

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

25 May 2000

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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The Hon. S. P. BRACKS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:

The Hon. J. W. THWAITES

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The Hon. D. V. NAPHTHINE

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Mr P. J. RYAN

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Langdon, Mr Craig Anthony Cuffe	Ivanhoe	ALP	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Wantima	LP
Languiller, Mr Telmo	Sunshine	ALP	Wilson, Mr Ronald Charles	Bennettswood	LP
Leigh, Mr Geoffrey Graeme	Mordialloc	LP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

¹ Resigned 3 November 1999

² Elected 11 December 1999

³ Resigned 12 April 2000

⁴ Elected 13 May 2000

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Thursday, 25 May 2000

The SPEAKER (Hon. Alex Andrianopoulos) took the chair at 9.35 a.m. and read the prayer.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr WILSON (Bennettswood) — I desire to make a personal explanation.

In my member's statement yesterday I advised the house that in response to a freedom of information request regarding condom-vending machines I received only one page of news clipping documentation from the Department of Education, Employment and Training. In fact, I received two pages of documentation, the first being a policy statement from June 1992 and the second being an undated form letter explaining current government policy.

The mistake was made by me. I apologise for unintentionally misleading honourable members.

PETITIONS

The Clerk — I have received the following petitions for presentation to Parliament:

Water: rural infrastructure

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria express their utmost support for the construction of an additional dam on the Macalister River north of Glenmaggie Weir, the intention being to capture rainfall run-off for the use and benefit of Gippsland and Victoria at large.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the Victorian government support this initiative with the grant of sufficient funds for an initial feasibility study for the project.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mr RYAN (Gippsland South) (1963 signatures)

Smoking: dining areas and shopping centres

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria sheweth your consideration in the forthcoming review of laws governing smoking in public places.

Your petitioners therefore pray that any change in laws regarding smoking in public places include a total prohibition on smoking in all hospitality establishments, including

casinos and gaming establishments, hotels, pubs, clubs, entertainment venues and restaurants.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Ms DAVIES (Gippsland West) (564 signatures)

Laid on table.

PAPER

Laid on table by Clerk:

Statutory Rule under the *Electricity Safety Act 1998* — SR No 31.

APPROPRIATION MESSAGE

Message read recommending further appropriation for Tobacco (Amendment) Bill.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Adjournment

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourn until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

FOI: government policy

Mr PERTON (Doncaster) — Yesterday a number of opposition members raised the difficulties with the government's charter and the fact that it was not complying with its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act. The other aspect of the charter relates to transparency and consultation, in this particular case the lack of availability of the Minister for Environment and Conservation.

The editorial in this month's edition of *BV News* makes it clear that the relevant association sought to meet with the minister to discuss the minister's commitments under her policy.

As the editorial rightly points out, the response from the minister's office was that she was too busy. This is part of a litany of mismanagement by the minister. All honourable members know of the incident at Seal Rocks. Ken Armstrong had not been able to speak with the minister for five months until he spoke with the Premier on radio station 3AW. Honourable members

know the residents of the Wombat State Forest wanted to get access to the minister. The only way they could get any attention was by dumping a tonne of woodchips outside the office of the honourable member for Gisborne and throwing themselves on the Premier's car. All honourable members know the businessmen of Falls Creek want to speak to the minister and they cannot get an audience. Last of all, the fishermen of the Bellarine Peninsula want to talk to the minister about their fishing grounds and cannot get an appointment, either.

Police: Northcote officer deaths

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — I wish to acknowledge the tragic and untimely deaths of two police officers in Northcote. Early last Saturday morning senior constables Mark Bateman and Fiona Robinson tragically died when their vehicle struck a pole on the corner of Dennis and High streets, Northcote. Today, both officers will be buried with full police honours.

A requiem mass will be held for Senior Constable Bateman at the Police Academy Chapel in Glen Waverley at 10.00 a.m. today. The following funeral will be private.

The service for Senior Constable Fiona Robinson will be held at St Mary's Church in Greensborough today at 2.30 p.m., after which the cortege will leave for the Yan Yean Cemetery, Plenty Road, Whittlesea.

I understand the accident occurred while the two officers were driving north along High Street after being called to an alleged burglary in the early hours of Saturday morning. It is a tragic loss of life. Tributes and flowers have poured into the Northcote station, a very close-knit station much beloved of the local community. Off-duty colleagues and members of the community have been visiting the station to offer their sympathy since the news broke early on Saturday morning. The pole itself has been surrounded by flowers.

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

Government departments: access

Mr ROWE (Cranbourne) — Once again I refer to the government's accountability and transparency. I made a very simple request to the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). Mr and Mrs Rowe of Tooradin, a low-flying training zone area — they are not related to me — asked me about the permissible

lead emissions from internal combustion aircraft engines.

I considered that the appropriate place to obtain the answer was from the EPA. My electorate officer contacted the authority and spoke with the relevant officer who attempted to provide the information and then said he would report back. After five days a further inquiry was made. We were told, 'We cannot give you that information. It is a world standard, but any information to opposition members of Parliament must come through the office of the minister'.

The EPA has been gagged from providing basic, non-threatening information that is required by constituents who are concerned about the possibility of lead emissions from low-flying aircraft over their property. That is a disgrace and makes a sham of open and accountable government.

Diamond Valley Arts Society

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Environment and Conservation) — I place on record my congratulations and acknowledgment of the work of the Diamond Valley arts society, which has had a long and illustrious history in the Greensborough area and has attracted many members from a broad area across the region.

For about 20 years the society used the old Greensborough primary school building for its activities, but this year it had to move because the school required the building to cater for its increasing enrolments. The committee and members faced a difficult task in making the move after being very happy at the primary school for so long.

The Banyule City Council, the Department of Education, Employment and Training and the Greensborough College have all helped enormously by relocating a toilet block and installing new blinds, kitchen equipment and lighting. The society recently held the first of its annual shows in the new building.

The members worked hard to organise the show and make the shift. I am sure the secondary college will prove to be a suitable venue for the many classes that are part of the society's activities. The opening show again demonstrated the wide range of painting and pottery talent among the art society's members.

Ministers: access

Mr DIXON (Dromana) — The Bracks government has an appalling record in providing access to information and personnel and, in the case I raise today, access to ministers.

I again raise a matter at the request of a local Labor Party branch, whose members have been seeking a meeting with the Minister for Environment and Conservation for several months. Not only have they not had a meeting, but their letters to the minister have neither been acknowledged nor answered.

If that is the way ministers treat their own, it is no wonder that other matters I raise on behalf of my constituents are treated with contempt. I have examples of correspondence that has been outstanding for between 10 weeks and five months. The prize for the longest wait goes to the Minister for Housing, who has delayed responding on one issue for five months. The prize for the serial offender goes to the Minister for Transport, who has five issues that have been outstanding for between 10 weeks and four months.

It is a disgusting situation that shows the government is incompetent.

Teachers: service awards

Mr WYNNE (Richmond) — This week being Education Week I congratulate those teachers who tonight will be presented with 35 and 40-year teaching service awards.

In particular, I refer to three teachers from my own electorate — Christine Scott, the principal of North Fitzroy Primary School; Peter Lord, the principal of Richmond West Primary School; and Ruth Evans, from Clifton Hill Primary School.

As an example of the dedication of those teachers I refer to Christine Scott, who has spent the past 14 years as principal of the North Fitzroy Primary School and who is highly respected in the local community. School numbers have increased considerably during her time as principal, and hers was the first primary school to provide a comprehensive before-and-after-school-care program, which she and her excellent school council initiated and implemented.

The commitment to education displayed by those teachers over their 35 years in the service is greatly appreciated by their school communities and is a magnificent example to teachers everywhere. I wish to acknowledge those three teachers for their dedicated service to education, and I wish them many more years of teaching and leadership in our community.

Smoking: dining areas and shopping centres

Ms DAVIES (Gippsland West) — I have today tabled a petition signed by 564 workers and others who are associated with Crown Casino. Those people

believe the smoky environment in which they work compromises their health and enjoyment of life. They ask:

... that any change in laws regarding smoking in public places include a total prohibition on smoking in all hospitality establishments including casinos and gaming establishments, hotels, pubs, clubs, entertainment venues and restaurants.

I hope the petition is an early phase in the necessary move to exclude smoking from not only gaming rooms but all public buildings.

There is anecdotal evidence that problem gamblers are also more likely to be heavy smokers. I have encouraged the government to provide research funds to explore that possible link and its consequences. That could help build public support for measures that could improve public health and encourage responsible gaming.

Leahy Petroleum

Mr HELPER (Ripon) — I refer the house to an article on the front page of today's Ballarat *Courier*. The issue raised is of great concern not only to me and my constituents but also to all residents of regional and country Victoria. The article headed 'Distributor cuts off fuel' refers to a Mr Trevor Oliver, the proprietor of the Buangor garage, being advised by a hand-delivered letter that his distributor Leahy Petroleum would immediately cease the supply of fuel to his service station.

Honourable members may recall that Mr Oliver rose to prominence by highlighting the issue of price-fixing irregularities, as they applied to him, in the fuel industry and particularly with supply arrangements. He has directed those issues to the attention of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, which is still considering them.

An interesting part of the letter quoted in the article states:

The comments you have made to media outlets are particularly upsetting to [Leahy Petroleum] given that you are doing so at a time when your credit terms are in arrears ...

I do not wish to go into the details.

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

Government departments: access

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — I also refer the house to an editorial comment in a rural newspaper, which states:

Is Mr Bracks' work being undone by those he employs to spread the word about his government's deeds and help fulfil his commitments?

Last week's state budget included an initiative to establish an office of rural communities in eight rural centres, including Colac.

Calls to the state government's media unit, including a message left on a mobile phone message bank, seeking details about the new office of rural communities and its role in Colac and district were left unanswered.

But that, it seems, is nothing unusual. Repeated inquiries to the media unit and government departments in the weeks and months since the new government gained power have been left unanswered or treated with indifference and even rudeness.

We hope the woman who answered one inquiry with a blunt 'What do you want?' had either picked up the wrong line or been mistakenly told it was her worst enemy waiting to talk to her.

A call to the human services department on Friday seeking information about funding for ambulance services directed us to the government's liaison unit where we left a message. That message remains unanswered and so too does another we left after a call to the office of conservation and environment minister, Sherryl Garbutt.

We phoned Ms Garbutt's office for details about budget allocations for a visitor information centre at the Twelve Apostles and asked to speak to a department spokesperson. The response was that the spokesperson was unavailable and when we asked if we could leave a message, received the curt reply: 'We don't take messages!' Cheeky? Perhaps! Arrogant? Definitely!

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

St Dominic's Primary School

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — Last Thursday I had the pleasure of visiting St Dominic's Catholic primary school in Highfield Road, Camberwell, where I was made welcome by the principal, Graeme Spence, and other teachers at the school. I was taken on a tour of that excellent school and visited all the classes and talked with the children. It is a thriving school with about 350 pupils and has an extremely active support group of parents and local people. It has three composite year 5–6 classes, and all of them were on the ball in quizzing their local member about our system of government. They are looking forward to visiting us in Parliament later this year. I commend the school, the students, the teachers, the parents and the school parish for their achievements. I should also add that the whole Catholic school system has appreciated its share of the \$50 million assistance from this government to non-government schools.

Stonnington: multicultural policy

Ms BURKE (Prahran) — I congratulate the Stonnington City Council on its multicultural policy and action plan. The Stonnington municipality, particularly my electorate of Prahran, encompasses 83 887 people from 111 nations living in harmony and peace. The council's multicultural policy and the fact that it works with the community have made that possible. The ethnic Meals on Wheels services add to that policy.

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

TOBACCO (AMENDMENT) BILL

Government amendments circulated by Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) pursuant to sessional orders.

Opposition amendments circulated by Mr DOYLE (Malvern) pursuant to sessional orders.

Second reading

Debate resumed from 4 May; motion of Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health).

The SPEAKER — Order! As the required statement of intention has been made pursuant to section 85(5)(c) of the Constitution Act 1975, I am of the opinion that the second reading of this bill requires to be passed by an absolute majority.

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — The Tobacco (Amendment) Bill is important legislation. I note the bipartisan approach to tobacco policy since the introduction of the originating bill in 1988. So far as possible the opposition intends to continue that honourable approach to tobacco control in the state.

The opposition has put up amendments to the bill because although it believes the public health provisions of the bill are good public policy, it is concerned about the way that public policy is to be implemented, which is through the small business provisions of the bill.

The opposition's amendments go to its concern that although it wishes the public health imperative to be fulfilled, it is not satisfied with the small business provisions. I will refer to that issue at a later stage and to what the opposition asks the government to do between now and when the bill is finally proclaimed.

Honourable members on this side of the house are pleased to support the excellent provisions of the bill,

such as clauses 11 and 12, which impose penalties for the sale of illegal tobacco and increase penalties for the sale of tobacco to minors.

The provisions dealing with the smoking ban in restaurants and tighter controls over the sale of tobacco and tobacco products also seem reasonable, but their implementation goes to the heart of the amendments I will discuss and to what I believe the government needs to do between now and the proclamation date for those provisions. It is important to talk about why the opposition has concerns for small business.

The bill means that every restaurant, cafe, pub, milk bar and business selling tobacco in Victoria must be apprised of the changes, and they will have to be helped to comply with what in some cases are quite serious, although necessary, impositions on the way they do business. The legislation is a very worthy public health policy imperative, but its implementation will be very clumsy for the community. The opposition is concerned that the implementation will be problematic and the compliance even more difficult with the policing being a nightmare. That is a part of the bill that I will dwell on in some detail.

At the outset I wish to outline what the opposition hopes its amendments will do and why they will help the government to make the legislation workable. All honourable members could support certain parts of the bill, for example, the prohibition of the sale of tobacco to minors and the sale of illegal tobacco could be implemented straight away. The opposition has no difficulty with those parts of the bill, and if its proposed amendments are accepted by the government during the committee stage these provisions could come into effect on 1 November.

The bill allows shopping centres to opt into a smoking ban, and the opposition believes it is reasonable for that provision to be similarly implemented on 1 November. Although I understand that the bill allows an opt-in schedule for shopping centres, the opposition would support extending the ban to all shopping centres. It would be a reasonable public health initiative and perhaps something the government could consider. If it is good for one shopping centre, why not make it so for all of them?

Turning to the question of point-of-sale advertising, there may be some difficulty in unbundling the way the legislation is framed in order to give effect to the opposition's amendments. The definition of 'point of sale' falls into two parts which are worthily worded in the bill. If the opposition's amendments are accepted, there may need to be a degree of cooperation in giving

effect to the amendments. Amendments may need to be made when the bill is between houses to ensure that the amendments reflect what the opposition intends. Businesses may find that an implementation date of 1 November is too soon for the removal of point-of-sale advertising in shops, but 28 February would be a reasonable time to allow poster-type displays to be removed.

The ban on smoking in restaurants and the display of product — not the posters but the product itself — requires more careful thought, and the opposition's amendments provide for its introduction on 1 July 2001. That enables a reasonably graduated implementation of the bill and gives government and business time to talk about the implementation process. I hope the government will accept the opposition's amendments in that spirit. Again, if the amendments cause difficulty in unbundling the definition of 'point of sale', the opposition will be happy to work with the government when the bill is between houses. It is the opposition's intention that the graduated implementation program be 1 November for most of the provisions of the bill, 28 February 2001 for the poster-style point-of-sale advertisements and 1 July 2001 for the ban on smoking and product-style displays.

It is a worthy aim of the bill that tobacco advertising is not allowed by the agglomeration of product which in itself becomes a kind of de facto advertisement. While it is a worthy public health aim, the wording of the bill has given some technical difficulties in differentiating the poster from the product.

I pay tribute to our major public health agencies — Vichealth, Quit, the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria and the National Heart Foundation. The National Stroke Foundation also played a strong role. In discussions with them, and agreeing that some small businesses would have difficulty in complying with the legislation, each of the major public health agencies has written to me indicating the following view of the opposition's amendments, and I quote from a letter from Dr Rob Moodie, the chief executive officer of Vichealth:

Vichealth is strongly supportive of the proposed changes to the Victorian Tobacco Act. We would prefer that all the provisions of the act be implemented on 1 November 2000, however we would be happy to support an implementation period to allow restaurants, dining areas and businesses selling tobacco products to accommodate the new legislation.

Dr Moodie then suggests just such a timetable as I proposed of 1 November, 28 February 2001 and 1 July 2001. If the major public health agencies are prepared

to accept that a graduated time for implementation is needed then it is a reasonable amendment, and I hope the government will support it. The four major public health agencies have all indicated that 1 July 2001 would be reasonable, and I thank them for their support.

I also place on record my thanks for the work those agencies have done not just in the preparation of the legislation and the thinking behind it but also for the work they have done over many years on such an important public health issue. Dr Nigel Gray, a former director of the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria, was for many years one of the guiding lights in trying to stop people smoking and bringing that message to the public. It is a result of work by organisations such as Quit and Vichealth that this debate is not about whether the public health imperative should happen but merely how it should be done and over what period. I note the petition tabled this morning by the honourable member for Gippsland West, which is part of the ongoing debate on smoking and other public health imperatives that will take Victoria forward.

I hope the opposition's proposed amendments will allow the government time to make the legislation workable and help businesses comply with it. I offer the opposition's support for further restricting the consumption of tobacco in our society and informing the public about the dangers of passive or environmental smoke. Although it is happy to support the provisions, the opposition is critical of the way it is being done.

In going through the bill I will make a number of points about the real concerns. Many future problems will come from finding definitions that are reasonable but which must also deliver what the Australian Labor Party proposed in its election commitment of September last year. For instance, the important definition of 'enclosed' states that:

"enclosed", in relation to an area or premises, means an area that is, or premises that are, except for doorways, passageways and internal wall openings, completely or substantially enclosed by a solid permanent ceiling or roof and solid permanent walls or windows, whether the ceiling, roof, walls or windows are fixed or movable and open or closed;

There are certainly difficulties in the phrase 'except for doorways, passageways and internal wall openings'. Picture a large space divided into a number of discrete areas by doorways — not physical doors but openings between sections. The exception stated in the definition might mean the entire space is caught by the definition; or that certain individual spaces within the bigger space might be deemed enclosed but another area connected by an opening is not an enclosed space. In other words,

could a restaurant owner define one area as a smoking area and another as a non-smoking area when what separates them is really a hole in the wall?

Mr Baillieu — How big is the door?

Mr DOYLE — I thank the honourable member for Hawthorn — I was about to come to that. The size of the opening will be important because the design of many restaurants means the bar area may be shared between two separate areas — one casual for drinking and one more formal for eating. Whether the definition catches those is problematic and arguable both ways.

Colonial Stadium will be defined as an enclosed space, whether the moveable roof is open or closed. Even with the roof open, it is declared an enclosed space.

Mr Trezise interjected.

Mr DOYLE — The honourable member for Geelong interjects that the Melbourne Cricket Ground is smoke free. My point is not about the benefits of the space being smoke free but about the ridiculousness of the definition. I ask the honourable member for Geelong whether the MCG is an enclosed space — that is my point about Colonial Stadium with its roof open and one of the examples of the difficulties in implementing and interpreting the definition for different types of venues.

Consider all the restaurants with courtyards that might have something definable as a roof such as a sunshade over the courtyard. Is that an enclosed space? I am trying to help you.

Mr Thwaites — Make an amendment.

Mr DOYLE — The Minister for Health says, 'Make an amendment'. I did consider doing that but decided it is not my job to rewrite the legislation. However, if the government wishes to rewrite the clause in order to clarify the definitions the opposition will be happy to support it. The definitions need to be looked at and written clearly to ensure people know how and where they must comply.

I wish to look at other problem areas not picked up in the definition of 'carton' in provisions about the sale of cartons of tobacco products. Nuance Global Traders has raised concerns with me in relation to duty-free tobacco products. The problem may be soluble, but we ask the government to accept the opposition amendments, as some work needs to be done on the definition of cartons when the only sale of tobacco products is through cartons and some traders might inadvertently be caught.

Some inequities will need to be resolved over the next year as a result of the problematic definition in the bill of ‘restaurant or cafe’:

“Restaurant or cafe” means premises that are, or an area in premises that is, used by the public, or a section of the public, predominantly for the consumption of food or non-alcoholic drinks purchased on the premises (whether or not food or non-alcoholic drinks are also sold on the premises for consumption off the premises) and —

- (a) in the case of a restaurant or cafe that is an area in premises, includes any abutting area in those premises that is not separately enclosed from that area, irrespective of the purpose or purposes for which the abutting areas is used; but
- (b) does not include premises in respect of which a general licence or a club licence within the meaning of the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 is in force;

The government is doing this to differentiate the licences held by pubs and those held by restaurants and cafes. But the two clear categories of restaurant are those with on-premises licences and those with general licences, so many restaurants will not be caught by the definition of ‘restaurant’. Many restaurant owners with a general licence will operate their venues like pubs with certain defined areas: a public bar, an eating area and a bottle shop, permitting a smoking area in the restaurant. That may or may not be good public policy. It will be allowed under the act. It creates two separate classes of restaurant, not because of smoking or the style of the venue but simply because of historic accident, because of two different types of licences.

That is patently unfair and needs to be addressed. It is one of the reasons restaurateurs are particularly angry about the legislation. They understand that it has been coming for many years and they are prepared to comply with it. However, they do not understand why they have been picked out — in their words — as soft targets. It can be argued that this is a first step, and the second-reading speech picks up that point. The effects of the legislation are not even the same for them all, which raises one of the philosophical difficulties with the bill.

I understand the government’s election commitment was to ban smoking in restaurants. However, the reasoning behind the government’s decision is difficult to follow. The opposition understands the dangers of passive smoke or environmental smoke, but that has nothing to do with eating. There is an aesthetic component here. Nobody likes people in restaurants blowing smoke in their faces. As a rabid nonsmoker I perhaps object to it more than anyone else. However, the dangers of passive smoke and environmental smoke are not connected to the activity of eating. That is where

the government has got itself into trouble. It has been determined to connect the two and has then had to make definitions about restaurants. It is trying to connect dangers of passive smoke with two areas, eating and restaurants, and they do not make a neat fit under the definition covering bans.

One has to consider the unfairness of the legislation to small business. It divides restaurants into two completely separate categories. That division has nothing to do with the public health reform that is sought to be introduced in this bill and actually discriminates against some restaurants. The government should do something about that.

I refer to another definition that is problematic — the definition of dining area. Proposed section 3D states, in part:

... an area (other than an outdoor area) used by the public or a section of the public in premises in respect of which a general licence or a club licence within the meaning of the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 is in force ... at any time when the predominant activity in that area is the consumption of food or non-alcoholic drinks.

If the government introduces that provision there will be problems. I note the minister’s recent comments in the media that nothing could be more clear than that the predominant activity is the eating or serving of non-alcoholic drinks. That word ‘predominant’ will be enormously difficult to interpret. What does predominant mean? Does it mean that the volume of sales determines predominance? Many restaurateurs will tell you that the predominant volume of sales is alcohol — not food or non-alcoholic drinks. If I were a cynical restaurateur and was looking for a way out, I would lower my food prices by a couple of dollars, jack up my alcohol prices by a couple of dollars, and clearly demonstrate that the predominant activity was the sale of alcohol. Because of this curious definition about the predominant activity being food or non-alcoholic beverages, alcohol sale will create enormous difficulty.

I still have not received a reasonable explanation about why the government did not use the terms food or beverages, because that would then catch alcohol. If we put that aside, what does predominant activity mean? If I say, ‘Hang on, there are only 2 patrons eating but there are 10 people drinking’, does that mean the predominant activity is not eating or the serving of non-alcoholic beverages? That area is not caught by the legislation. Is it simply to be done by number of patrons? If the services offered are reduced, so food service is cut back and non-alcoholic beverages not served, will that allow a restaurant with a general licence to continue to allow smoking in the restaurant?

If the public health imperative is that the government wants to further restrict smoking because of the dangers of passive smoke and environmental smoke, difficulties will arise from the clumsiness of the definitions.

The intent of the legislation is clear. Honourable members will have no trouble talking about the importance of public health, but I hope those who contribute to the debate will not focus on that issue alone. That is an area with which we all agree. The difficulty will be to make it work.

It is astonishing that in this 40-page bill, 16 pages are taken up with the powers of environmental health officers. There are some absolute beauties about the way that work will be carried out. That is an area that will come back to haunt the government day after day.

I have referred to the way licences operate for restaurants and to the difficulties in the definitions of dining area and enclosed space. Once the government recognises the clumsiness and inelegance of its own definitions, it will acknowledge that its very worthy public health reform may well be subverted because it has not thought through the way things operate in the real world. As I said, I am just trying to help, but it seems — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DOYLE — I can assure honourable members that if I was not trying to help things would be a bit more difficult! I am just trying to help.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr DOYLE — The minister says, ‘Give us your amendments’. Let’s swap places, and then I would be glad to give you the amendments. I am happy to go with that. Come on over!

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The honourable member, without assistance. We do not want the swap to happen just yet, despite the fact that there may be some merit in the suggestion.

Mr DOYLE — In my endeavours I will attempt to help the Chair.

I turn to an important part of the bill. Clause 9 inserts proposed section 6 which deals with point-of-sale advertisements, advertising tobacco product in only one of a number of ways and the display of the product. They are reasonable ideas. We do not want people to be able to advertise tobacco products in inappropriate

ways. If the posters are removed, we do not want people to advertise tobacco by stacking up a display of product. There are real difficulties in the implementation of this proposal for two reasons: because of cartons and the ban on cartons; and the way tobacco products are displayed in milk bars and other shops.

I refer to a letter I received from Nuance Global Traders. If the government does not have a copy of the letter I am happy to provide it. Nuance is Australia’s largest duty-free retailer and comprises a group which includes Downtown Duty Free, City International Duty Free and Ailders Duty Free. It is a significant employer in Victoria and a great deal of the revenue generated at Melbourne airport is because of the business of people such as Nuance Global Traders. Nuance understands what the government is trying to do but is:

... disappointed that the Victorian government’s approach has not sought to maximise the effectiveness of the legislation by seeking our input ...

That is a nice way of saying, ‘You did not even talk to us’. I have heard the same thing from restaurants and from other businesses. Honourable members might be focused on what happens in this place, but the 3000-odd milk bars that will be affected by the legislation have no idea of what is happening in here today and no idea of what the passage of the bill through the house today will mean to their businesses. Someone has to go out and talk to them. The opposition’s amendments suggest, particularly for product-type display, time is needed for education of retailers and the government will need until 1 July to introduce this amendment effectively.

I refer again to Nuance and the problem with duty-free stores. They have a different way of operating. There are two kinds of duty-free stores, as honourable members are probably well aware: metropolitan shops and airport landside shops; and those after passport control called airside shops. By way of summary, I mention a few of the points made to me in this letter. Duty-free stores do not sell tobacco products over the counter; they operate in customs-licensed bonded premises; tobacco products can only move with customs documentation which includes a sales contract signed by the purchaser guaranteeing exports; they only display in locked cabinets; any purchase of a tobacco product is in a sealed bag which may not be opened in Australia, and noncompliance with that is punished by extensive fines; and they sell cartons only, and the price of cartons even after the savings from duty is much more inhibitive and restrictive than selling smaller quantity packets.

The quantity of duty-free tobacco product is also controlled by the importation allowance in the passenger's country of destination. All honourable members understand those things.

Nuance Global Traders points out that:

... the proposed restrictions described in new section 6A would appear to rule out the display of cartons of product.

They ask for clarification of that provision and say:

If this is the case ... we will be forced to display the 'immediate package' which by its nature is much cheaper and therefore easier to buy.

They are not sure whether that is the government's intention and make the point that:

... there is a need to consider the duty-free environment carefully to avoid creating counter-productive scenarios in a retail environment that is already very carefully and strictly controlling access to tobacco products. Duty free is not where the problem lies.

I suggest that because of the nature of their business Nuance Global Traders will be caught by the provisions and will have to make major changes that may not have the public health effect sought to be achieved.

The opposition's amendments seek an extension of time for final proclamation of the bill until 1 July to make sure the government looks at concerns like the duty-free area, where the proposals almost need to be separately worked out.

Two aspects of clause 9 have also caused some concern to retailers of tobacco products. The first is proposed new section 6A(3) which states:

A display of tobacco products at a point of sale may not consist of the display of the products, packages of the products or representations of the products or packages so as to constitute a tobacco advertisement itself as distinct from the display of each product, package or representation.

That is actually a very good and reasonable reform. The bill then includes considerable and ingenious wording to make sure that multi-chute dispensers and other displays of tobacco product in, for instance, supermarkets does not constitute an advertisement.

The government needs until 1 July to cope with the questions and demands of and the information required by the many people who will have to make extensive changes to the shop fittings that now constitute their businesses. Again, the opposition has received representations from small business associations representing many milk-bar owners and from specialist tobacconists who constitute a different type of market. I understand the government has had talks with people

from businesses such as Coles Myer. The opposition has also had representation from the Liquor Stores Association, as, I understand, has the government.

I suggest that even if all honourable members support the public health imperative, implementation has real difficulties. For instance, it has been pointed out that the effect of introducing such point-of-sale restrictions in Tasmania has resulted not in a reduction in purchase of product but simply in smaller outlets losing volume of sales which have been picked up by the Coles Myers of the world.

Such a result would not achieve our desired end. It would be a very bad public health outcome, but an even worse small business outcome. The government needs time to talk to all those businesses about how they can comply so that in trying to obtain a good public health reform the result is not only no public health reform but also the wrecking of a whole area of small business. The reason for seeking an extension of time until 1 July is because the government must have very careful discussions with all those businesses so that the reforms are implemented appropriately and businesses are not destroyed. The people running the businesses are angry that the government has not talked to them.

Honourable members debate these weighty matters in the house and we all understand the worthy aims of the proposed legislation. However, sometimes government forgets that legislation will have an effect on the real world of the people whose livelihoods depend on the sale of a legal product such as tobacco. Honourable members might all abhor the public health outcomes when people use that particular legal product but there is a responsibility on the government to implement changes carefully, even when there is widespread community acceptance for the reforms, as there is on this matter. The government must talk to the people with whom it has not talked already.

Specialist tobacconists are a particularly important group. The director and small business owner of the Tobacco Station group wrote to the Premier and was kind enough to send me a copy of the letter. On reading the last paragraph of that letter, I was both heartened and saddened. He says:

In closing, the reason I voted for you was on your promise of an open, consultative and accountable government ...

I am somewhat saddened by the writer's confession that he voted for a Labor government. However, I am delighted that the Premier now seems to have lost the votes of that group because they have been ignored. If the government wants the reform to work, it must talk

to those people about how it affects their businesses and what it will do about it.

Mr Viney interjected.

Mr DOYLE — That is interesting. The honourable member for Frankston East says, ‘How did you go in Benalla?’. That is a glib, throwaway line. I suggest that the government gloats while it can. I hope government members continue to carry on like that and disregard their promise that they will be open and consultative and talk to the people of Victoria. I can inform the government that the people of Victoria are out there screaming that that is exactly what it has not done! That is exactly the sort of small-minded arrogance that I hope the government carries on with for the next three years. Keep going, Mr Popular!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DOYLE — Let’s finish quickly so the honourable members interjecting can take their particular brands of personal charm out into the community. I hope they talk to as many voters as they possibly can, because that can only help the opposition. Just get out and talk to them!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The interchange is interesting, but it does not relate to the bill. The honourable member for Malvern should get back to the bill.

Mr DOYLE — It may not relate to the bill, but it is good fun. I advise honourable members to get out and talk to the people they so proudly claim they consult. Those people have been writing to government and opposition members in their droves complaining that the government has not talked to them and does not understand their businesses. Even when they agree with the government, as many do, they say this legislation cannot work. But that is what we are here to do!

The interchanges do not alter the fact that the opposition supports the government’s public health reform. However, the opposition is concerned to make it work. The government is making it difficult for the opposition to support the reform. Although they support the public health parts of the legislation, opposition members believe the provisions affecting small business are unworkable and need to be fixed. The government has an obligation to look after not only public health but also small business owners.

I will list some of the other shortcomings of the bill that the opposition asks the government to look at. I return to a matter I mentioned earlier, although I do so only briefly because I know many members wish to

contribute to the debate. As I said, 16 pages of this 40-page bill are devoted to listing the powers of environmental health officers. One of the first powers listed is in proposed section 36C, which refers to the power to require names and addresses. The history of debate in this place is always fascinating. I refer to a debate that occurred before many of the honourable members I see here today were elected to this place.

A government member interjected.

Mr DOYLE — I was being kind in refraining from suggesting that there had been any addition to the collective intellect of the house. However, the honourable member for Morwell was here in 1993, as was the honourable member for Albert Park, now the Minister for Health. Subsection (1) of proposed section 36C states:

An inspector may request a person to state his or her name and address if the inspector believes on reasonable grounds that the person has committed, or is about to commit, an offence against a provision of this act referred to in the schedule.

Subsection (3) states that:

A person must not ... refuse or fail to comply with the request ...

The government is giving environmental health officers the power to demand people’s names and addresses. Although I do not have any problem with that, you did, because in 1993 — —

Mr Trezise — We weren’t here in 1993!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The honourable member will address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr DOYLE — I beg your pardon, I meant the Labor Party did. I am somewhat amused by the fact that some members of this house are so solipsistic they believe my remarks apply to them specifically. I have to tell them, I do not think about them that closely — and I meant it in a wider sense.

Ms Lindell interjected.

Mr DOYLE — It is unbelievable, Mr Acting Speaker. I will resist, except to say, ‘Just keep helping us!’.

When the Crimes (Amendment) Bill was being debated in 1993 the Minister for Agriculture and the Minister for Health voted against the same provision. Apparently they now think it is okay to give that power to environmental health officers, but in 1993 they were

violently opposed to giving the exact same power to members of the Victoria Police. That shows a wonderful consistency in public policy.

I voted for that power in 1993, and will vote for it again in 2000. As I said yesterday during the debate on another bill, one should be consistent about what one believes. I wonder whether the new government members agree with the views their colleagues held in 1993?

My real concern is that the government is giving local government the power to do all the enforcing. At the briefing provided by the public health officers of the Department of Human Services, one question I asked — it was a throwaway question asked simply for reassurance's sake — was whether the revenue from the fines would go back to local government. The answer was that it will. Isn't that a wonderful regime. Not only is the government giving local councils the power to impose fines — \$100 on-the-spot fines and \$500 fines if the matters go to court — but the revenue from the on-the-spot fines will go to the councils. What does it think the result of that will be? I do not have the confidence the government has that the provision will be applied consistently and equitably to restaurants across the whole of Victoria, particularly when the revenue collected from on-the-spot fines will go back to local councils.

Given that the bill bans smoking in restaurants, what hours will the environmental health officers work? Will their working hours be such that the smoking bans will apply at lunchtime but not at dinner time because there will be no officers available to enforce the draconian provisions the government has included in the bill? There are real problems with the enforcement methodology the government has chosen. Let us assume councils say they will have environmental health officers inspecting restaurants and fining people who smoke while dining out at night. How will the councils bear the cost of that? I suggest one underlying consequence of the methodology for inspecting premises will be an extension in the working hours of environmental health officers. I have this nightmare vision of a thousand grey-faced men in grey coats and little grey cars scurrying in and out of Victorian restaurants and milk bars.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr DOYLE — I thank the Minister for Agriculture for his interjection. It is probably the nicest thing he has said to me in seven years.

If that happens, is the government really saying that the health officers will not be told that they have to earn their keep? They will be told to find the fines — and if that is not to be the case — —

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr DOYLE — The environmental health officers. If that is not to be the case, and if they are the ones who will enforce the new provisions — —

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr DOYLE — The minister says it is the law. In that case, if these provisions are not needed to give those powers to environmental health officers, why bring in a new bill? In my view, it simply will not work. I know they are generally provided by the justice department — —

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr DOYLE — The minister says there is no change. If no change is necessary, why have it in here?

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr DOYLE — If it is existing law, why is it in there? If the money for the fines — —

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr DOYLE — The minister makes the point that the money goes there now. The bill creates new offences that will give — —

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr DOYLE — If the bill creates a series of new offences and the government gives the power to impose fines of \$100 — —

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr DOYLE — The minister and the government appear a little sensitive, and I can understand why. I hope the government can make the legislation work, but it will need good luck because no-one else believes it can. I would love to have been behind closed doors when the bill was being discussed. The government needed an extra revenue stream for local councils. When deciding against a positive licensing system, which was its first intention, and the government opted for a negative licensing system, local government said, 'Show us the money' — and the government sure did! That is why — —

Ms Burke interjected.

Mr DOYLE — I have just heard the honourable member for Prahran praise the Stonnington City Council, and I am at one with her on that.

When the argument is proven the government resorts to sloganism of the most facile kind. That is what happens. All I am asking is that the government make it work, because local government does not think the government can do it. No-one believes the government can do it, but apparently the government thinks it can. When you could not do the deal on positive licensing you needed something — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The honourable member for Malvern must address his remarks through the Chair and not directly to the government.

Mr Hamilton — You are not allowed to abuse the Chair, either.

Mr DOYLE — Certainly not. I will save my abuse, Mr Acting Speaker, I promise you.

I take up the point about the provision dealing with the procedures for entry and search with consent. That generic provision for natural justice is interesting. However, I again point out that there is some difficulty with how the procedures will work in the real world. Apparently what will happen is that there will be an agreement to enter, an inspector will sign a document, the occupier will sign an acknowledgment and the occupier will be given a copy. I understand the protections that need to be in place to ensure that the powers are not abused. However, I suggest that what the government is setting up is an onerous burden of bureaucracy and paperwork. Although it may be doing that for all the right reasons and the aim may be worthy, the way the government has gone about achieving it is clumsy.

Another of my concerns is the offence created by proposed subsection 36Q in clause 15 if the business of an environmental health officer is interfered with by another person. The proposed subsection states:

A person must not, without reasonable excuse, hinder or obstruct an inspector who is exercising a power under this Part.

The penalty for that offence is \$6000! It may be that that is appropriate. For instance, if someone were selling illegal tobacco we would want to pursue that person with as much vigour as possible and we would want the inspector to have the necessary power to pursue that crook. That is fine. All I am pointing out is that the power is given without any direction about

what the words ‘without reasonable excuse, hinder or obstruct’ may mean. All I ask is that some safeguard be put in place or some local government protocol be established so that that draconian provision is not abused. That is my concern. I am not saying the provision may not be needed at some point for a legitimate purpose, but it may be open to abuse. A \$6000 penalty for obstructing or hindering! We would not want that to be trivialised by any misapprehension or misapplication of the power.

Another \$6000 penalty appears in the bill, which again I find strange. Clause 18 inserts proposed section 42A, which requires the names of persons supplied with tobacco to be provided to the Secretary of the Department of Human Services. I can understand why it may be necessary to track where the product goes. However, the proposed section creates an astonishing offence. It states:

The Secretary must not give to any other person, whether directly or indirectly, any information acquired by the Secretary under this section except to the extent necessary to enable an inspector to carry out functions under this Act.

The penalty imposed for that offence is \$6000, which will apply to the secretary. I understand it is sensitive and important information, but I ask whether it will be available under FOI legislation. If it is and the secretary provides the information, he or she would be guilty of an offence under this legislation. If the government means to exempt that information from freedom of information — there could be good reasons why that may be necessary — it should say so.

The word ‘indirectly’ also creates a problem. I do not know how many employees there are in the Department of Human Services, but there are a large number. If that information is passed on, even inadvertently, can a fine of \$6000 be levied on the secretary for an action over which he or she had no control or about which he or she may not even have known.

Mr Hamilton — Doesn’t that apply to other acts?

Mr DOYLE — I do not think it does apply to other acts. I would be keen to know whether there is a precedent for that sort of offence under any other act whereby the most senior public servant in the department, the secretary, is apparently personally liable for even indirect or inadvertent omissions or commissions by members of his or her department. It seems to me to be an astonishing provision. It may well be that there are other similar provisions, but I have not seen one like it. The government needs to look carefully at that provision.

The difficulty the opposition has with the bill is not with the worthy thrust of the public health reforms. The opposition has difficulty with the terms in which the bill has been couched to achieve that worthy public health imperative. The opposition has put the amendments forward as a way of saying to the government that the legislation may well be unworkable. I hope that is not the case, because the opposition supports the public health reforms aimed at reducing the harm caused by passive smoking in the community. The opposition supports that aim wholeheartedly, but the government has made it difficult to support all of the bill's provisions because of the effects they will have on small business. The opposition has not sought to amend all the provisions affecting small business because it believes a bipartisan approach should be taken to tobacco control.

The opposition has proposed the amendments to give the government time — I presume it will take a year, and I hope the passage of the bill through both houses is expeditious — to talk extensively about both the application and the interpretation of the act. I again refer to such things as predominant activity, given all the small businesses around Victoria. I also wish to point out that the government could talk to some people who have expertise.

I recognise that there will be times when small business wants the government to do things that will not help public health reform in Victoria. It may well be that people in small business cannot satisfy or accept some of those demands, in which case it is the government's responsibility to say to them, 'We accept that this is an imposition on your businesses. We have done everything we can to ameliorate it, but the public health aspect of the legislation is so important that you are going to have to wear it'. To do that, however, the government will have to get out and talk to people.

The government's suggestion that 1 November was an appropriate start-up date was an insult to small business. It did not consider simple things, such as shopfittings in all those milk bars that will have to be changed as a result of the bill. The opposition is now giving the government the chance to rectify that by allowing a year before the legislation comes into effect.

The second-reading speech states:

Industry bodies such as the Restaurant and Catering Association of Victoria have welcomed the moves to regulate passive smoking in restaurants.

A series of letters sent to the minister and me makes it patently clear that that is not true. The association understands what the government is trying to do for

public health and is prepared to help; its problem is that the government has not talked to association members.

Mr Viney interjected.

Mr DOYLE — The honourable member for Frankston East says the government has talked to them. Perhaps I should rephrase my comment and say that the government has not listened to them. Maybe that is the problem — you just talked at them and didn't listen. Some of the things they propose — —

Mr Viney interjected.

Mr DOYLE — Well, in its most recent letter to the minister the Restaurant and Catering Association asked the government not to proceed with the legislation. That can hardly be called welcoming the move to regulate passive smoking in restaurants! In that letter to the minister, dated 24 May, the association urged him to reconsider the legislation. Can you call that welcoming the legislation? You say the government has talked to them; perhaps you have something to learn about listening as well.

Some of their concerns may not be able to be met because you have created a cross for yourself to bear.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! I again remind the honourable member for Malvern to address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr DOYLE — Mr Acting Speaker, the government has created a difficulty for itself by drawing dividing lines between categories of licences for restaurants. That may well be a problem it will find insoluble. Small businesses may well suffer a disadvantage against others in competing categories and even against others in their own sector.

People in the catering industry make good points that the government has yet to address. One owner who runs a cafe in Brunswick Street explained to me that at the moment a person can come into his cafe and have a glass of red wine, a cigarette and a cup of coffee. That establishment will be caught by the legislation and no smoking will be allowed. At the pub next door, however, the same patron will be able to sit down and have a cigarette, a glass of wine and a cup of coffee. So even between adjoining premises there are inequities.

When inequity emerges within the same class of premises, such as restaurants, you have real problems. The government needs to address the problems that will be experienced by that industry. I am confident solutions can be found, but some may involve hard answers for small business. The complaint to the

opposition was, however, that the government simply did not talk to people who will be affected.

All honourable members will have received a sheaf of letters from some of the most prominent and well-known restaurateurs in Melbourne saying they believe the legislation is inequitable. In a letter dated 4 May addressed to all members of Parliament the first point made is that restaurateurs' views on the issue were never sought. I am pleased to see they are not saying they will not support the bill. Indeed, I believe they would be happy to comply — and I want them to — but that compliance will not be achieved by magic. The government now has a lot of hard work to do talking to people and helping them to comply.

Government members may well be able to take comfort in the fact that there is widespread community acceptance of the reform, as there is from the opposition. The government needs to know, however, that people in the industry feel they have not been talked to and that they need help to comply. They are confused, too, about what they have to comply with.

The government has created real difficulties for itself, even within the industry, because the vehicle it has chosen for the banning of smoking in restaurants has been caught by the provisions concerning both general and premises licences. Those questions will have to be addressed, and so far there is no sign that they have been.

I believe the government needs to accept the opposition's amendments — not because the bill does not send a clear signal to the community, because it does. The bill is a clear signal about what Parliament thinks about reducing the harm caused by smoking in our community, and that is a worthy signal for Parliament to give. Nevertheless, the government has a lot of work to do with small businesses to help them comply, and what the opposition is asking for in its proposed amendments is just that.

The opposition has confidence that the government will now provide that help with compliance. It will go out into the community and talk to restaurateurs, peak associations, specialist tobacconists, specialist traders such as duty free traders, milk bar owners, cafe owners and hoteliers about what the legislation means for them.

Mr Baillieu interjected.

Mr DOYLE — But only, as the honourable member for Hawthorn points out, if the government accepts the amendments. If it does not, its implementation date will be 1 November, in which case

the very worthy reforms may well founder on an unreasonable timetable.

In conclusion, the government has made support of the worthy reforms by the opposition quite difficult, and not because the opposition is in any way half-hearted about the reforms being proposed — it is not. Opposition members are delighted to continue the bipartisan approach Parliament has taken to tobacco control since 1988. Although there may be inequities the government will have to address, the opposition believes the bill is a worthy first step towards further tobacco reform. The opposition has, however, proposed an amendment that asks the government to address the shortcomings in its own bill. The first way to do that is to engage in proper consultation with people such as the many who have written to the government saying they believe they have not been heard.

It is astonishing that despite the extensive consultation process going on with local councils about supervised injecting rooms there has not been the same level of consultation or help on the issue of smoking.

The government should accept the opposition's proposed amendment because it will give it a chance to carry out those sorts of consultations. Even if the government agrees to consultations it will face some sticking points because of clumsily worded definitions. I have pointed out the difficulties that have been created by the definition of just what a predominant eating area might be. The aim of the legislation is worthy, but the problems need to be teased out in discussions with the owners of restaurants, cafes, milk bars, hotels and all tobacco product retailers and wholesalers. The opposition asks that those things be taken into consideration to bring some degree of sophistication to the discussions.

The opposition's concerns are not and have never been with the public health reforms proposed in the bill; they lie with the difficulties involved in helping small business to comply and with the confusion about the current definitions and how they will be made to work. Further concerns lie with the government's methodology in choosing local government environmental health officers to police the regulations. The opposition trusts that the period of time proposed will give the government an appropriate period in which to talk to retailers and local government bodies so that an appropriate regime can be worked out.

In conclusion, the opposition supports the proposed public health reforms. It has concerns about the implications for small business and the difficulty of implementation. It has proposed an amendment in a

spirit of cooperation with the government and in the belief that the government will now enter into appropriate discussions with all the relevant parties. The opposition asks the government to consider supporting the amendment, which does no more than push out the time line for implementation to 1 July in respect of smoking bans and tobacco products, and to 28 February for the point-of-sale poster displays.

The opposition is happy to work with the government in any way possible, either through the amendments or while the bill is between houses, to get more precise wording to enable it to fully and wholeheartedly support a worthy public health reform.

Mr VINEY (Frankston East) — I listened carefully to the honourable member for Malvern. I thank him for his contribution and for the opposition's bipartisan support for the Tobacco (Amendment) Bill.

Having by agreement only 5 minutes to respond to a speech of a little over an hour's duration is something of a challenge. However, I make the point that a Labor Party government has introduced the legislation. The previous coalition government had seven years in which to do it yet failed to do so, and one would be forgiven for thinking that perhaps this was another of the commitments the now opposition would have made in its eighth year of government. It appears the previous government was going to do a lot of things in that eighth year. I was waiting for the honourable member for Malvern to list the problems of tobacco in society and perhaps comment on the important public health issues addressed by the bill. However, the house heard a list of fairly pedantic comments about detailed and obscure criticisms of the bill concerning issues such as the size of doorways.

I am happy to respond to a couple of remarks. I was hoping that the honourable member might mention the following facts: that of all drugs tobacco is by far the biggest killer in society; that each year illicit drugs cost Australia about \$1.7 billion, alcohol costs Australia about \$4.5 billion, but tobacco costs Australia in excess of \$13 billion and represents more than two-thirds of the total cost of all drug use; that 4500 Victorians die each year of smoking-related illnesses; and that in 1996 tobacco caused more than 16 per cent of the mortality burden in men and 9 per cent in women. The house did not hear any of those sorts of contributions. Instead, honourable members heard a grasping attempt to criticise the government for what is progressive legislation.

The honourable member criticised the apparent inconsistency of government members in relation to

legislation that was passed in 1993. He suggested that government members are showing a lack of consistency in supporting this bill, and he particularly criticised the minister. I am reminded of the following comment of John Maynard Keynes, 'When faced with the weight of evidence, I change my mind. What do you do?' In making that comment I suggest to the honourable member for Malvern that the Minister for Health has shown considerable courage in introducing this legislation and should be commended for taking it through the extensive process of discussion and consultation that was necessary.

The honourable member criticised the implementation dates. He misunderstands the bill, because clause 2 states:

- (2) Subject to sub-section(3) the remaining provisions of the Act come into operation on a day or days to be proclaimed.
- (3) If a provision referred to in sub-section (2) does not come into operation before 1 July it comes into operation on that day.

Following discussions with restaurateurs and people in the industry it was always the government's intention to progressively enact the legislation from when it received royal assent until 1 July 2001. The government has accepted the opposition's amendments and the minister accepts that the amendments will now remove his discretion in that regard.

The legislation is vital. Rather than focusing on the obscure criticisms of the honourable member for Malvern, I will refer to what the legislation will do. Smoking will be banned in Victorian restaurants and designated shopping centres; tobacco advertising in retail outlets will be abolished; the display of tobacco products will be tightly regulated; a negative licensing system will be introduced whereby a retailer's capacity to sell tobacco may be suspended if he or she sells cigarettes to children; the maximum financial penalties will increase from \$1000 to \$5000; and health warning signs will be mandatory in tobacco and retail outlets.

Honourable members should not forget that cigarettes kill 13 Victorians a day and that passive smoking is a considerable contributor to lung cancer. Selling cigarettes to minors is part of a marketing strategy that is designed to hook young people into the long-term use of tobacco. Victorians will welcome the important and overdue changes in the bill. The legislation goes a long way towards improving public health. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr WILSON (Bennettswood) — I am pleased to join the debate on the Tobacco (Amendment) Bill. As

the honourable member for Malvern said, the opposition is pleased to support the public health goals behind the legislation.

The honourable member clearly explained the reasons behind the amendments he has foreshadowed. He has also covered the anomalies and inconsistencies in the legislation and highlighted the government's failure to adequately consult with some of the parties affected by the new laws — that is, restaurateurs and small business operators among others.

In my brief contribution I will concentrate on the public health benefits that will flow from the legislation. In the second-reading speech and in the information circulated by the Heart Foundation we are told that each year more than 4500 Victorians die of smoking-related diseases, compared with 450 Victorians who die each year from road trauma. The number of people who suffer the severe consequences of tobacco-related illnesses is extraordinary.

Honourable members will recall that it was a Liberal government that introduced the compulsory wearing of seatbelts, which significantly reduced Victoria's road toll. That initiative paid great dividends because it resulted in fewer Victorians losing their lives on the road. The bill takes the same path and presents a new opportunity to tackle a major public health and safety issue.

Information supplied to me by the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria is most disturbing. Its research indicates that between 1993 and 1996, 167 people in my electorate died of tobacco-related diseases. On average, 136 of every 1000 deaths in my electorate will be due to smoking, compared with 26 due to alcohol and/or road trauma. Those statistics are reason enough to tackle the dangers associated with passive smoking in restaurants and other eating places.

As outlined by the Minister for Health in his second-reading speech, the bill has four main goals, all of which were covered by the shadow minister. They include banning smoking in restaurants and other eating places and specified shopping centres; banning the point-of-sale advertising of tobacco products in retail outlets; and increasing fines for selling tobacco to minors.

The dangers associated with passive smoking are indisputable. All Victorians have an undeniable right to breathe air without risking their health. I accept the contention of the Heart Foundation that people have a right to smoke only if they can do so without harming or significantly annoying others. The vast majority of

people, including children, who eat in restaurants and other dining places are not smokers. Both they and the staff who work in those places have a basic right to dine or work without damaging or risking their health. The bill will assist in that sense. The move is not unique; it has already been made in many states of America and in Western Australia, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory.

I support the attempt to reduce the damage caused by passive smoking by banning smoking in specified shopping centres for the same reasons that I support a ban on smoking in restaurants and eating areas — as well as for the reasons outlined by the shadow minister.

I accept that too many Victorian children are exposed to the advertising of this dangerous product and support the reforms to point-of-sale advertising.

Any attempt to reduce the glamour of smoking through clever advertising campaigns is to be encouraged. As a community we have a duty to protect our children. As a father I believe I have a duty to protect my children, and the bill will assist in that aim.

The information provided by the Heart Foundation stating:

A child who starts smoking at age 14 or younger is five times more likely to die of lung cancer than a person who starts smoking at the age of 24 or more, and is 15 times more likely to die of lung cancer compared to someone who never smokes —

is good reason for the provisions in the legislation.

On the issue of increasing fines for selling tobacco products to minors, the reforms in the legislation are most welcome. Anyone who breaks the law by selling cigarettes to minors deserves to pay a hefty price. I noticed in his second-reading speech that the minister made the claim that Victorian children spend about \$25 million a year on cigarettes, and 80 per cent of smokers start smoking before they turn 18 years of age. The second-reading speech says that smoking is essentially a childhood habit that continues into adulthood. It also makes the point that the take-up rate for adolescent females aged 16 to 17 years is of concern and has exceeded the rate for adolescent males.

In my dealings with public health authorities over recent years, that has been a great concern: we have not successfully tackled the issue of young women taking up tobacco smoking. The figures in the second-reading speech are worth quoting:

In 1993, 32 per cent of boys aged 16 to 17 years were smokers. In 1996, only 29 per cent of boys aged 16 to 17 years smoked.

By contrast, in 1993, 33 per cent of girls aged 16 to 17 years smoked. But in 1996, 37 per cent of girls aged 16 to 17 years smoked.

The shadow Minister for Health made the point that there has been bipartisan support in this state and this Parliament for tobacco control since 1988. This debate continues that tradition. These public health issues must be beyond party politics, and the contribution of the shadow Minister for Health, and I hope my own contribution, signify that that is the opposition's continuing intention.

In concluding I pay tribute to a number of people and organisations. The shadow minister paid similar tributes, and I think it is important because I have worked for a long time with many of the people and organisations I will mention.

I pay tribute to the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria and the fantastic work it has done in Victoria over so many years. Vichealth, established by this Parliament in 1988, has taken on the issue of tobacco control in the 12 years since then with the bipartisan support of the Parliament. I particularly thank the present chief executive officer, Dr Rob Moodie, and pay tribute to the first executive officer, Rhonda Galbally, who took on the fight when it was somewhat less glamorous than it is today.

I pay tribute to the Quit organisation, and I note that Todd Harper from that organisation is in the house today. I also pay tribute to his predecessor, Judith Watt, who was a great supporter of Quit campaigns for many years. I also pay tribute to the work of the National Heart Foundation.

The shadow minister outlined the reasons for the opposition's amendments. If those amendments are supported by the government bipartisan support for these sorts of reforms will continue. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — It gives me great pleasure to join the debate on the Tobacco (Amendment) Bill. As the Labor government's representative on the Vichealth board, I am very much aware of the support for the legislation from Vichealth, the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria and the National Heart Foundation of Australia. Having spent 20 years working as a health professional, I make no apology for being passionately anti-smoking. That was born from witnessing first-hand the misery caused by tobacco-related diseases, suffered not only by smokers but also their partners and children.

In the three years between 1993 and 1996 there were 282 smoking-related deaths in the electorate of Carrum.

The diseases included cancer of the lung, mouth, pancreas, bladder, kidney, stomach and cervix, as well as heart disease, stroke, chronic bronchitis and emphysema. It is disturbing that the rate of deaths from smoking-related diseases is much higher in Carrum than it is for Victoria as a whole.

The amendments to the Tobacco Act will help reduce tobacco use and consequently help prevent avoidable deaths and reduce the misery that flows from them. The bill will bring Victoria into line with other Australian states, and it is of grave concern that Victoria, once an international leader in tobacco control legislation, now lags behind both nationally and internationally.

The bill delivers on an election commitment of the government. A clearly stated policy objective the government took to the people of Victoria was that it would work to achieve lower smoking rates and reduce unwanted exposure to tobacco smoke.

The bill bans point-of-sale advertising of tobacco products in retail outlets — hallelujah to that! The local milkbar should not be the point of addiction for kids. As other forms of advertising have been restricted tobacco companies have responded by increasing the emphasis on point-of-sale advertising, particularly in convenience stores and local milk bars, thus exposing even very young children to the advertising message when they buy sweets, snack foods and soft drinks. That leads to a dramatic uptake in smoking by children between the ages of 12 and 15. The rate of smoking for 16-year-olds is comparable to the rate for the adult population. Reducing adolescent smoking is an issue of the highest priority because tobacco is the major gateway drug.

The Prime Minister, Mr Howard, was quoted in the *Age* of 19 March 1999 as saying of drug traffickers:

I don't think there's anybody in the Australian community who has anything other than the maximum contempt and zero tolerance for those who seek to make money out of human misery and human suffering.

I agree with that statement. I suggest to the house that executives from tobacco companies should share the contempt we direct at other drug pushers.

An article written by Dr Rob Moodie, the CEO of Vichealth, and Jonathon Lieberman, the legal consultant, Vichealth Centre for Tobacco Control, published in the autumn 2000 Vichealth newsletter, states:

... tobacco companies continue to make millions of dollars selling a product that is highly addictive and that kills about

half its long-term users — over 18 000 a year in Australia or about 50 a day.

Tobacco smoking is the largest preventable cause of death and disease in Victoria. The bill will help to reduce tobacco smoking, and I urge the house to support it.

Ms McCALL (Frankston) — The preamble to the Tobacco Act states:

Tobacco use is so injurious to the health of both smokers and non-smokers as to warrant restrictive legislation ...

For that reason I am happy to support the bill.

One of the worst things about being an ex-smoker is that you are vehemently opposed to anyone who still smokes. There is an apocryphal story about non-smokers being almost as bad as converted Catholics, but that is an argument for another day.

From 1977 to 1981, when I was living in the United Kingdom, I worked for British American Tobacco, and I was a smoker. I worked in the UK during a time when two major campaigns were being waged — one called ASH, which was run by Anti-Smoking and Health, and, quite rightly, the opposite campaign called FOREST, organised by the Freedom of Residents of England to Smoke Tobacco. They were important, argumentative and vocal groups in the English community. It was almost as good, for those of us who can remember them, as the days when we talked about drinking real ale in England rather than just ordinary beer. I used to work for a brewing company as well — I have had something of a chequered career!

During the four years I worked in the European division of British American Tobacco, which exported predominantly State Express and John Player Special cigarettes, one of the highlights, if you like, was the negotiations involving BAT and John Player Special cigarettes sponsoring the Moscow Olympics. I learnt some of the interesting ways in which the tobacco companies dealt with illegal tobacco products, point-of-sale material and outlets and the distribution of cigarettes to minors. I support that part of the legislation dealing with those matters.

I could tell honourable members many stories about going down to the ports in Sicily and watching illegal cigarettes being rowed in from North Africa. The tax labels would be changed and they would be transported across Europe to be sold illegally in milk bars and restaurants in Germany and Amsterdam — but that is also a tale for another day.

I strongly support the moves to increase the penalties for illegal transportation and sale of cigarettes and cigarette products, particularly because of the impact it has on the younger members of our community. There is substantial evidence to suggest that starting to smoke at a young age makes it progressively more difficult to give up. I urge the smokers in Parliament to consider the option to give up smoking — for the health of all and not just themselves.

I am also concerned about the impact of passive smoking on the community. All honourable members would be aware of the ban on smoking in government buildings. In the past the public was amused at the sight of hordes of people standing outside the buildings dropping cigarette ends at their feet while they were on their 10-minute morning smokes. I urge the government to consider other ways of dealing with no-smoking rules in buildings rather than having smokers congregating on the pavements outside. It delivers a very bad message to the community. I notice from correspondence I have received that it even happens outside entrances to hospitals and places where public health must be and is a major concern.

I have no difficulty in supporting the parts of the legislation relating to shopping centres, and I note that the shopping centre in Frankston now has a smoke-free environment, which is much nicer for everybody. The major restaurants in the Frankston area also boast non-smoking areas and they tell me that the smoking parts of the restaurants are virtually never used.

I have one concern, which was also raised by the honourable member for Malvern, in relation to what appears to be an anomaly within the legislation concerning public bars. It is peculiar to say a person cannot smoke in a restaurant but if he or she wants to lean on a public bar and have a smoke with a beer that is still okay. There is substantive evidence to suggest that more people are likely to smoke in public bars than in restaurants. Will the legislation catch up the people it hopes to?

I am also concerned that there is no ban on smoking in gaming venues. I have visited places like the Returned and Services League clubs and some of the local pubs in my electorate and I am amazed that people can see to use the poker machines through the pall of smoke that pervades the entire environment. I notice the Minister for Agriculture is giggling. As a smoker he will probably understand that. If the government is taking strong and commendable steps towards the obliteration of potential risks to smokers and non-smokers, why are gaming venues not included in the legislation?

I have received some interesting documentation — as I am sure have all honourable members — from the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria. I analysed some of the statistics on the 63 victims of lung cancer in my electorate between 1993 and 1996 to determine how many were smokers and how many were non-smokers. Some 60 per cent of those who died were heavy smokers while 40 per cent did not smoke but lived with smokers. There is a strong correlation which bears out the reasons for the legislation and why smoking in all shapes, sizes and descriptions is bad for one's health.

One of the worst things in this sort of debate is for an ex-smoker to stand up and talk about it because, believe me, we are much holier than thou! As a consequence of smoking, after giving up the habit I developed slight asthma and therefore an allergy to anyone around me who smoked. I commend to the house the efforts of my parents who smoked incessantly for many years but gave up cold turkey when they reached 50 years of age. I have enormous admiration for them because they tell me that is one of the most difficult ways to stop smoking. I suspect I have inherited their stubbornness, and I am delighted to acknowledge it.

There is no question that the issues raised in the original Tobacco Act have been followed by this legislation and are another step along the path. However, I am concerned about the implication of the legislation on small business. Small businesses in my electorate, particularly milk bars and retail outlets, have expressed concern about how they will continue their trade as a result of the restrictive nature of the bill and the time lines in which it is being introduced. I am pleased to support the amendment to be proposed by the honourable member for Malvern to have a rolling introduction to allow small businesses time to adjust. My local milk bar might start making better cappuccinos and machiatos instead of selling lots of packets of cigarettes first thing in the morning when I walk through a fog of smoke on my way in to collect a newspaper.

I notice the honourable member for Gisborne hiding her head in shame — we ex-smokers sympathise!

The bill is a good piece of legislation, although the opposition has some reservations about it. I do not criticise the comments of the honourable member for Malvern. His in-depth understanding of the technical issues of the bill is laudable and I support the amendments he has moved.

In recognition of the problem of young people — in particular young women — taking up smoking I congratulate the government and support the

amendments introduced by the honourable member for Malvern. I commend the bill and wish it a speedy passage.

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — I am pleased to support the Tobacco (Amendment) Bill. This might seem strange to some members, knowing I am a smoker. I know of the addiction tobacco brings through my first-hand knowledge of the product and the long-term health problems associated with it. Honourable members are all wondering why she does not just give it up. Addiction is real, and once someone is hooked it is hard to give up. I did give up for eight years, but the addiction remains and I commenced smoking again and have continued to smoke ever since.

I support the bill because it seeks to discourage people from taking up the habit. I come from an era when there was mass advertising of tobacco products on television, in picture theatres and in glossy magazines — we all remember them, with the colourful photos creating wonderful images of young, good-looking and healthy men and women being successful in areas of their lives so long as they were smoking the right brand of cigarette. The images implied that smoking the right brand would bring success. I am so glad this blatant, dishonest advertising is gone forever, but more must be done.

I strongly support the banning of smoking in restaurants and enclosed eating places. Although I smoke I find it unpleasant to have a meal corrupted by cigarette smoke, and for many years my husband, my friends and I have abstained from smoking while dining.

The realisation of the damage done by this product to communities is finally impacting on us. On 22 May, the headline in the Ballarat *Courier* read: 'Smoking the leading killer'. The article went on to say that regional areas were amongst the worst affected. Unfortunately, in Ballarat 14.3 per cent of deaths were attributed to smoking-related causes. Everything possible must be done to encourage current smokers to quit and to deter young people from ever beginning.

I have met with local retailers who have expressed concerns about the loss of trade. Legislation in the area is a question of balance, and the bill has the right balance. An issue was raised by a previous speaker about the powers of inspectors. I assure the house the powers are not new or additional but based on the Fair Trading Act. The suggestion that the powers are new is untrue.

The main statistics will be left to others to mention, but I shall quote one fact: in 1996, 77 000 children aged

between 12 and 17 years smoked 2 million cigarettes in a week — unbelievable. The appalling trend must be reversed. The bill will address a significant health problem and deserves support.

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — It is with pleasure that I speak on the Tobacco (Amendment) Bill. In the second-reading speech the minister said:

Reducing smoking rates is the single most effective way to enhance the health status of Victorians, and to impact on rising health care costs.

I agree fully. Later in the speech the minister said:

There is no excuse for being complacent about the significant health threat tobacco poses to Victorians.

Again I fully support the statement.

Much debate has ensued on the rights of non-smokers to a smoke-free environment against the rights of smokers to smoke. As a non-smoker, believing individuals, in particular children, should have access to a clean environment and should not be exposed to significant levels of tobacco promotion, I have participated in many such debates. The main purposes of the bill are to make provision for smoke-free dining; to ban smoking in specified shopping centres; to increase penalties for selling tobacco products to minors from \$1000 to \$5000 — a good thing, and I support it; and to prescribe penalties for selling illegal tobacco, which I support also. Vendors selling cigarettes to minors will incur heavy financial penalties and may be banned from dealing in tobacco products.

The bill has caused much debate in the community. Last week there were concerns about the decision by Coles to scrap plans to build a smoke enclosure in the Doncaster East shopping centre, which is next to my electorate. An article in the Doncaster Templestowe *News* states:

The supermarket had applied to Manningham council to build the smoking enclosure in March and a permit was expected to be issued ...

Coles management withdrew the application after two complaints were made about the smoking enclosure.

Trudy ... who lives behind the site where the enclosure was to be built, said she was worried about the effects of passive smoking ...

Educational institutions are also taking part in the debate. Last week the headmaster of St Michael's Grammar School, Mr Simon Gipson, wrote in a newsletter about the human suffering associated with smoking. I read from his letter:

As you know, one of the health issues about which I feel particularly strongly is smoking ... Last December I watched my father die from smoking-related cancer. Six years ago, my uncle died from lung cancer, directly attributable to smoking.

The year before that, my father's best friend died from lung cancer, again directly from smoking. In 1965, my grandfather, who survived four years in the trenches ... died from lung cancer, after a lifetime of smoking. In 1956, his daughter, my aunt, died also from lung cancer.

Hence I feel very strongly that we should work towards preventing children from smoking and from becoming tragically addicted to nicotine ...

There is evidence that children are more susceptible to tobacco advertising than adults and that such advertising increases the risk of young people smoking.

I tend to agree. When my young son was only five he went down to the local milk bar with his grandfather and bought himself a packet of candied cigarettes. He came home, pretended to light the cigarette and imitate his uncle, who is a heavy smoker, which caused me much concern.

The National Heart Foundation of Australia claims:

Victorian children are still being exposed to significant levels of tobacco promotion at point of sale. Children who see cigarettes advertised alongside confectionery will gain the impression that tobacco is a benign product, rather like chocolate. That is, they may see it as an indulgence that need not be harmful, rather than an inherently dangerous product that kills one in two of its long-term users and which, despite intentions to the contrary, adults find extremely difficult to give up.

I therefore support any measures taken to stop the selling of tobacco products to children and I support those parts of the bill. The foundation also states:

While the majority of retailers probably do not sell cigarettes to very young children, the fact is virtually all cigarettes smoked by children are cigarettes supplied by retailers to minors. Fewer than 5 per cent of children who smoke get cigarettes from parents or other adults.

I support the measures taken by the minister to try to stop the sale of tobacco to children. However, the danger does not stop there. Smoking is a health risk. According to the Anti-Cancer Council, the number of smoke-related deaths in my electorate of Bulleen was the highest number of avoidable deaths. On average out of every 1000 deaths, 129 were due to smoking, even though a recent survey in Manningham indicates that teenagers in my electorate are less likely to smoke than in other eastern suburbs.

The National Heart Foundation states:

Smoking is the single largest preventable cause of sickness and premature death in Victoria as it is nationwide and in the rest of the developed world.

Although I support parts of the bill, I believe it is unfortunate that parts of it have been hastily drafted without much consultation. I, as have other members of Parliament, have received many letters on this issue. One from a group of restaurant owners states:

We the undersigned are restaurant owners-managers in Victoria and are expressing our concern in regard to the legislation to ban smoking in restaurants.

We are concerned that: our views have never been sought on this issue; we have never been invited to attend a consultation forum with either the government or our representative body ... the legislation before Parliament does not reflect or acknowledge our concerns and views, even though it has been reported as being unanimously supported by restaurants.

The government claims it will be open, accountable and will consult widely but it has failed in its first test.

The Cigar Society of Australia also sent me a letter. In part, it states:

We call on the Parliament ... to consult with stakeholders and the community on some practical solutions to the issues the government is trying to address.

According to the legislation, shops will not be able to display tobacco packets or products, which raises many questions. Where will the shop owners store tobacco products? What happens if a person wishes to buy a product which he or she cannot see? What happens if someone wishes to purchase a carton? Who will subsidise the shop owners to refit their premises? Although I support parts of the legislation, I suggest in future the government should consult with all relevant groups during the drafting of legislation.

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — I support the Tobacco (Amendment) Bill. It is a proactive measure that will inhibit the activities of the tobacco industry. According to the National Drug Strategic Framework, in 1996 smoking-related deaths in Australia totalled 18 580. That is a huge number of people and accounts for 81 per cent of all drug-related deaths in Australia. In comparison, I understand that alcohol accounts for 3500 deaths. The 1999 figure for smoking-related deaths was 18 900, so there has been a slight increase over the past four years.

Every day 13 Victorians die from smoking-related illness. A person can give up smoking today and 17 years from this date encounter lung cancer because of the slow process that follows. It is certainly not the case that if you give up smoking today you are assured of good health. It can follow you and prematurely end your life. I believe it is harder to give up tobacco than heroin, having been down that path some years ago.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr SAVAGE — Let me qualify that — definitely only tobacco. I can assure honourable members it is very difficult to give up tobacco and I will never go down that path again. I am disappointed with the Philip Morris company. In a leaflet drop to every business that sells tobacco in my electorate it has put my name at the bottom of the leaflet as the local member of Parliament. The leaflet states:

Have your say, protect your business.

Never mind about protecting the 18 500 people who die every year from tobacco-related illness; let's protect the industry that sells tobacco. Some proposals will certainly impact on small business and will cause difficulties. The transitional period is lengthy and I hope that long time frame will mean the changes will be slow and reasonable and take into account the mind-set that will be necessary to change significant advertising and significant displays and packaging of that type of material.

The bill has some positive aspects to it. It will cut the incidence of smoking in restaurants completely. There is nothing more obnoxious than being in a restaurant and having cigarette smoke wafting over the table. One has no control over that component.

Smoking will be banned in shopping centres, should they choose to participate. Perhaps that choice should not be there.

It is timely legislation and anything that diminishes the horrendous death toll from cigarette smoking is to be endorsed. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — At the outset I acknowledge that there are health problems for smokers. However, we need to acknowledge that it is not an illegal practice. I want to make that clear to the house: while I acknowledge there are problems for people who are smokers, it is not an illegal practice. I am not and never have been a smoker.

This bill is a sham. I have listened to the contributions made to this debate, particularly by the honourable member for Malvern who went through the bill in detail and provided information on the problems the opposition had with the legislation. He made the point that the legislation is not equitable; it is not consistent; it will not work well, particularly for restaurateurs; and its implementation by municipal environmental health officers will present another difficulty.

The honourable member for Malvern went into considerable detail about the difficulties that will be faced by municipalities in implementing the legislation, the differences that will arise between municipalities, and, as I said, the difficulties that will be created particularly for restaurateurs.

I support many aspects of the bill. However, restaurateurs will face problems in providing smoke-free zones. I acknowledge the representations I have received from people in the industry who have raised their concerns about the measure. I also support the amendment moved by the honourable member for Malvern to extend the date for the implementation of parts of the legislation to 1 July 2001.

I place on record the importance of the tobacco industry to north-eastern Victoria. My electorate of Murray Valley includes many tobacco growers, as does the electorate of Benalla — 60 per cent of Australian tobacco is grown in north-eastern Victoria. The revenue from tobacco grown in north-eastern Victoria amounts to approximately \$25 million and the industry provides hundreds of jobs in the region.

Honourable members should also bear in mind that the tobacco industry provides substantial employment in Melbourne, with the Philip Morris company employing more than 1000 people at its factory in Moorabbin. Philip Morris also owns Kraft Foods which has a major food factory at Strathmerton and has recently spent more than \$100 million in developing that plant.

It is also worth mentioning the taxes that federal and state governments gain from the tobacco industry. Honourable members are aware that the tobacco, liquor, and petrol industries are heavily taxed by state and federal governments, and that that matter needs to be addressed, particularly with the introduction of the GST. It is estimated that \$5 billion a year is collected by Australian governments in tobacco taxes.

During the 1980s when the Labor government was in power in Victoria the then Treasurer introduced a bill to increase taxes on tobacco products in Victoria by 5 per cent because the then government believed that increase would reduce by about 10 per cent the incidence of smoking in the state. The then Treasurer also said that the government would collect an extra \$40 million in increased taxes. While the government hoped to reduce the incidence of tobacco smoking, it would collect an extra \$40 million.

We need to be realistic and put this matter in balance. We must consider the importance of the tobacco industry to north-eastern Victoria. It is not illegal to

smoke, but I acknowledge that smoking creates problems for smokers.

I listened with much interest to the comments made by earlier speakers. I place on record my concern with some of the comments made by the Attorney-General. Honourable members will recall that in April last, at a meeting of state Attorneys-General, the Attorney-General said consideration should be given to increasing taxes on tobacco products if a cost was involved in handling people who had smoking-related illnesses.

The Attorney-General then suggested there could be a class action against tobacco companies that could be covered by an increase in the excise on tobacco products.

I was interested to examine the Attorney-General's history as a federal member of Parliament. In the early 1990s he represented the federal electorate of Kennedy, which is in north Queensland. At that time he spoke on a number of bills, including the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Bill. I will quote some of the comments made by the current Victorian Attorney-General during the debate on that bill:

As you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker, I represent the most significant tobacco growing area in Australia. The townships of Mareeba, Dimbulah and Mutchilba are totally dependent on tobacco for their viability. Not only are there more than 300 growers in this area of the Atherton Tableland, but also the service industries associated with tobacco make it a huge employer and the lifeblood of these towns. Hardworking farmers have been growing a legal product for many years.

The then federal member for Kennedy went on to say:

Unfortunately for them, but perhaps fortunately for the health of the nation, public policy in Australia dictates that fewer people consume tobacco products.

He then said:

As domestic consumption decreases, the amount of tobacco that local growers can grow also decreases, thus adversely impacting on their livelihoods. This is a human cost not often thought about when discussing the tobacco issue.

It is worth quoting some of the other things said by the champion of non-smoking in Victoria. The comments he made during debate on the Custom Tariffs Amendment Bill were even stronger:

The first aspect of this legislation that I want to talk about concerns the tobacco industry. Schedule 5, which was operative from 19 August 1992, increases the duty on certain tobacco products by \$5 a kilogram, as announced by the Treasurer (Mr Dawkins) in his budget speech. There are a lot of tobacco growers in my electorate and they are

understandably concerned about the long-term effect of state and federal government increases in excise levels.

He goes on further to say:

There is no mention of consultation with the industry or even acknowledgment that this policy may adversely affect farmers who happen to grow tobacco. Whether we like it or not, tobacco is a legal product.

That is what the current Attorney-General said. I will continue, because his comments while he was the federal member for Kennedy should be written into Victorian *Hansard*. He went on to say:

I want to use this opportunity to remind the house that, whilst I share the concerns of my colleagues about the health risks associated with tobacco smoking, there are hundreds of hardworking farmers in the Mareeba and Dimbulah area of my electorate who came out to Australia many years ago from Europe and were encouraged to plant tobacco leaf and invest in the irrigation systems and drying sheds. They have invested their life's labour in a legal product and are now being made to feel somewhat like criminals.

That is exactly what the state government is doing to the tobacco growers in north-eastern Victoria.

I will quote two other passages from the speech of the former federal member for Kennedy because they are important:

However, where paternalistic policy measures such as tobacco advertising bans or increases in tobacco excise such as in this bill directly affect the viability of farmers, I believe that it is incumbent on the government to provide appropriate compensation or a crop substitution scheme for those farmers.

What a classic quote! That is what the current Attorney-General said when he was representing far north Queensland in the federal Parliament in the early 1990s. He also said:

The decision to establish the task force, I believe, is a further demonstration of the government's preparedness to work with the industry. It shows up yet again one of the big differences between this government and the opposition. We believe in consultation and listening to people.

Given what the former federal member for Kennedy said during those debates, his subsequent actions as Attorney-General are hypocritical. When debating legislation that affected tobacco growers in his electorate he talked about the importance of consultation and outlined what the then federal government should be doing to protect the tobacco industry. He also made it clear that tobacco growing is not illegal. He strongly criticised the high charges the state and federal governments were imposing on the industry in the early 1990s.

I support entirely the comments made by the former federal member for Kennedy — and I trust he will take note of them, too. It was therefore totally hypocritical of the Attorney-General to say following the meeting of state and federal attorneys-general in early April that there should be a class action and that the attorneys-general should consider increasing the taxes imposed on the tobacco industry to cover the health-related problems that result from cigarette smoking.

I repeat for the benefit of government members that I believe there are health problems associated with smoking. However, the fact is that tobacco is a legal product. I also believe the bill is an absolute sham. The part of the proposed legislation that relates to restaurateurs will be difficult to implement and represents an imposition on a legitimate Victorian industry.

I acknowledge that the opposition supports some aspects of the bill. However, I strongly recommend that the government accept the amendments foreshadowed by the honourable member for Malvern as a good compromise. I hope the house can achieve a balanced position on the bill and in doing so recognise the importance of the tobacco industry to north-eastern Victoria and the need to look after the interests of the people who grow a legitimate product in the north-east.

Ms CAMPBELL (Minister for Community Services) — I put on the record my strong belief in the importance of enforcing clause 12, which talks about selling tobacco to minors. Given that the bill concentrates on promoting public health and emphasising the importance of community wellbeing, it is essential not only that young people be alerted to the possible effects of smoking on their health but also that those who sell cigarettes to them are fined — —

Mr Steggall — Those who knowingly sell them.

Ms CAMPBELL — It is essential that those who knowingly sell cigarettes to minors are hit hard with significant fines.

Clause 12 amends section 12 of the Tobacco Act by increasing the penalties for selling products to minors or allowing minors to obtain cigarettes from vending machines from 10 penalty points for a first offence and 20 penalty points for a subsequent offence to the new penalty of 50 penalty units.

Yesterday I mentioned a report I released on a survey of risk and protective factors affecting young Victorians. The people surveyed were asked whether they had used cigarettes or other drugs of addiction in

the previous 30 days. A table summarising the responses to that question, which is headed 'Substance use in the past 30 days', shows that in the preceding 30 days 23 per cent of young people in the metropolitan area had smoked cigarettes.

I find that statistic alarming not only in terms of the health of those young people but also because of its significance as a risk indicator. The survey found that when the incidence of cigarette smoking was high there was a correspondingly high incidence of marijuana, other-drug and alcohol use.

The government and community leaders must place emphasis on educating young people on the importance of health, and people's health is enhanced when they do not smoke.

I wish to put on the public record the statistics showing the proportion of young people who smoke. In the eastern metropolitan region the highest proportion of young people who smoke was in the Knox area — 31 per cent; the lowest percentage was in the Manningham area — 18 per cent. In the northern metropolitan region the highest percentage was in the Banyule area — 26 per cent; the lowest percentage was in the Yarra area — 18 per cent. In the southern metropolitan area the highest percentage was in the Bayside area — 33 per cent; the lowest percentage was in the Greater Dandenong area — 18 per cent. In the western metropolitan region the highest percentage was in the Melton area — 31 per cent; and the lowest percentage was in the Hobsons Bay area — 14 per cent.

I have limited time in which to address the bill, but I wish to make the point that we in the wider community and within this Parliament need to send a strong message to sellers of tobacco that they must not sell to minors and that if they do the full force of the law will come down on them.

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — I have a great deal of pleasure in joining the debate on the Tobacco (Amendment) Bill, particularly following the honourable member for Murray Valley, who was the speaker before last. The honourable member for Murray Valley showed how quickly the rhetoric of members who are currently in government has changed from when they were in opposition. When the government was in opposition it supported the tobacco growers in Queensland. The Attorney-General, who was at that time the shadow Attorney-General, said:

It is incumbent on government to provide compensation to growers for the loss that they are sustaining because of the impact that the policy of government is having on the industry, which is a legal industry.

It is difficult to reconcile that with the statements made by honourable members on the government benches during this debate. Tobacco is a legal product, it is grown by legal growers and it is grown as a commercial crop in my electorate and the electorates of Murray Valley and Benalla in north-eastern Victoria. It is grown in Victoria in direct competition to the crop grown in Queensland.

In 1995 the Victorian industry was grossly overproduced, so the Kennett government introduced a rationalisation process that promoted a buy-back of quota and reduced the number of areas used to grow tobacco. That process increased not only efficiency but also the quality of the product, which resulted in a better and safer product in the marketplace. The type of tobacco used for cigarettes can be regulated if a better quality leaf is grown. The former government took the sensible approach of buying back quota, and the legal operations of growers in north-eastern Victoria are now profitable.

The issue involves people's rights. We have heard nothing during the debate about the rights of smokers. I am not a smoker, but the right of an individual to smoke a legal product where that will not interfere with the rights of others who do not wish to smoke or who may object to smoking in their presence has to be respected. Similarly, the rights of people who grow a legal product have to be respected. I heard nothing from the government benches about those rights.

To allow other speakers to join the debate, I will conclude my remarks by saying that I support the changes introduced by the bill. They represent a commonsense approach to the issue and will reduce the health risks of using a legal product. I commend the bill for that good aim. However, although the intention of the bill is good, the introduction is hasty.

The amendments put forward by the opposition will allow additional time for small business to adapt to the changes. The changes will grossly disaffect small businesses because the sale of tobacco is a major part of their operations. I support the opposition amendments, because although the purpose of the bill is beyond question, the speed with which the changes are being introduced is totally impracticable.

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — I support the Tobacco (Amendment) Bill. I commend the opposition and the Independents for their support, but I must say I was surprised and disappointed to learn that the honourable member for Murray Valley thinks the legislation is a sham.

I support the bill in the full knowledge that smoking is the single largest preventable cause of sickness and premature death in the developed world, as the honourable member for Carrum pointed out. That is a disgrace given that multinational tobacco companies continue at full pace and without conscience to target our teenagers as their next generation of victims.

I also welcome the bill because many people who in the past were unable to go to restaurants because of their physical reaction to smoke, such as my wife, will soon be able enjoy a meal in a smoke-free environment, which, of course, is their right.

I welcome the legislation primarily because it will address to some degree the problem of recruitment of young people into the clutches of the tobacco companies. It proposes a number of restrictions on displays at retail outlets and increases penalties for the selling of cigarettes to minors.

The bill places additional responsibilities on retailers such as suburban owners of milk bars and other retail outlets, and those people have concerns about the legislation. The government recognises that but also knows that very successful peddling by the tobacco companies encourages adolescents to gain access to cigarettes. It is essential that restrictions be placed on displays in retail outlets.

As with any new restriction there are arguments against as well as for. It is said by some that implementation will be a logistical nightmare. Hypothetical situations have been dreamt up to highlight a supposed maze of implementation problems. As I said, however, to see what will happen we need only hark back to the example of the implementation of the smoke-free policy at the Melbourne Cricket Ground a number of years ago. At that time people who opposed the initiative came up with all sorts of hypothetical scenarios in an attempt to prove that the policy would not work. As we all now realise, the MCG is smoke-free, and the policy works very well to the benefit of all who attend the ground.

I welcome the legislation for many reasons, but primarily because it goes some way towards restricting the ability of tobacco companies to peddle their putrid product to future generations. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Mr LUPTON (Knox) — In joining the debate on the Tobacco (Amendment) Bill I advise the house that I have never smoked and have no intention of smoking. Parliament should, however, bear in mind that smoking is not illegal. It is a legal practice that I do not condone,

but I defend a person's right to smoke if he or she is stupid enough to do so. However, I will not support any arrangement that allows a person who is smoking to breathe his or her dirty, filthy passive smoke over me or anyone else.

Mrs Fyffe — Why don't you tell us what you really think!

Mr LUPTON — I will. It is a bit hypocritical that Parliament, while on the one hand introducing legislation to stop smoking in public buildings and banning smoking in restaurants and such places, does not have the guts or the inclination to on the other hand ban smoking in Parliament House. Honourable members seem comfortable about telling everyone else in Victoria what they should and should not do with cigarettes, but in Parliament House that subject is almost taboo. I note that a few honourable members are cringing at this very moment. Perhaps they are among those who indulge.

I have some statistics on smoking and health in the City of Knox. Between 1993 and 1996 in that city alone 42 people died of lung cancer. In addition, 2 people died of mouth cancer, 12 of other cancers, 36 of heart disease, 12 of strokes, 38 of chronic bronchitis and emphysema, and 6 of other smoking-related diseases. That totals 147 people in the City of Knox who died in a four-year period because of smoking. What terrible statistics!

I am very concerned about what tobacco does to people. My father-in-law passed away a couple of years ago as a direct result of smoking. He died of cancer and emphysema. I also have a son who smokes. Despite all my efforts he still smokes, and although I call him a goose and tell him he is stupid, he will persist. That is a person's right, of course. If a person is stupid enough to do it, it is his right.

Mr Viney — He will enjoy reading *Hansard*!

Mr LUPTON — Yes, he will really appreciate this when he reads it. I might send him a copy.

If a person wants to smoke, that is his right; but when the habit makes him breathe his smoke over other people, his behaviour is not appropriate.

The basic concept of the legislation is right, although, as indicated by the honourable member for Malvern, it is flawed in some respects. The intent is commendable but the legislation is clumsy. Like the honourable member for Malvern, I am concerned about the time lines imposed. It will be very difficult for members of the wider community to meet them and remain within

the law. A meeting of restaurateurs in Melbourne on Monday indicated clearly that they were concerned about the time lines. They do not want to break the law, but they are having trouble accepting the demand to make the necessary alterations to premises in time to meet the guidelines.

Some of the statistics mentioned by honourable members are quite frightening. For example, in 1996 in Victoria 73 000 children aged between 12 and 17 smoked 2 million cigarettes a week. The Minister for Community Services said that the City of Knox, which is in my electorate, has one of the highest levels of smoking among children. I find that deeply concerning. Those kids are being encouraged to smoke. For that reason I strongly support the provisions for strict controls on point-of-sale advertising of cigarettes. The number of displays will be curtailed and heavily controlled.

I am pleased to see that the fines for the selling of cigarettes to minors will be increased. I recall the time when a distraught mother came to me after having discovered that a milk bar proprietor was selling cigarettes singly to young kids. When I tried to have that proprietor prosecuted the mother did not have the courage to come forward and make a formal complaint. She wanted me to do everything without any assistance from her. The only way I could have done that would have been to have conducted a sting operation, but that would have been illegal because it would have involved another child in the purchasing of cigarettes.

Mr Savage interjected.

Mr LUPTON — I will. I believe the legislation is timely, but it is flawed because the opposition has trouble with the time frames. If there is to be an attempt to stop young people smoking and prevent the filthy habit from spreading throughout the population there is a need for the community and all sides in this place to act together to ensure the legislation is enforced.

The statistics in relation to smoking by children are alarming and my electorate of Knox has one of the highest rates in the state, which is of concern to me. There are other statistics. Victorian children spend about \$25 million a year on cigarettes, 80 per cent of smokers commence smoking before turning 18 and smoking is essentially a childhood habit that continues into adulthood. In 1993 some 32 per cent of boys aged between 16 and 17 were smokers, yet in 1996 only 29 per cent in the same age group smoked. By contrast, in 1993 some 33 per cent of girls aged between 16 and 17 were smokers and in 1996 the rate increased to

37 per cent. The problem appears to be that many young females think it is fashionable to smoke.

I support the legislation, but I believe the amendments suggested by the honourable member for Malvern must be considered seriously. They are appropriate because nothing could be worse than for the legislation to be passed and for the industry to find it is not able to meet the time lines. The legislation is timely and necessary. Anything that can be done to stop the spread of smoking among young people must be commended.

Ms DUNCAN (Gisborne) — I rise to speak on the Tobacco (Amendment) Bill with mixed feelings. I have to confess that as a fairly serious smoker myself — I will pause for a moment to cough — who loves eating out in restaurants I do not underestimate the potential inconvenience the legislation will cause to those of us who are both socially active and smokers. However, most smokers have already, mostly voluntarily, stopped smoking in restaurants. When I go out for dinner with my friends and I want to have a cigarette — I have only one or two friends who are smokers — I go outside to smoke. In my experience most people do the same. While smoking in eating places is still legal it is without doubt socially unacceptable. For the most part the bill reflects what is already happening anyway.

For most smokers today — as I look around I see some parliamentary colleagues who share the dreaded habit with me — it is not a question of saying, ‘If I give up smoking’, but more of saying, ‘When I give up smoking’. I think that would be true of all smokers because we all intend to give it up one day. The legislation may have the effect of allowing those of us who continue to defy medical authorities and smoke to make the decision to quit sooner rather than later; and certainly that is its intention. It is another little push and provides an incentive for doing that.

I thank the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria for providing every member of Parliament with relevant data on smoking-related deaths in various electorates. The statistics are awesome. In the electorate of Gisborne on average 153 of every 1000 deaths will be due to smoking. It is a serious statistic that needs to be addressed.

The bill continues the process that has been in place over a number of years. It is an incremental change that reflects society’s attitudes to smoking. When an attempt is made to ban a legal product it is usually done incrementally. A lot has been said about various inconsistencies in parts of the legislation as it applies to places that provide food and also serve alcohol. There will obviously be some confusion in the minds of the

public on the issue. The legislation is clear but an ongoing public education process will be required.

Prior to the election Labor gave a commitment that it would ban smoking in restaurants. The fact that the legislation also applies to eating areas in pubs reflects the government's acknowledgment that such eating areas are in competition with restaurants. The bill puts both areas on an equal footing.

Although the changes may cause inconvenience and some confusion in the short term, the evidence from overseas suggests that restaurant patronage will increase and that people will quickly become accustomed to the change. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr ASHLEY (Bayswater) — I am pleased to join in support of the debate on the Tobacco (Amendment) Bill and wish the bill well as it passes through the house.

Like the honourable member for Knox I have not been a smoker and do not intend to be one. I have declared my hand. It is easy for people who have never smoked to moralise and I congratulate those honourable members who are smokers and who have spoken about the difficulties of quitting and the attempts they are making or have made to do so. I wish them well in their efforts to overcome the dreaded habit.

It is a habit that goes back to Sir Walter Raleigh. Smoking was declared by King James I to be 'a stinking and loathsome thing', and that was before its health effects were known. Having said that I have not smoked, I admit that my father, in leaving school at the age of 11 to support his family because his father had fallen seriously ill, began work in the 1920s on a tobacco farm at Myrtleford. He derived his first income as a result of working on that farm and growing tobacco. That draws attention to complexities faced by honourable members in considering the bill.

It is not necessarily all one way and a balance must be struck as to where the issue is heading. A couple of honourable members who represent country electorates have not only referred to tobacco as a legal product but have said that tobacco farmers are engaging in a legal activity. The government must bear in mind that the bill has consequences for some primary producers. At some point parliaments must address what they will do for tobacco growers who may in the future have no market. The economic rationalist approach is simply to say that if there is no demand there is no need for supply and you are out. However, given the problems in rural Victoria the government must be mindful of the effects

of social change and its impact on groups in the community.

I reserve my anger for what I call the merchants of death — that is, the manufacturers. If they are correct, the statistics supplied by the National Heart Foundation are offensive. According to figures supplied by the Victorian division of the National Heart Foundation in 1997 in Victoria 7875 deaths were caused by external events rather than natural causes. The events included falls, suicide, drowning, motor vehicle accidents, drug dependence, liver disease and cirrhosis, deaths during childbirth, AIDS, sudden infant death syndrome, breast cancer, infections and parasitic diseases. Of that figure 4500 deaths are attributed to smoking — that is, some 57 per cent of the deaths in Victoria caused by external factors are attributed to smoking. If 57 per cent of those 7875 people had not smoked they would possibly still be alive. Their deaths were entirely avoidable.

It is salutary to end on a statistic as serious as that. I stress the importance of the point referred to by many earlier speakers about deterring young people from smoking. The consequences of beginning to smoke at a young age are reflected in that figure of 4500 deaths. I wish the bill well and trust that government members will accept the significance of the opposition's amendments.

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — In an exceptionally brief contribution to the debate I add my comments on behalf of the constituents of the Ivanhoe electorate. I have also received the figures from the Anti-Cancer Council on the deaths due to smoking in Ivanhoe. As the deputy chairman of the Road Safety Committee, a committee with which I have been involved over the past four years, I have seen statistic after statistic on road safety, particularly roads deaths and their causes, but I have never seen worse statistics than these.

Between 1993 and 1996 there were 248 deaths due to smoking in my electorate. Of every 1000 deaths in the electorate, 143 will be due to smoking. The figures are appalling. I have no course open to me but to support the bill. The Minister for Health has done an outstanding job. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — I thank all honourable members for their contributions to the debate. Members on both sides made good points. All honourable members have acknowledged the harm caused by smoking. It has also been acknowledged that reducing rates of smoking is probably the single most effective way of improving the health of Victorians.

A disturbing fact is that in recent years rates of smoking among young Victorians, particularly young women, have increased rather than decreased. The bill sends a clear message from the government and the Parliament that smoking is dangerous, and the government will do everything it can to reduce the harm it causes.

It must also be emphasised that passive smoking is dangerous. Research increasingly indicates that passive smoking could cause up to 1600 deaths a year. In introducing the bill the government has said that it is part of continuing progress in the anti-tobacco smoking campaign.

Progress started many years ago, but it has not been made in all parts of the world. Things we take for granted, such as smoke-free aeroplanes and workplaces, do not exist right around the world — and that is a great pity. The government stated that its strategy and policy is to impose further limitation by introducing smoke-free restaurants and reducing point-of-sale advertising.

Some community members are concerned that the government has not gone far enough. Some restaurateurs support the principle of smoke-free dining but are concerned that the legislation will not cover hotel bars. They would like the bill to cover those areas as well. The government has made eating areas smoke free, whether they are in restaurants or hotels. It is a significant step forward. Of course, when legislation is introduced in a progressive way there will always be groups caught in the middle; we understand that.

We have consulted extensively with not only peak organisations but also individual restaurateurs. It is not possible to speak to every restaurateur in Victoria, but the consultation process was extensive, and I thank the departmental officials who conducted the consultation. I thank organisations like Quit that have been involved in the consultation, and I acknowledge the role of various peak bodies that took part in the process.

They were in a difficult position because, although they supported the principle of reducing harm, they were not happy with the way the bill might affect their members. I understand the right of peak bodies to say that, and I believe they have acted responsibly. They have a clear role to represent their members, and peak bodies such as the Restaurant and Catering Association of Victoria have represented their members well by raising the serious concerns their members have about the operation of the legislation.

Some people have made suggestions about how the legislation should operate — for example, it has been

suggested that there should be provision for people to smoke outside restaurants. It has also been suggested that if there is a separate room in a restaurant, that should be available for use by smokers. It is intended that people can smoke outside restaurants on the pavement or in areas that are not enclosed. There will be no ban on that.

It is also the intention of the bill to allow smoking in areas where the predominant activity is not food or non-alcoholic drink consumption, provided that the area is separately enclosed from the eating area. A bar area in a separate room or on a separate level of a restaurant would be exempt from the bans if the restaurateur so wished. Smoking will be permitted in eating areas that are not enclosed — for example, in courtyards and on pavements. The bill aims to prohibit smoking in eating areas. It does not purport to prohibit smoking in areas such as bars. The bill will ensure that when people are eating a meal they will not be subject to passive smoke.

It has been suggested that areas within restaurants should be allocated as smoking or non-smoking rooms. The problem is that all the expert evidence indicates that in such areas the smoke moves from the smoking area to the non-smoking area, so it is useless. That is why the legislation has been designed to cover only enclosed areas: an area must be enclosed to provide smoke-free dining. It is a significant step forward.

The shadow minister raised a number of points in supporting the bill, and I am pleased to have the opposition's support. The shadow minister became quite passionate at times in raising concerns about the legislation. I wish that he had shown the same passion when he was in government and had introduced legislation such as this.

The reality is that the Bracks government has introduced the legislation. The shadow minister, as the parliamentary secretary for human services, was in a position to give expression to the passion he has demonstrated today by introducing the legislation, but that did not occur.

The shadow minister raised some points that I believe are a bit misleading, such as concern about penalties for offences established in the bill going to local councils. That merely continues the existing situation. The existing Tobacco Act provides that penalties go to the local council. The Bracks government is merely continuing that practice. The only change is that the bill allows infringement notice money also to go to the council. It would be ridiculous to have money from a court case go to local government, but not money from infringement notices. The state government wants to

work closely with local government in the operation of the bill. I would have thought the opposition would support local government in its efforts to improve public health.

Other issues quite rightly raised by some honourable members are the importance of transition arrangements and informing retailers and restaurateurs about the detail of the bill. The government has anticipated the need for a communication strategy with retailers and others.

I am pleased to announce that the government has allocated \$500 000 for a strategy to communicate with restaurateurs, retailers and others about how the legislation will be implemented. The government is concerned, as is the opposition, to ensure that everyone in the community — small businesses and others — is fully aware of the details of the legislation. It is appropriate that that program not commence until the legislation is passed through both houses of Parliament, but given opposition support the government is able to publicly indicate the direction of the legislation.

The opposition has proposed a principal amendment relating to the effective starting date being moved out to 1 July 2001. The government is happy to accept that amendment. In fact, the government proposed to do the same thing, and I indicated that to the restaurateurs.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr THWAITES — That is a fact. I am telling you the facts. As part of the bipartisan approach we have adopted we are happy to accept the amendment. If the opposition wants to continue in that manner, I am happy to do so in the future. By working together on legislation we can improve it and get a better outcome for the people of Victoria.

I simply indicate that the government is happy to accept the proposed amendment; it was something it was proposing to do in any event. I acknowledge the positive approach taken by many opposition members in the debate.

The honourable member for Malvern raised an issue about confidentiality of information. Proposed section 36T in clause 15 refers to confidentiality of names and the prohibition on releasing them. The inspector's powers have been adapted from the Fair Trading Act and the penalties in the act apply the revenue to local government, as do the amendments.

I thank all honourable members for their support of the legislation and indicate that the government will accept the opposition's proposed amendments.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! As the required statement of intent has been made pursuant to section 85(5)(c) of the Constitution Act and there are less than 45 members present, I ask the Clerk to ring the bells.

Bells rung.

Members having assembled in chamber:

Motion agreed to by absolute majority.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — I move:

1. Clause 2, lines 6 and 7, omit "a day or days to be proclaimed" and insert "1 November 2000".
2. Clause 2, lines 8 to 10, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert —

“() Sections 7(1), 8, 9, 10, 13(1) and (3) and 16(1)(b) come into operation on 1 July 2001.”.

Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — I move:

1. Clause 4, line 15, before "In" insert "(1)".
2. Clause 4, page 5, line 6, omit "appears to be" and insert "is, or appears to be,".
3. Clause 4, page 7, after line 13 insert —

“(2) In section 3 of the Principal Act, in the definition of "tobacco advertisement", at the end of paragraph (b) insert —

“ —

and includes the display of an immediate package of a tobacco product;”.

Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clauses 5 and 6 agreed to.

Clause 7

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — I move:

3. Clause 7, line 31, before "In" insert "(1)".

4. Clause 7, line 31, omit “before section 6” and insert “after the heading”.
5. Clause 7, page 10, after line 7 insert —
“(2) In Part 2 of the Principal Act, before section 6 insert — “.

Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to.

Clause 8

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — I move:

4. Clause 8, after line 32 insert —
“(2) In section 6(3) of the Principal Act —
(a) in paragraph (a)(iii), after “product” insert “; other than a package at a point of sale”;
(b) after paragraph (a) insert —
(ab) a tobacco advertisement that is the display of an immediate package of a tobacco product, other than at a point of sale; or”.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to.

Clause 9

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — I move:

5. Clause 9, page 13, line 33, after “advertise” insert “a product line of”
6. Clause 9, page 14, line 2 omit “cigars” and insert “product line”.
7. Clause 9, page 14, line 8, omit “cigars” and insert “product line”.
8. Clause 9, page 14, line 30, omit “of the cigars” and insert “cigars of the product line”.
9. Clause 9, page 14, line 33, omit “cigars” and insert “product line”.

Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clauses 10 to 12 agreed to.

Clause 13

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — I move:

6. Clause 13, page 18, line 9, before “After” insert “(1)”.
7. Clause 13, page 18, after line 19 insert —
“(2) Before Part 3 of the Principal Act, insert in Part 2 — “.
8. Clause 13, page 18, after line 30 insert —
“(3) After section 15B of the Principal Act insert — “.

Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clauses 14 to 17 agreed to.

Clause 18

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — I move:

10. Clause 18, page 38, line 14, after “particular” insert “, the person”.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clauses 19 and 20 agreed to.

Clause 21

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — I move:

11. Clause 21, after item 3 in the Schedule being substituted by the clause, insert —
“3A. An offence against section 5D(1) 1 penalty unit”.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clause 22 agreed to.

Reported to house with amendments.

Third reading

Motion agreed to by absolute majority.

Read third time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

APPROPRIATION (2000/2001) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 24 May; motion of Mr BRACKS (then Treasurer).

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — As I was saying yesterday, I have the pleasure and honour of representing constituents in the state electorate of Melton, and the fantastic communities making up the seat.

Today I will discuss how my constituents relate to me and the government and how communities can be given the skills to advocate and look after their own affairs. One of the challenges is to continue to develop democracy through civic education and upskilling communities so more can be achieved.

I have concerns about the state of democracy within my region and the way the disenfranchised, the poor and

those without influence rather than the elite can be given a voice in the community.

A number of the elite within my community have a voice, such as articulate business people who have had control of agendas over a long period. I want to give other members of the community a voice. I have been working with some terrific people in my community at a local level, such as Judy Henderson from the Diggers Rest Residents Association, Ian Cowie from the Rockbank Action Group, and others from the Caroline Springs Residents Association and the Melton Shire Council.

Some groups were operating before I was elected; others I have encouraged and gotten off the ground since my election last year. Much more needs to occur. As with any community group, the same people are involved at those levels, whether it is Lions, Rotary, political parties, or school councils. I want to increase the pool of people and their skill levels so that they can take on those responsibilities. Such groups become active when there is something of concern to them. I refer to a recent example involving the Diggers Rest Residents Association. It successfully fought against a proposed caravan park. I congratulate the Melton council and the commissioners on their recent decision involving the caravan park. A public meeting called to discuss the issue was attended by 108 people. There are 600 residents in Diggers Rest so that was a fantastic result.

After public meetings the same few people on the residents associations are left to do the organising, the follow-up and the rest of the necessary work. However, people's lives are affected by constantly being pressured to undertake that work. They get burnt out, as do some honourable members in the work they do.

It is a matter of increasing that pool and upskilling the community, especially some younger members of the community, by giving them the tools they need to perform functions such as public speaking and teaching them how to deal with the butterflies. We have all had them, regardless of where we have been or where we have come from. People need to be taught how to prepare and deliver speeches, how to deal with hecklers and people with opposing views, and how to argue effectively in public. It is important to teach people the skills to run and to control a meeting and not allow it to get out of hand. Skills in taking notes and minutes are important in many organisations. When forming a group it is important to ensure the people involved are legally protected, that they know what the structure should be and how it should operate.

Many people understand companies, shareholdings and trusts, but when it comes to the community more education is needed in how to establish community groups. The manner in which those skills are delivered to people is very important. We need to look at developing professional leadership courses so that people can become leaders within their communities.

Debate interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.03 p.m.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Schools: asbestos

Mr ROWE (Cranbourne) — I refer the Minister for Education to her assurances this week that the 195 portable classrooms checked for asbestos for the second time are safe for teachers and students to occupy, in particular the 18 older classrooms removed from the Port Melbourne storage site and recommissioned, and I ask: if those rooms are safe to occupy, why did the minister's department order an asbestos specialist company to urgently remove all asbestos from one of the classrooms at Langwarrin Park Primary School on Monday in the dead of night?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house is far too noisy. The honourable member for Cranbourne has asked his question, and I ask the house to remain silent for the minister's answer.

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — I thank the honourable member for his question and for his obvious interest in occupational safety in our schools.

On 3 May I informed the house that I would have all the portables that had been relocated from and to school sites over the Christmas period reaudited to ensure that they posed no risk to our children. I am pleased to announce to the house that that audit has been completed and that each of the 192 portables moved during the Christmas period has been declared completely safe to occupy.

The secretary of the department, Mr Peter Allen, has sent the following message to all the schools affected:

1. all relocatable units moved between September 1999 and February 2000 have been reaudited in accordance with your request —

that is, my request —

of 3 May 2000;

2. all audits have been conducted by accredited environmental hygienists;
3. all audited units have been found safe to occupy;

...

In addition, the department will work with each school to ensure the classrooms remain safe environments for students and are managed in accordance with the department's asbestos management plan.

That is what the government discovered. In examining why the portables posed some concern for parents, I asked the department to ensure that its asbestos management procedures had been followed. That had not been the case in the past. We now know that all those portables have been reaudited and declared completely safe. That included portables — —

Mr Rowe — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, in relation to the relevance of the minister's answer, the Langwarrin portable classrooms I referred to were checked and declared safe by the director and the department, yet they still brought in specialists overnight to remove the asbestos from those classrooms.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. I will not permit the honourable member for Cranbourne or any other honourable member to use a point of order to repeat his or her question. The minister was being relevant, and I will continue to hear her.

Ms DELAHUNTY — I am happy to come to the matter of the portables at Langwarrin Park Primary School. That is something of an issue given that the opposition has been running around the state causing unnecessary alarm. After almost seven years of inactivity and inaction by the former government, the Labor government is now ensuring that every principal and teacher in the state is aware of its asbestos management procedures. The former government did nothing about the safety of the Victorian students in those schools. That is the big difference — and the opposition does not like it!

Langwarrin Park Primary School received some of the portable classrooms. As I have said, those portables have been audited by occupational health and safety hygienists and declared safe. However, the honourable member for Cranbourne has been causing unnecessary panic and frightening the parents at that school, which I think is unconscionable.

It is a sad fact that a young student at Langwarrin Park Primary School who is in remission from leukaemia had been in that classroom. Despite the fact that the

portables have been declared safe, the department decided to remove the asbestos from the eaves or porticos outside the classroom because of the unnecessary panic created by the honourable member for Cranbourne, who unfairly — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house will come to order. The honourable member for Doncaster will cease interjecting.

Ms DELAHUNTY — The actions of the opposition on this issue have been unconscionable. The opposition has been running around — —

Mr Perton — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, apart from the shameless way in which the minister is using that child, she is in breach of standing orders. She is required under your guidelines, Mr Speaker, to give a factual and succinct answer. She is debating the question in the worst possible taste while trying to wrap herself in a pretence of morality. It is sick, Mr Speaker!

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house will come to order. The honourable member for Doncaster has raised a point of order arguing that the minister has been debating the question. I am not prepared to uphold that point of order at this time; however, I remind the minister that she has to answer the question.

Ms DELAHUNTY — I inform the house that all principals and parents have been informed of the safety of those portables given the unnecessary alarm that has been created. We all know there is asbestos in old buildings. The Bracks Labor government is doing something about that by trying to replace the old portables. You will notice — —

Dr Napthine interjected.

Ms DELAHUNTY — The opposition claims that those portables were not in use under the former government. That is false.

Ms Asher interjected.

Ms DELAHUNTY — We will prove it. While we are correcting the record, Mr Speaker, the honourable member for Warrandyte has been running around causing alarm throughout school communities, but he has not even bothered to check his facts. At least four of the schools he publicly named as being at risk had not even received a portable classroom.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms DELAHUNTY — They don't like it, Mr Speaker.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house will come to order and allow the minister to conclude her answer. The numerous interruptions have made the answer extraordinarily and unnecessarily lengthy. I ask the opposition front bench, and the honourable member for Warrandyte in particular, to cease interjecting. I ask the minister to conclude her answer.

Ms DELAHUNTY — The parents of Victoria — —

Mr Maclellan — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the minister referred in her answer to a list. Is she willing to make the list available to the house?

The SPEAKER — Order! Was the minister quoting from a document?

Ms DELAHUNTY — No, Mr Speaker, I was not.

Mr Cooper interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Mornington! When a member is quoting from a document the requirement is that he or she make that document available to the house. In this instance the Chair was observing the minister and it appeared to the Chair that she was referring to notes. On being asked whether she was quoting from a document, the minister confirmed the view held by the Chair. There is no point of order.

Mr Richardson (to Ms Delahunty) — Then resign in disgrace!

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms DELAHUNTY — That is the pot calling the kettle black!

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the house to come to order. The house is wasting its time. The honourable member for Forest Hill should cease interjecting.

Ms DELAHUNTY — Clearly, opposition members do not want to hear the answer.

All parents of children being taught in those portables were informed about the safety of the portables at the completion of the audit. All schools were given documentation to explain the safety and management

procedures for the buildings. The government will also conduct a \$4.5 million compliance audit to ensure that every school in Victoria knows about the government's asbestos management procedures and that those procedures are followed.

Furthermore, the government will spend \$28 million replacing those old portables, which is something that lot on the other side never did! I would hope that the unconscionable tactics of the opposition on this matter will now cease.

The SPEAKER — Order! I am of the opinion that the minister is now debating the question. I ask her to conclude her answer forthwith.

Ms DELAHUNTY — I have concluded, Mr Speaker.

Questions interrupted.

ABSENCE OF MINISTER

The SPEAKER — Order! I interrupt to inform the house that I have been advised that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services is absent. He and the Leader of the National Party are attending the funeral of the police officers who were recently killed in Northcote. The Premier will answer for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Questions resumed.

Reconciliation Week

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — I refer the Premier to the need for all Victorians to embrace the reconciliation process, and I ask him to inform the house of the special events that will be held to mark Reconciliation Week.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for Geelong for his question. I can announce today that with the cooperation of Mr Speaker and the opposition an historic sitting of Parliament involving members of Melbourne's Wurundjeri and Boonerwung tribes will be held in this place next Wednesday to mark Reconciliation Week.

On that day parliamentary debate on a bipartisan motion in support of reconciliation will be preceded by a traditional Aboriginal welcome and speeches by members of the Aboriginal community in Victoria.

The sitting will be the first time in Victoria's parliamentary history that indigenous persons have addressed the public gallery from the floor of the house. The speakers will include Wemba Wemba elder Kevin Coombs, Yorta Yorta nation representative Mr Bryan Andy, Victorian ATSIC commissioner Ms Marion Hansen and Victorian Reconciliation Council member Ms Marjorie Thorpe.

During Reconciliation Week we must as a government and as a people acknowledge the plight of the stolen generation in Victoria and recount the apology given by both sides of this house for past injuries so we can move forward for healing and reconciliation in the future.

Reconciliation Week will begin on Friday, 26 May, with the Victorian Stolen Generation Rally — Journey of Healing commencing at Treasury Gardens at 10.30 a.m. and proceeding to Parliament House, in which some members of Parliament will be involved.

Corroboree 2000 will commence on Saturday with a formal ceremony at the Sydney Opera House, and a people's walk will take place across Sydney Harbour Bridge on Sunday morning. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Attorney-General and I will attend Corroboree 2000 with other premiers, the Prime Minister and other people from around Australia.

On Tuesday next week the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Attorney-General will host a reception in Queens Hall for people who will be attending the launch of the Aboriginal justice agreement on Wednesday afternoon. All members of Parliament are invited to attend that reception. On Wednesday I will launch the Aboriginal justice agreement. That agreement on how to deal with justice issues in the future is a partnership agreement developed jointly between the Aboriginal community in Victoria and the government.

On Thursday the Peter Clarke teaching for reconciliation awards will be presented in Queens Hall by the Minister for Education. The awards recognise both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators in promoting reconciliation through teaching.

On Friday the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs will announce the successful applicants for grants from the Koori Community Fund. The fund was established under a government initiative to support Aboriginal communities across Victoria. Some \$1.75 million of funding will be allocated to the program over the next three years.

All members of Parliament are looking forward to the historic sitting in this place as part of Reconciliation Week and the events held in Sydney for Corroboree 2000. I implore all members of Parliament to get behind those important celebrations.

Schools: asbestos

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — I refer the Minister for Education to the lack of any information or guidelines being provided by her or her department about the presence of asbestos in affected schools over the past four months since she attempted to reduce class sizes. Will the minister confirm that the schools that have received the 195 asbestos-affected portables are only now being assisted by the minister's department to develop individual risk control and containment strategies to lower the risk in those asbestos-ridden classrooms? I call on her to publicly release the details.

Mr Thwaites — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, about three questions were asked by the honourable member for Warrandyte. Only one question is allowed to be asked during question time.

The SPEAKER — Order! As the Chair understood the question asked by the honourable member for Warrandyte it related to the release of information. Therefore, the question was in order.

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — As the honourable member would well know, as he was an education minister in the previous government, in June 1999 the then government was presented with an asbestos management strategy.

A government member interjected.

Ms DELAHUNTY — Good question! What did they do with it? Who was in government in June 1999? That lot over there! You were presented with an asbestos management strategy and you did nothing. Zip! That is what you call an own goal, Phil.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Mornington! The minister, answering the question through the Chair and not debating across the table.

Ms DELAHUNTY — The honourable member knows full well what the asbestos management strategy was and that it was never implemented by his government. You are unconscionably — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Glen Waverley!

Ms DELAHUNTY — The Bracks Labor government is taking seriously the safety of students in our schools.

Opposition members interjecting.

Ms DELAHUNTY — The government has already sent details of the asbestos management strategy to all schools, details that should have been sent — —

Dr Napthine interjected.

Ms DELAHUNTY — Settle down, Denis. The details should have been sent — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house will come to order. I ask the Leader of the Opposition to cease interjecting and I ask the minister to address members in the chamber by their correct titles, not by their first names.

Ms DELAHUNTY — The asbestos management strategy and the procedures to be put in place have been sent to all schools, as they should have been in June last year when the last government turned its back on the safety of our children.

Opposition members interjecting.

Ms DELAHUNTY — I am happy to give the honourable member for Warrandyte a copy of the strategy document that he would have seen when he was an education minister in the last government.

Principals and parents are outraged at the way the opposition has been trying to whip up fear about this issue. The principals of Bendigo schools have been quoted in their local paper as saying that the opposition's claims, particularly those of the honourable member for Warrandyte, about asbestos in our schools are 'outrageous, mischievous and scurrilous'.

Dr Dean — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, either the minister is not understanding you or she is deliberately ignoring your comments from the chair. She is again debating the question.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The Chair distinctly heard the minister refer to a case in Bendigo, which I deem to be providing information to the house relevant to the question

referring to the location of 195 portable classrooms throughout the state.

Influenza: vaccination program

Mr LONEY (Geelong North) — I refer the Minister for Health to reports that Victoria faces a potential flu epidemic this winter and ask him to inform the house of any action the government is taking to avert that threat.

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — Honourable members will be aware of the extremely serious strain of influenza that affected Europe and the United Kingdom during their winter this year. The government is extremely concerned about the potential effect of influenza in Victoria this winter.

Opposition members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Evelyn!

Mr THWAITES — I am pleased to announce that this year the government has implemented a very comprehensive strategy to reduce the effects of influenza on the community as part of its Enjoy Winter Free of Flu strategy. The Department of Human Services has distributed a combined vaccine that includes vaccine against the A/Sydney strain of influenza, the one that has been affecting Europe. I am also pleased to announce that a record number of doses, approximately 570 000, have been distributed through the program.

The program is targeted at two key groups. All citizens over 65 are entitled to free vaccination. They are also entitled — —

Opposition members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Carrum!

Mr THWAITES — Yes, I am pleased to say that I have had one as well.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will speak through the Chair.

Mr THWAITES — The program also provides influenza vaccine for indigenous Victorians aged between 15 and 65, because that group is also at risk.

As a new initiative of the government, the program this year provides \$1 million to vaccinate nurses, physicians and other staff in our hospitals, because we want to reduce as much as possible the effect of the flu on hospital staff. While those people may not necessarily

be ill, they are at risk of contracting flu by being in contact with people who have the disease.

The pneumococcal vaccine that is being distributed this year is anticipated to cover some 42 per cent of the over-65 population. Victoria is the only state that has the program — a positive program to reduce the effect of pneumonia in older people.

Unlike the opposition the government believes that doing everything possible to reduce the effects of influenza is extremely important. I am pleased that this year a record number of vaccines have been distributed. The government is doing everything it can to reduce the effects of this terrible illness.

State Superannuation Fund: board chairman

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Premier to the arrangements being negotiated for the appointment of Mr Bernie Fraser as the administrator of the Victorian State Superannuation Fund. Will the minister confirm that Paul Keating's Canberra-based buddy, Mr Fraser, will now become the highest paid — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The government benches will come to order. The Leader of the Opposition is entitled to ask his question and be heard in silence.

Dr NAPHTHINE — Will the minister confirm — —

Mr Bracks — The Premier or minister?

Dr NAPHTHINE — The Premier. Will the Premier confirm that Paul Keating's Canberra-based buddy, Mr Fraser, will be the highest paid Labor mate on the Victorian government payroll, clocking up \$70 000 a year for a two-day working week?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — If I can just clear up a few matters, Mr Speaker, the appointment is not as an administrator because there is no such position in the state government for the superannuation office. It is as chairman of the board, which was a position that came up in the normal course of events, and was the appointment the government made for Bernie Fraser.

Mr Bernie Fraser is an ex-secretary of Treasury in Canberra, an ex-head of the Reserve Bank and has eminent qualifications in the superannuation industry privately — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Mordialloc!

Mr BRACKS — I do not think there are many people, apart from a couple on the other side of the house, who would think that was not a good appointment. It is a fantastic appointment and one that will give great benefit back to — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — There is some excitement about the fee paid for the position. The fee paid is the same as the fee that was paid by the previous government for the position. There is no difference in this situation. It is a ridiculous question; nevertheless I will treat it seriously. Mr Bernie Fraser has been appointed. It is a great appointment. He has great credentials and he will do a fantastic job!

Roads: speed limits

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — I refer the Minister for Transport to the government's commitment to make Victoria a safer place. Will the minister inform the house of the government's latest action to reduce the number of motor vehicle accidents in local streets?

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — In its election platform the Australian Labor Party promised to investigate a range of safety measures to help reduce Victoria's road toll and to improve the amenity of residential areas. I am pleased to announce today that the Bracks government has delivered on that commitment by indicating that it will reduce the default speed limit on residential roads of 60 kilometres per hour to 50 kilometres per hour.

The change will follow a regulatory impact statement, which in effect will be a period of formal public consultation. Following that period the speed limit on local residential streets across Victoria will be reduced to 50 kilometres per hour.

This decision has already been supported strongly throughout the community. It is supported by Vicroads, the Transport Accident Commission, the Victoria Police, the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria and other motorists groups, road safety experts, the State Emergency Service and individual residents. It is warmly welcomed and the government expects that following the regulatory impact statement the change will be seen as a great improvement to both road safety and residential amenity. It will make a significant contribution.

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr BATCHELOR — The honourable member for Doncaster suggests that we should do it on freeways. We will not be doing that — —

Mr Perton — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, honourable members are required to tell the truth. While I can take a joke as well as the best, the reality is that the interjection the minister picked up was, 'It would be a nice thing if the residents of Doncaster could get up to 60 kilometres on the Eastern Freeway'. It is about time the minister dealt with it.

The SPEAKER — Order! I shall hear the honourable member for Doncaster no longer. There is no point of order. He should have learned that interjections are disorderly and can be used by the person who has the call in the way that the minister was using it on that occasion. I ask the honourable member for Doncaster to cease interjecting.

Mr BATCHELOR — I will try to listen more carefully next time! In Victoria last year there were 2000 crashes on local residential streets that resulted in death or injury. That statistic is terrifying. The government seeks to reduce the road toll on local residential streets caused by excessive speed.

Results in jurisdictions where the default speed limit has been reduced or the 60-kilometre-an-hour limit applies clearly demonstrate that accidents can be reduced. A trial undertaken in New South Wales on a precinct basis has established that a 16 per cent reduction in crashes occurred. In overseas jurisdictions the success has been as high as a 25 per cent reduction.

The reductions will apply only to local residential streets in built-up areas. A 60-kilometre-an-hour speed limit will continue to apply on collector roads and existing speed limits will be retained on all arterial roads, main roads, highways and freeways.

As I have indicated, there is strong community support for the initiative. Research carried out by the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria reveals that around 65 per cent of Victorians are in favour of a speed reduction. The level of support in country Victoria is just as high as it is in the metropolitan area.

The decision follows the support of an all-parliamentary committee of which the honourable member for Ivanhoe is a member. It indicates the support — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BATCHELOR — The honourable member for Forest Hill was the chairman. The decision received

bipartisan support, and it is disappointing that the current spokesperson for the opposition is not as enthusiastic about this matter as the rest of the community.

The government is committed to bringing down the road toll. A target of a 20 per cent reduction has been set over five years. Together with the community I am sure we will go a long way towards meeting that commitment.

Premier: office review

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Premier to his evidence before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that Mr Tom Hogg, brother of Labor Party stalwart Bob Hogg, is being paid \$30 000 to conduct a review of the Premier's private office. Is it government policy to hire consultants to advise ministers and the Premier on how to run their offices because of their own inadequacies, or is it a pay-off to another Labor mate?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — The Leader of the Opposition is right: the issue relates to a question asked at a meeting of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee a week or so ago. It was the first time in seven years that a Premier attended a meeting to undergo scrutiny. The exercise was useful and I enjoyed the experience immensely.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRACKS — There is surprise on that side that I am coming back at them again because of their past behaviour. The question was answered in detail at the committee hearing, but for the information of the Leader of the Opposition I will repeat the details. Both myself as Premier and Mr Bill Scales of the Department of Premier and Cabinet answered the question. As Premier, I indicated that after six months I wanted a review of the private office of the Premier, its relationship to other ministerial offices and its relationship to the department to ensure the smooth operation of that office.

The consultancy is a limited consultancy of \$30 000 and is being carried out by Mr Tom Hogg, a former head of the Victorian sport and recreation department under both governments. He was also a senior member of the state development department under the former government.

I have not seen the transcript, but Mr Scales's answer is on record. He indicated he thought the appointment was sensible and good, the correct appointment and one

which he had the authority to endorse and support. He also said he had initiated the appointment.

I understand the theme, and I understand the question from the Leader of the Opposition. I am on record as saying I have no trouble at all with the former Premier, Mr Kennett, having the job of heading up the depression institute. The government supports that appointment. I understand the defensiveness of the opposition, but it is appropriate for former premiers to be appointed to positions of authority. I have no problem with Mr Kennett's appointment.

Roads: cattle underpasses

Ms DUNCAN (Gisborne) — I refer the Minister for State and Regional Development to the government's commitment to deliver a fairer share to regional and rural communities. Will the minister inform the house of the progress of plans to assist dairy farmers with cattle underpasses?

Mr Perton interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster will cease interjecting. I will not warn him again.

Mr BRUMBY (Minister for State and Regional Development) — One of the disappointments I have had in this place is that we no longer get questions about country Victoria from National Party members. We just don't get them!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — I can't hear anything! I thank the honourable member for raising this important issue about regional Victoria.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — A third of them are carrying the Olympic torch — that is two out of six! It is a serious issue. There are no questions coming from National Party members, and on reading the *Bulletin* this week it is not surprising to note that the National Party is polling at 2.7 per cent.

Mr Rowe — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to the fact that the minister has been speaking for some minutes. He is debating the question. He has not in any way addressed dairy farmers or cattle passes under roads. He is referring to newspaper articles and the National Party, which have nothing to do with the question.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order, but I ask the minister not to debate the question and to answer it.

Mr BRUMBY — I was making the point that the National Party is polling at a rate lower than the rate of inflation.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Will the house come to order to enable the Chair to hear whether the minister is debating the question or not. The minister, answering the question.

Mr BRUMBY — Of course, inflation is going up!

In its first budget the government committed \$170 million to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. As part of that it made a commitment to provide \$4 million to assist dairy farmers in Victoria with the cost of constructing cattle underpasses. It is a big issue in Gippsland and western Victoria and also in parts of the flatter country up north.

The Minister for Agriculture knows — and he has been working closely with me on this issue — that bigger farms need underpasses to get cattle off roads to improve the efficiency of farms and safety for motorists. The government's \$4 million allocation is \$4 million more than the former government provided in seven years. More money is being provided in one program for dairy farmers than the former government provided in seven years. The government is proud of that program.

The government has had discussions with the Victorian Farmers Federation with a view to the VFF taking a major role in the implementation of the commitment. I am pleased to inform the house that we have reached in-principle agreement on the implementation of the scheme. The VFF will apply to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund to implement the cattle underpass program. The VFF will administer the funds, which will be oversighted by the Department of State and Regional Development. Over the next four years hundreds of grants up to a maximum of \$20 000, which will be approved by the VFF, will be available.

It is an excellent program and an excellent investment in regional Victoria. I commend the role the VFF has played in working with the government to develop and implement the scheme. Dairy farmers, the Victorian Farmers Federation and the regional community generally are 100 per cent behind this initiative. I would like to know whether the National Party supports the initiative and whether the Liberal Party supports the

initiative, and whether, with the Deputy Leader of the National Party here today, they are going to follow his dictum and split from the Liberal Party without delay. As he said, there is no difference between the two.

Rail: regional links

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Premier to Labor's election promise to deliver feasibility studies into high-speed rail links to Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong and Traralgon within the first 100 days in office. Given that they are now 118 days late, when will the government release those feasibility studies to the public?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — The minister is examining the feasibility studies at the moment, the first three of which relate to Ballarat, Traralgon and Bendigo, and they will be available for release very soon. The commitment, which has been misread by the Leader of the Opposition either intentionally or unintentionally, was that the government would commence the feasibility studies within its first 100 days.

An honourable member interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the honourable member for Monbulk to cease interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — We have commenced the studies and are close to releasing details. The links represent a significant investment in country and regional communities and will bring people, goods and commerce in regional centres closer to Melbourne. Looking at the labour market, they will mean Melbourne and the regions working together, and they will be an exciting way of growing populations, creating jobs and making sure regional and rural communities are vibrant again.

The initiative is in stark contrast to the past seven years of neglect. This proposal was before the last government for some years in all these regional centres, but it chose not to pursue it. The Bracks government has pursued it because it has a priority to grow the whole state, not just part of it. With the Minister for Transport I will be proud to release details of the studies. They are the start of rebuilding communities in country Victoria after seven years of neglect.

Docklands: investment

Mr LEIGHTON (Preston) — I refer the Minister for Major Projects and Tourism to allegations and reports that the Docklands development has stalled.

Will the minister inform the house of the latest news about the progress of this important project?

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Major Projects and Tourism) — Even before I have started to speak the Leader of the Opposition is carping and whining and trying to undermine the whole project. It is important to understand that Docklands is a vital long-term project for Victoria. It will double the size of Melbourne's central business district and is five times larger than Darling Harbour in Sydney. It is a long-term project the government does not want to talk down or talk up. It wants to support the long-term development and sustainability of the project.

It is important to understand that when the Bracks government came to office there was a great deal of concern about the project, and things have been said since, in particular by the Leader of the Opposition.

When the Labor Party came to government the preferred bidders for Victoria Harbour and the Batmans Hill precinct had withdrawn their bids. The Docklands Authority also informed the government about roads under construction that would have to be closed — except during major events — because of a long-term agreement to which the previous government had committed all future governments as part of City Link. The previous government left many underfunded projects at Docklands. The Labor government had to find \$7.5 million to fully fund the north-south road and another \$6 million to fund the gasworks site. However, the government did not make a song and dance about the problems; it fixed them up.

This government wants to get on with the job and let Australians and investors know that Docklands is a strategically important site for Victoria. It is my pleasure to announce today that the Docklands Authority has released details of the five consortiums that have been short-listed to build the Victoria Harbour precinct. The bids must be in by the end of July.

It is interesting to note that the previous government required tenderers to bid for the whole site. The Labor government listened to what the development industry was saying and decided companies should be allowed to bid for either the full site or parts of it. As a result, the government has had the largest ever number of expressions of interest for both Victoria Harbour and the Batmans Hill precinct. Twenty-two major companies from Victoria, Australia and overseas have expressed interest in Victoria Harbour, and there is now a short list of five.

The Docklands is a 15-year project that will include a variety of the new civic life of the future — a mix of residential, retail and open spaces. On ABC radio Melbourne 774 this morning Andrew Buxton of MAB praised the government and the Docklands project. The development industry has a huge interest in Docklands. The government is going through the short lists for the Batmans Hill precinct, Comtechport and the north-east corner of the Docklands stadium to determine the preferred bidders. The Labor government is quietly getting on with the job, working with the industry and providing good rules and some certainty about the site.

MAB has announced a 22-storey residential building, and I am pleased to report that construction will commence next week. Despite what the opposition says, things are happening at Docklands. It is the place to invest. I remind the house of the Leader of the Opposition's comment not long ago that Mirvac had withdrawn from Docklands, but it has announced that construction will soon start on Yarra Edge at Docklands.

Mr Perton — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, your guidelines clearly indicate that a minister's answer must be succinct. The minister is breaching those guidelines and is clearly debating the question. The question relates to developments at Docklands; it does not relate to the comments of any other person.

The SPEAKER — Order! I uphold the earlier part of the point of order about the requirement for a minister's answer to be succinct. The minister has been speaking for just on 6 minutes, and I ask him to conclude his answer.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — There is so much happening. The government will not talk it up because it wants to work with the industry; it wants the industry to know that there is certainty. Docklands is a visionary project for Victoria. The Labor government is getting on with the job. Docklands is the place to invest, and the government is pleased with today's announcements by the Docklands Authority.

APPROPRIATION (2000/2001) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — Before the debate was interrupted I was talking about community development in the electorate of Melton, which I have the great honour of representing.

Dr Napthine — It's only because Bill Shorten pulled out!

Mr NARDELLA — That is true, but otherwise I would have remained in Melbourne North Province, and it would not have mattered.

I was talking about the number of skills that need to be developed. People need to be taught the necessary skills to run meetings and take notes and minutes and set up groups. I also referred to the need to incorporate groups and ensure they have a mission and a purpose so they can achieve what they set out to do. I referred also to local people undertaking professional leadership or media courses to train them in how to communicate with journalists and deal with the negative aspects of local journalism — when, for example, local journalists simply want to make names for themselves and create sensational stories.

Some journalists think they are resurrecting the *Age* Insight team at the local level and have to run everything in a negative way. Rather than doing themselves and the community a service, they are doing a disservice. The media have to be dealt with and understood — not controlled, but allowed to put their case forward. Local people require negotiation skills to enable them to advocate on behalf of their communities and use community structures to facilitate the achievement of their aims. They need to develop skills to implement ideas, and I am talking about the implementation of ideas.

During an address-in-reply debate in the upper house the Honourable Bruce Atkinson talked about the opportunities for developing ideas within the Parliament and the importance of the community developing ideas and stating its needs. I thank him for those words many years ago.

Another important issue is how to upskill young people so they can start advocating their needs. They need the skills to run community consultations, to have community debates about drugs, youth suicide, education and training, and matters such as depression and poverty and the environment, which are critical to our survival and that of plants and animals around the world. They need to know how to run workshops and seminars. Young people require the tools to enable them to create a vision for their society — not our society. We are here only as custodians and need to put in place the tools to enable young people to take over and carry forth the work.

I am serious about trying to develop the skills of young people in my electorate. A number of important people

are emerging in the community: Helena Medjumurac, from the Melton environment group; Stacey Malloy, from Rockbank, who is working with me in developing a BMX track for the community; other young people in the Diggers Rest residents association; and all those who put in submissions to the higher education review. A group of young people went to Gisborne Secondary College and gave the perspective of Melton's young people on the changes to higher education. These are the sorts of actions and attitudes that have to be encouraged so the skills developed can be used in the wider community.

Mentoring programs should also be looked at. In my case, Pat Cook was a person I looked up to in the parliamentary community. We went to all the demos together, including the Newport power station demo and the Omega demos, and we attended creative writing classes — not that I learnt a lot about creative writing. It was important to have someone to look up to and to ask questions of without being put down, someone who has had experience of life and can teach and show the way forward.

It is important for young people to have a scheme or program to help them develop in a community like Melton. Business has mentor programs for its people, and young people need similar programs so they can achieve the best in their lifetimes for their families and their communities. In my community programs are being offered in a number of ways: the Melton education project is one such way that incorporates a number of groups, and I support it.

I want to talk about developing a vision within the Melton electorate's communities. For your information, Madam Acting Speaker, my seat is made up of the communities of Caroline Springs, Burnside, Hillside, Banchory Grove, the Toolern Vale township, Diggers Rest township, Rockbank township, Melton, Melton West, Melton South, Sydenham, Delahey, Deer Park and Albanvale.

Dr Napthine — Do you want to name the constituents too?

Mr NARDELLA — No, that comes later. Many of the communities are isolated. Both Melton and Melton South are geographically isolated communities, as are communities within the electorate of Tullamarine. We need to develop a vision for those communities and consider a way of putting together a strategy, probably through a community audit, where the residents are involved in discussions about transport and education, including kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and tertiary education, especially for isolated

townships. Other areas to examine include planning, health, aged care, crime, police strength, conservation and environment, and community services. Melton and its residents will be worse off if that is not done. In developing that vision in the short, medium and long term, we will discover the aspirations of residents. We can then put in place the building blocks required to strengthen the communities.

I want to ensure that the communities I represent are able to travel through the 21st century full of confidence and with the ability to work together so that they are not disadvantaged, regardless of who is in government in Victoria, whether it be Labor, Liberal or the Nationals, and regardless of what happens at the federal level. I do not want those communities left behind.

At the moment we have a top-down government at the local level. I am sure there will be debate about that in the future. One of my greatest concerns about local government is the role of commissioners — and there are still commissioners in Melton. I want my constituents to have a say. At the moment they do not have that opportunity because the commissioners are making decisions for them. Most of the time they are right, although sometimes they get it wrong. But that is not the point. Democracy means local people make those decisions. Democracy is about representative government. It is not about Melton being a business. It has to be about Melton as a community comprising families who live and work in the area, not shareholders or clients. There will be further debates on that issue. I want my constituents to be able to determine their livelihood in a way that best suits them and their families in the future. I commend the budget to the house.

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — History will judge this to be a budget of lost opportunity. It is based on short-term thinking and not on long-term strategic planning approach. The budget highlights the fact that the government has no vision, no agenda for the future and no long-term blueprint for the growth and development of Victoria.

The government has failed to learn the lessons of the 1980s. One would have thought a Labor government coming back into power in Victoria would have learnt the lessons from the 1980s, but the Bracks government has failed to learn those valuable lessons. It has failed to understand that to provide for long-term sustainable growth one needs a strong and growing economy to generate the wherewithal to fund schools and hospitals and social development and law and order programs. In the short time that it has been in office the Labor

government has demonstrated that it has not learnt those lessons from the 1980s.

The budget's fundamental flaw is its failure to provide any tax cuts or incentive for business in the state. It has failed to provide the incentive for business to continue to grow and develop the economy, which is important for the future of Victoria. An article in the *Herald Sun* of 13 May written by Dr Ed Shann, a director of Access Economics and well known to the Labor government, states:

The last five coalition budgets increased current spending by \$900 million in total and cut revenue by \$665 million.

The coalition was already boosting spending, but was also cutting taxes.

Not surprisingly for a Labor government, this budget only raised spending.

Even the New South Wales Labor government understands that when you are increasing expenditure you have to generate wealth from somewhere to sustain that spending. In its budget this week the New South Wales government provided cuts in both payroll tax and stamp duty, yet the Victorian Labor government delivered no tax cuts — not \$1 of tax cuts to Victorians or Victorian businesses. There is not \$1 of tax benefits or tax cuts being delivered to the Victorian economy in this year's budget.

The promised tax cuts the government talks about for the future are fundamentally Clayton's tax cuts. I say that for two reasons. The government has promised tax cuts of \$100 million in next year's budget, so the earliest anybody will see any benefits, if they come about, is 1 July 2001. What does Ed Shann say about that? In the same article he states:

The government did promise business tax cuts of \$100 million in 2001–02, rising to \$200 million in later years.

The promise is conditional on continued surpluses, and those surpluses will be hard to deliver.

Ed Shann, the adviser on economic issues to Labor when in opposition, says the tax cuts that are promised for the future will be difficult for the government to deliver. It has promised them only on the basis of continued surpluses, and there is serious doubt whether it will be able to deliver those continued surpluses.

The second reason they are Clayton's tax cuts can be seen when one examines the figures on page 417 of budget paper no. 3, which compares the budget income from payroll tax, land tax and stamp duty in 1999–2000 — this financial year — with the budgeted expectations for next financial year. What does one

find? On a budget-to-budget comparison, payroll tax revenue will increase by \$238 million; land tax, \$102 million; and stamp duty, \$191 million. The Bracks Labor government anticipates it will collect an extra \$531 million on a budget-to-budget comparison through this process. It then says it will give possibly \$100 million of that back. That is duping Victorians.

The government is saying it will collect from one year to the next an extra \$531 million in tax — and if we are lucky next year it will probably collect another \$500 million of tax, so it could be collecting an extra \$1 billion in revenue from payroll tax, land tax and stamp duty. The government then says it will give \$100 million back, and it calls that a tax cut. It is a Clayton's tax cut. Clearly the Labor government is collecting more in revenue from those businesses and is not providing genuine tax cuts and genuine incentive to business to grow.

What does the budget say about what will happen to the Victorian economy under a Labor government? The following figures and information come directly out of budget paper no. 2. It shows that the growth of our economy will slow down. Our economy grew by 6.2 per cent in 1998–99 compared with the national average of 4.6 per cent — it was growing at a faster rate than the national economy.

The Labor budget papers predict that in 2000–01 the Victorian economy will grow at 3.5 per cent, and the year after that it will grow at 3.23 per cent. The government is telling us that under a Labor government Victoria is guaranteed to have a slower growing economy and that the growth rate will move from above the national average to below the national average.

At page 30 budget paper no. 2 shows there will be a downturn in housing construction; at page 31 it states there will be a downturn in non-residential construction; at page 29 it shows that Victoria will, once again, start losing population — people will move interstate, which was a characteristic of the Labor years of the 1980s; and at page 28 it states that there will be a decline in employment growth.

The Labor Party, in its own budget papers, is predicting a significant downturn in the Victorian economy under its stewardship. Of real concern is that the government does not seem to be worried about that and does not seem to be planning to do anything about it — instead it seems to be saying that it is inevitable. The people of Victoria probably understand that it is inevitable that when you get a Labor government you get a slowing down of the economy.

Ms Delahunty interjected.

Dr NAPHTHINE — The Minister for Education interjects. She obviously has not read the budget papers. She should read budget paper no. 2, which was presented by her Premier and then Treasurer, which clearly states that the economy will slow down and that the other things listed there will befall Victoria.

One of the most frightening things the budget papers show is reported succinctly in an analysis by Tony Harris in the *Australian Financial Review* of 3 May, in which he says:

... after the fiscal legacy of the Kennett government has been exhausted, net budget sector debt will actually grow from \$2.8 billion at the end of 2000–01 to \$3.1 billion in 2003–04.

The budget papers are showing that in the out years under a Labor government Victoria will actually have an increase in net budget sector debt. Doesn't that hark back to the 1980s of increasing debt under a Labor government! The article states also:

The \$628 million cash surplus left in 2000–01 becomes a \$135 million cash deficit by 2003–04.

The budget papers clearly predict that under a Labor government's strategy Victoria is guaranteed to get an increase in debt and a cash deficit — Victoria is going back into debt on the Bankcard. That is what the Labor Party is predicting in its first budget after being re-elected to government following its having been thrown out in disgrace due to economic mismanagement during the 1980s.

It is most disappointing to get that summation from the government's budget papers, especially when one considers what the government inherited. It inherited a strong economy, a budget in surplus and strong growth. It inherited a budget surplus of \$1.7 billion in 1998–99, and an expected surplus of \$1.3 billion in 1999–2000.

The Bracks government inherited over \$3 billion in budget surpluses from the previous two financial years. It also inherited positive employment growth and real investor confidence. However, the budget failed to capitalise on an economy that is growing well and on a state that is on the move.

Alan Mitchell, the economic editor of the *Australian Financial Review* said exactly that in an article on 3 May:

... when it looks realistically at where the budget is pointing, it will see that the Bracks government, unfortunately, is more likely to spend the Kennett fiscal legacy than build on it.

That is a classic quote. The reputable economic editor of the *Australian Financial Review* believes the Bracks Labor government will spend the Kennett government's fiscal legacy rather than building on it by taking advantage of the strong position in which the state was left.

Dr Ed Shann, the man who advised the Labor Party when it was in opposition, shares those sentiments. He has expressed concern about the lack of confidence in the state caused by investors losing faith in the Bracks Labor government. I will quote from an article in the *Herald Sun* of 13 May, in which he says:

The budget papers argue that Victorian business investment will rise in 2000–01, using ABS expectations survey data.

That seems unlikely.

Polls show Victorian business confidence has collapsed.

Access surveys show few projects in planning. The government needs to restore business confidence quickly, or private investment will fall next year.

Using some of the revenue surge to cut business taxes now would have been money well spent.

Ed Shann says that any money used to cut business taxes now would be money well spent because it would boost business confidence, encourage investment and stimulate the further growth of our economy.

I again refer to Alan Mitchell, who said in the same *Australian Financial Review* article:

... Victoria faces an uphill battle to continue to attract business investment from New South Wales and resource-rich Queensland and Western Australia.

Victoria has the task in front of it. The government was given every opportunity to tackle that task with vigour and confidence, given the substantial bank balance and strongly growing economy it inherited. The budget gives every indication that the government is prepared to squander that inheritance, and as a result it will not build the economy.

Other leading commentators and peak bodies are registering their concern about the loss of investor confidence and the drop in business confidence. Honourable members opposite fail to understand the importance of business confidence. They have not learnt from the 1980s that a decline in business confidence leads to a significant reduction in business investment, which in turn leads to a slowing of the economy and a decline in employment opportunities. That means less money comes into the state coffers, which reduces the government's ability to fund schools, hospitals, community services, the police, transport and

the other services the state needs. Even today, the *Australian Financial Review* in an article entitled —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! I have been patient, but the level of audible conversation is far too high.

Dr NAPHTHINE — The title of the article, which I suggest honourable members read, is ‘The blurred vision thing of Steve Bracks’. It quotes Brian Welch, Victorian chief of the Master Builders Association, as saying:

The government is concerned about investor confidence but they have acted the same way as other investors and taken their cheques elsewhere. There will be job losses in the building sector more quickly than we have anticipated. I fear our prediction of a savage downturn will now come to pass.

The article continues:

But the worst slight on the government is Mr Welch’s assertion it lacks vision — a thought shared by several industry players.

...

His sentiments were echoed by the general manager for the industrial developer Salter Property Group, Mr Brett Heath, who said the previous government was more proactive in attracting external industry to the city.

...

Mr Phil Ruthven, chairman of market analyst IBIS.com ... said it was the government’s role to engender new business in Victoria.

In particular, he is reported as saying that it is important for the government:

... to attract modern industries to Melbourne, particularly in the IT and telecommunications areas.

It is important to attract them not just to Melbourne but to Ballarat, Bendigo, western Victoria, Gippsland and the north-east of the state as well. If the government had a dedicated minister for information technology and multimedia, it might be able to achieve that.

The same *Australian Financial Review* article quotes someone who is known to some members of this place. I refer to the property council’s executive director, Mr Jock Rankin, who is quoted as saying that he was not prepared to give anything other than a vanilla response to the new Bracks government. When he gets home tonight he will probably get a vanilla slice!

I refer to an article in the *Herald Sun* of 22 May, which reports the results of a Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry survey:

According to the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s March quarter survey of business trends, business confidence has continued to tumble since the election of the Bracks government.

...

A hefty 56 per cent of surveyed businesses forecast the Victorian economy would be weaker in 12 months’ time.

Members of the opposition are not the only ones talking about a loss of confidence; business leaders, investment community leaders and VECCI representatives are saying the same thing.

The warning bells need to be heeded and heeded now by Premier Bracks, his new Treasurer and his new Minister for Finance. The budget has missed a significant opportunity to build on the enormously successful financial and economic management of the previous government.

The government needs to take stock. It cannot simply ride on the coat-tails of the coalition government’s good management. There is an urgent need for the government to deliver leadership and vision. The budget fails that vital test because it does not provide leadership and vision. It is a short-term, populist budget rather than a budget for the long-term good of Victoria.

The government has failed to use the surpluses and the strong economy it inherited for the good of Victorians this year, next year and the many years after that. It has failed on all those grounds, and as a result Victoria is now suffering from a lack of business confidence.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling the next speaker, I remind the house of the longstanding tradition in this place that inaugural speeches are heard in silence and without interruption.

Ms ALLEN (Benalla) — It is with immense pride and a deep sense of responsibility and humility that I rise as the first Labor member for the seat of Benalla to address the Victorian Parliament. As honourable members will be aware, no Labor member has ever addressed this house as the representative of the people in the north-east of the state who live in places such as Nagambie, Myrtleford, Euroa, Bright, Violet Town, Mansfield, Swanpool, where I now live, and Alexandra, where I was born and raised and where my parents live to this day.

None of those towns has ever been represented by a Labor member of Parliament. Of course, none of the towns I have just mentioned has ever been represented by a woman. So, it is with a great sense of history and responsibility that I take my place in this house as the

first Labor member for and also the first female representative of the seat of Benalla.

It was nearly 50 years ago that my grandfather, Cyril Boote, established the first-ever branch of the Labor Party in Alexandra. There were not many branch members in those days, and if the truth be known we still do not have a lot of members in Alexandra. I am hoping that the result of 13 May will change that, but back then members of the Labor Party in Alexandra were few and far between.

Some of the early meetings of the Alexandra branch were held in the kitchen of my parents' home, and I would sit on the stool in the kitchen and listen to my father talk politics. It was at that early age that I first learnt about the Labor Party and came to understand what the Labor Party represented.

I did not understand a lot of what was said, but what I came to believe and what I hold dear to this day is that Labor stands for a fair go, for a helping hand for people who really need it, for decency and for equality of opportunity. As members of Parliament, that is something I believe we should all aspire to — no matter whether we be Labor, Liberal, National or Independent.

We have all been elected in the expectation that we will represent the interests of those who gave us our places in here. But it is more than that. We are not here just to be their representatives and to listen to their concerns. We must be here to vigorously pursue outcomes that will lead to a better quality of life for all Victorians, and in my case better services and a renewed sense of confidence for the people of the north-east.

That is something that some members over the years have forgotten, and that is why some are no longer here. It is why I am here today as the first Labor member in the history of the north-east of Victoria. I realise it must have been very hard for a lot of people in the north-east to vote for a Labor candidate, and I will work very hard to repay that faith.

But after 14 months working in the electorate I do understand what the people want — they want a strong voice to represent their interests, a strong voice to put their issues forward for a decent hearing, and they want a full-time member of Parliament. They do not want special favours or special deals. They want a voice. They want someone to talk to about their bridges, their roads, and to lobby on behalf of their bush nursing hospitals, for a new ambulance station, improved school facilities or on environmental issues.

I was touched by the number of people who approached me over the past 14 months to tell me they were voting

Labor for the first time in their lives. And they voted for a change for the first time in their lives because they felt that the party they had supported all their lives had stopped listening to them and no longer cared. They felt that a whole range of issues, big and small, had been ignored or forgotten.

So, the expectation and the responsibility is perhaps even greater than would normally be the case. I thank the people in north-eastern Victoria who voted for me — who voted for Labor. I thank them for putting their trust in me to be their representative, and I will work tirelessly to repay that trust.

It will be a tough challenge. When people talk about the electorate of Benalla a lot of them do not realise just how big or how diverse the electorate is. I have no doubt that my electorate takes in some of the most beautiful places in not just Victoria but anywhere in Australia — Bright and Myrtleford in the north-east, Marysville in the south, Mansfield, Alexandra and Eildon, the lakes district of Nagambie in the north-west of the electorate, the history of Euroa, Glenrowan and Violet Town, the thriving economic centre of the town of Benalla itself.

The Benalla electorate also boasts diverse industry, from the booming tourism industry to forestry, tobacco and, of course, the famous wineries. All need constant and positive support.

But despite the diversity of the landscape, the people and the industry, a constant message was repeated to me again and again. The people felt that the country and country people had been neglected and they were looking for something better.

When I think back to when I was preselected for the seat of Benalla in March last year — Labor faced a 15 per cent margin in a seat which had the Deputy Premier as the local member. But we ran an issues-based campaign for more than a year. We focused on the basic issues that affected the lives of people in my electorate — health education, roads, bridges and the environment.

And I think the amazing result of 13 May reflected the growing feeling in regional and rural Victoria that they now have a government — for the first time in seven years — that is looking after the basics that concern the everyday lives of ordinary Victorians.

The result reflected the growing feeling that country Victoria is getting its fair share under the Bracks Labor government. This feeling was only strengthened by the recent state budget, which not only maintained a healthy budget surplus but for the first time in many

years focused on restoring funding to those fundamental services that contribute to an improved standard of living and, just as importantly, a renewed sense of confidence and optimism about the road ahead — health, education, roads, jobs and opportunities for our young people.

I want to touch briefly on some of the issues which Labor focused on over the past year and which played a key part in the by-election. In Nagambie it was Kirwans Bridge, which is literally falling into the water after years of neglect. It was also the Euroa and Nagambie bush nursing hospitals that desperately needed increased funding or faced cuts to services. In Bright it was the need for a permanent ambulance service — promised but never delivered by the former Liberal–National government.

In Benalla it was the plight of the Dunlop campus of Benalla College — targeted for closure and starved of maintenance funding for seven years by the former government. When I went on a tour of the campus with the Minister for Education neither of us could believe the holes in the walls and the floors, the flaking paint and the generally run-down condition of the buildings.

Fortunately, with the help of committed ministers and a Premier who was prepared to listen to those concerns, we were able to address some of the problems. Some criticised us for listening and acting after just seven months in government; but I can tell the house that the people of the north-east welcomed the commitment to address the neglect of the past seven years.

I am not kidding myself. There is so much more to do. One of the commitments I made two weeks ago was to work with farmers whose lives have been devastated by ovine Johne's disease. Two weeks ago I attended a meeting of farmers in Nagambie and listened to their stories — about how they had been forced to destroy their entire flocks and how their livelihoods had been taken away from them. It is an issue that most people in the city have little or no knowledge of, and I confess that until recently I had little understanding of the tragic consequences that disease is wreaking on families who have lived all their lives on farms.

I gave a commitment to those farmers that I would work with them to achieve a better outcome. I certainly hope the current parliamentary inquiry comes up with a clear outcome for those families.

Finally, I would like to thank the small but committed group of true believers who kept the faith over many years, and I am so very happy and proud that a number of them have made the journey to Melbourne to be here

today. It was wonderful to see the delight on their faces on election night knowing that at long last they had a Labor member for Benalla.

It is so heartening that Labor supporters all over country Victoria, and especially the north-east, can hold their heads high after the result. They kept the faith through some dark years, and the result is a reward for all the hard work everyone has put in over so many years.

Thank you also to my very dear friends who have always been there for me and believed in me, especially my closest friend, Chris Middleton, who has been my greatest supporter since kindergarten.

Among my supporters is, of course, my family, and it is to them I owe the greatest debt. To my father, Jack, my mother, Betty, my beautiful children, Shae, Hayley and Paul, all I can say is thank you for the love and undying support you have given me. My family has been through some very tough times, not least during the by-election itself, and it was very hard to remain strong, focused and dignified.

I only did it with the unwavering love and support of my family.

Everything I have done over the past 20 years — and some have criticised me for this, but they are not in the house — has been to give my children a better life, and I have been rewarded with three highly intelligent, well-adjusted, caring young adults who have so much to offer society.

Some in the media have written that by winning the seat of Benalla after 96 years of conservative representation I made history. I disagree — it was the people of the Benalla electorate who made history because they dared to vote for a positive and inspirational change.

Again I thank the people of the north-east for their support and their trust. I strongly believe that as the new member for Benalla, and as part of the Bracks government, we will repay that faith and deliver not only to the north-east but for the whole of Victoria.

I look forward to facing the electorate again in three years time and standing on my record and the record of the Bracks government in delivering a fair share for country Victoria and focusing on the issues that affect the lives of country Victorians. I thank the house.

Honourable members applauding.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind honourable members that applause is not permitted in the chamber.

Mrs PEULICH (Bentleigh) — Before I begin my comments on the Appropriation Bill and the Bracks government's first budget I take the opportunity to congratulate the new member for Benalla on her election to Parliament. I am sure this is a very proud moment for her and for her family. I note a few tears among family members. It is a proud moment for all those who supported her.

However, as an honourable member in a marginal seat the honourable member for Benalla must understand that the task of a marginal seat member is to represent everyone in the electorate, and this often means working more closely with one's political opponents.

This is very much a Santa Claus budget. Everyone likes Santa and currently everyone likes the Premier. He is an attractive political persona — there is no doubt at it — and the bag of goodies, the sack of presents, is fairly large. However, the cold, hard political facts are that the pressies in Santa's sack have been pre-purchased by Victorians and are the belongings of every Victorian who had worked in partnership with the former coalition government to achieve savings that were intended to be an investment for Victoria's future rather than just a reward for the faithful.

All honourable members who still believe in the practice know what it is like to receive presents from Santa at Christmas, and that some presents are better than others. The presents that are better than others are not the things we just want but the things we need — the things that are durable and are enjoyed for many years to come rather than just in the hype of the moment; not things that bring only immediate and short-term comfort. Unfortunately, the presents in this Santa's sack are a disappointment.

Mr Nardella — Which ones?

Mrs PEULICH — I will tell you. I will speak a little later about the presents for Bentleigh — and Bentleigh was certainly very disappointed. Daniele Vare said, 'Diplomacy is the art of letting someone have your way'. Santa, in the form of the current Labor Premier of Victoria, is certainly a diplomat, if nothing else. As I said, he is a smooth operator. He smooths rather than confronts, and that is something that still attracts a deal of support. He is responding to perceived present needs but unfortunately appears to give little thought to tomorrow and make little investment in Victoria's future.

The new state slogan reflects the Premier's focus on the present. 'Victoria — the place to be' is the essence of the Premier's style. The focus is on the here and

now — moments of comfort for today rather than having an eye on the more confronting challenges of tomorrow.

The centrepiece of the budget, the billion-dollar Growing Victoria infrastructure fund, sounds good, but being somewhat prone to cynicism, as we all are in this profession, I consider it is more likely than not a re-election war chest to be used in the best way Labor knows. It will be used for some good, old-fashioned pork-barrelling for Labor's own cynical political benefit rather than for what Victorians need, not only for today but also for tomorrow. The state's good financial position is a legacy of a lot of hard work by Victorians in partnership with the former coalition government. The budget is a missed opportunity and the government does not like having that exposed. It does not like being branded as hypocritical. It does not like it being pointed out that it does not consult, or that it consults only with those who agree with its views.

The government did not consult with the small business sector on the tobacco bill that was debated earlier today. It did not discuss the location of supervised injecting rooms with residents and is intent on locating them where it wants irrespective of the feelings of local communities. It did not consult with the broader community — certainly not my community — in its current review of education via its public education dialogue. For example, one simple oversight is the lack of public meetings on this side of Frankston on the issue. But Madam Acting Speaker, will Victoria be the place to be, or the place not to be?

I turn to look at what the budget offers for the Bentleigh electorate. What did Santa bring? Bentleigh has the third-highest number of over-65s in the state and I asked my constituents what they thought the priorities should be for the expenditure of the huge surplus left in the kitty by the former coalition government. The three priorities of the Bentleigh community are, firstly, the addressing of health needs; secondly, the addressing of education needs; and thirdly, cuts in payroll tax as a way of generating further employment.

On health the Bentleigh electorate received only a promise of less access to health services, the likely closure of accident and emergency services at Sandringham hospital because of the reconfiguration of the health network — —

Ms Lindell — On a point of order, Madam Acting Speaker, the honourable member for Bentleigh is quoting from a survey document. I wonder if she could table that survey and its responses, please?

Mrs PEULICH — On the point of order, Madam Acting Speaker, I have a number of documents. I have no intention of tabling them. They are copious notes that I am using in my address. If the honourable member is interested in finding out what my community thinks, she can damn well do the hard work!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! On the point of order, the honourable member for Bentleigh has indicated that she is referring to copious notes and is therefore not required to table them.

Mrs PEULICH — Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. What does Bentleigh get? It gets a Deputy Premier who last night said that none of the concerns about changes to the health care networks are legitimate and that none of the concerns expressed by various members of Parliament reflect the views of the community. I refer to this week's edition of the Moorabbin *Standard*, which is fairly fresh in people's minds. An article on the issue headed 'Medical move scorned' states:

The final report in the overhaul of the health care networks was last week labelled a change for the sake of change.

The report, based on the Duckett review, recommended Sandringham hospital be withdrawn from the Southern Health Care Network and grouped with the Alfred hospital and Caulfield General Medical Centre under the title Bayside Health.

Dr Jim McDonald, who works in obstetrics at Sandringham, said the 'whole reshuffle smells of just having to do a reshuffle'.

Dr McDonald further stated:

... although obstetrics was to be retained with a link to Monash, it was unlikely to last.

The Alfred would have to pay for that out of its budget and they would get sick of that ...

Dr Peter Gregory, site head of general surgery at Sandringham — —

Ms Lindell interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — You have had your turn. Sit there, listen, and stop interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! I ask the honourable member for Carrum to cease interjecting and the honourable member for Bentleigh to ignore interjections.

Mrs PEULICH — Dr Gregory, the site head of general surgery at Sandringham, said:

... the only surgeon in general surgery at Sandringham to have links with the Alfred had left last year.

In line with the concerns raised by several members on this side of the house, my constituents' access to health services is likely to diminish dramatically. As a result, waiting lists at the Monash Medical Centre, which will be left to pick up the slack, are likely to increase by 20 per cent, while the number of accident and emergency presentations is likely to increase by 25 per cent. Services that are now available to local communities will no longer be available. That is as far as Santa's health presents go in the electorate of Bentleigh.

Mr Stensholt interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — I am pleased the honourable member for Burwood is such an expert on the needs and wants of the Bentleigh electorate.

The 5 per cent increase in the health budget and the 5.6 per cent increase in the education budget are just tinkering at the edges. It is a typical Labor Party — —

Mr Stensholt interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! Will the honourable member for Burwood lower his voice.

Mrs PEULICH — Old habits die hard. Along with many other Victorians, the people of Bentleigh will suffer. During the election campaign the former government gave several commitments about the ongoing upgrade of schools. Those commitments were attacked by both the Labor Party and the Australian Education Union as election confetti. That line of argument has been continued by the Minister for Education. However, I was delighted, as was my community, that the much-needed upgrade of Ormond Primary School, whose school council you were a member of for some time, Madam Acting Speaker, has been given the green light — especially when I announced the former government's commitment to the upgrade during the election campaign.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs PEULICH — It was promised and budgeted for with funds made available by the former government. One disappointing aspect of the budget is that McKinnon Secondary College, one of the largest and most respected government colleges in the state, has missed out on much-needed money for a continuing upgrade. The college has received more than \$1 million

over seven years, and it is desperately in need of further funds to complete its refurbishment.

The biggest disappointment is that the Minister for Education did not have sufficient clout to get enough of the \$3 billion surplus the former government generated over the previous two financial years to wipe out the remaining \$150 million Cain–Kirner debt on school maintenance. The government did not see fit to support the state's school communities by allocating a paltry \$150 million to remove the remaining upgrade and maintenance backlog. I urge the Premier to support the minister and fund that much-needed action from the Growing Victoria budget.

The current drug debate is important to the constituents of Bentleigh. I conducted a survey on the issue to learn the views of my constituents. The drug debate has been divisive because people have strong views on the matter. One must be sure about the views that are being expressed and how widespread they are. My survey demonstrates that 65 per cent of Bentleigh constituents believe self-injecting rooms are not the way to go. A number are uncertain, but 65 per cent are totally opposed, and many of them are Australian Labor Party members, which is enlightening.

Without qualification all of them believe more funds should be directed towards drug rehabilitation services. Given that the drug scourge is escalating, the government's decision to set aside the paltry sum of \$17 million to deal with the issue is deplorable. I urge honourable members to read an enlightening article in today's *Age* headed 'Footscray's not the place to hide our failure'.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs PEULICH — It was a heated debate, probably over self-injecting rooms — I don't know!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs PEULICH — Yes, the Footscray traders do have some strong views about self-injecting rooms because they do not support them. The article, which is written by Kerry Flattley, states:

Nor is the compassion of the injecting room a sincere, genuine compassion. It is the compassion of last resort, grasped at by a society that has failed, at every other opportunity, to exercise care and responsibility in the lives of young people.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs PEULICH — A lot more, and I also know a lot about the constituents of the Premier.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs PEULICH — It is interesting to hear the concerted efforts government members are making to drown out a viewpoint on this controversial issue that is different from theirs. The debate about self-injecting rooms and drugs policy is important to all communities, including my electorate of Bentleigh.

It is the height of hypocrisy for government members to attempt to drown out my efforts to make representations at the highest level of decision making in Victoria on this important issue. The article continues:

The injecting room stands as a stark symbol of this failure. Rather than counselling, care, education, training and work, we offer, instead, a place to shoot up.

The \$1.5 million set aside for five self-injecting facilities is clearly forecasting the fact that local communities are not going to give it the green light. The community is not going to throw in the towel, and the people who feel most strongly against it are young people who expect adults in positions of responsibility and decision making to protect their future interests and exercise a duty of care.

Mr Mildenhall interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — It is a very sad statistic, but I urge honourable members opposite to look at drug policies that use harm minimisation as a foundation principle but do not support liberalisation of drug laws or normalisation of drug use. If government members have not seen those policies, they should go and get the information from the library. Harm minimisation does not mean liberalisation of drug laws. If government members do not know the facts, I suggest they become informed.

The community I represent is very disappointed that the government has not set aside more significant funds for drug rehabilitation and detoxification. What have we heard about law and order in the Bentleigh electorate? I will tell honourable members. The former candidate for Bentleigh, Cartha Maloney, quoted all sorts of facts and figures then, but the situation appears to be deteriorating. I call on the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to consider establishing a shop-front police station in the Bentleigh shopping centre to deal with an increasing level of vandalism, crime, graffiti and theft, and even bag snatching, which is certainly uncharacteristic of the electorate.

The worst event occurred about a week ago when three cars in numerous streets were subjected to a senseless

form of vandalism. Car tyres were slashed, wipers were twisted and ripped off and paintwork was ruined. It was thousands of dollars worth of damage. The local police, who are generally very responsive, suggested that the victims of those crimes should go down to the police station to make a report because they were so stretched for manpower they could not go and take the details.

We have heard a lot from the Labor Party about all sorts of promises of reforms and a different style of leadership, but it seems Victoria's new Labor in the new millennium is really old Labor with its old habits repackaged. It is a bit like a Santa Claus gift with a big bow on it and shiny paper, but the contents are the same.

What have we seen? Smugness, arrogance and smart alec behaviour have all grown in a very short seven months. It is deplorable.

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

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — The honourable member for Bentleigh is a hard act to follow, and I apologise to my colleagues because I do not think I will be half as entertaining. I will certainly do my best in contributing to the budget debate.

I congratulate the Premier on his first and only budget, given that his role has moved to the honourable member for Broadmeadows. Everyone thinks it was an excellent budget, except opposition members.

Since bringing down the budget we have heard expressions of anger and anguish from opposition members who say, 'It's our money'. It reminds one of an old bank advertisement — 'It's our money; they're spending our money'. It was not their money. If there was as much money as opposition members say, it would have been nice, but it was not that much. It was a \$1.3 billion surplus, not \$2.8 billion or any other figure drawn out of the air. The money did not belong to the Liberal Party, although one might be forgiven for thinking it did after listening to the debate. The money belongs to the people of Victoria. Perhaps if Liberal Party members had recalled that it is the people's money and not theirs they may have been in a position to spend it.

The Bracks Labor government has put forward a budget that provides assistance for all Victorians and gives expression to many of the promises it made prior to the election. The promises made by the Bracks government prior to the election are slightly different from the ones made by the previous government. If all the promises made by the Liberal Party prior to the state

election were financed by the current government — the ones they did not have budget allocations for — not only would the Bracks government have spent the surplus from last year's budget but it probably would have spent the surplus from the next 20 years' budgets. In a state of panic the Kennett government went around promising money everywhere. In answers to recent questions in the house a number of ministers have referred to the additional funding the government has had to provide for services or half-finished projects about which the previous government made promises but for which it allocated no money.

The new museum is an example of an unfunded project. The previous Premier and Minister for the Arts talked about it at length. It should be open by now, but it is running behind target. The former government failed to allocate money for the opening or to set up the displays or to employ staff. Under the coalition we would have had a museum but it would not have been much good because it would not have had anything in it and there would have been no staff.

There are examples of that sort throughout the portfolio areas we have heard about recently. The major area in which the former government really got carried away with funding promises is schools. From what we have heard from members opposite since the election and more frequently since the budget, I wonder if there is one school in Victoria to which they did not promise something. If what they say is right, the amount of money they were going to allocate for schools in this year's budget was massively greater than any amount they had ever allocated in any previous budget.

One wonders why suddenly they saw value in extra staff to aid integration and meet special needs requirements for school students when in the previous seven years, despite many protests from school communities, they allocated so little for those services. Those areas were happily ignored for seven and a half years. The Kennett government greatly underestimated the intelligence of Victorians; Victorians do not fall for promises based on air. Victorians are not likely to believe a government that has ignored them for seven years will suddenly discover the road to Damascus and entirely change its tune.

The fact that the Kennett government was seen not to really care about education and health is one reason that people voted against it in the state election. It is therefore pleasing that the current state budget implements most of the promises made by the Bracks government during the election campaign to improve education and health facilities. I am sure other government members find that people they meet in the

street or at functions still talk about health and education as the two main areas of concern and the two main areas of failure for which they hold the Kennett government responsible.

The Duckett report, which was released a couple of weeks ago, clearly shows that major hospitals were technically bankrupt. The Royal Melbourne Hospital, which for many years had a great reputation as a teaching hospital and as providing first-class treatment for people with serious injuries or illnesses, was one of the hospitals found to be technically bankrupt. Fortunately, the hospital still has a good reputation in many areas. There is no doubt that in discussions towards the end of the previous government's reign the Royal Melbourne Hospital made it quite clear that it knew it was close to bankruptcy and was concerned about its capacity to keep operating without a proper budget allocation.

The warning it gave to us was the same warning it had been giving to the state government for the previous two or three years but which was ignored by the previous Kennett government. It is unlikely Victorians will have any faith in the comments made by the current opposition about health. It is obvious the concerns that have now been made public were known by the previous government for many years but were totally ignored. Victorians are not likely to thank the Kennett government, nor are they likely to trust the opposition when it is seen crying crocodile tears.

I was astonished to hear the honourable member for Bentleigh and other members talk about the terrible state of some of their schools. We never heard about the terrible state of their schools during the seven and a half years of the previous government's rule and I cannot imagine that the schools have deteriorated in such a marked way since September last year. It can only be assumed that the previous government did not care too much about the state of the schools when it was in government and had a chance to do something about it. It is only now that the members of the opposition see it as some sort of political weapon with which they can beat the current government about the head that they come forward and admit that schools in their electorates have had problems. One must assume that in education as in health the previous government totally ignored the concerns of residents, schools and facilities in their electorates even though the facts must have been brought before it constantly in the same way that the health networks brought forward their health problems.

I shall turn now to issues relating to my electorate of Essendon, which was treated badly by the previous government not only for the time that I was its

representative but also when it was represented by the Liberal Party from 1992 to 1996. Perhaps that member had the same trouble as the current members opposite — he did not hear what the electorate was telling him.

The Kennett government was quite happy to sit back and allow hospitals to take incredible actions which harmed the community. The closure of Essendon hospital was supported by the Kennett government. It was sold by the Royal Melbourne Hospital not because there was any problem with its budget or its level of care — in fact it was probably the most highly regarded hospital for rehabilitation facilities in the state — but because the Royal Melbourne Hospital was going bankrupt and had to divest itself of any assets to try to keep itself in a sound economic position. The previous government was advised of the action and knew the whole time that it was allowing facilities to be sold off without any concern for the health of local residents, and Essendon was only one hospital that was sold. Once again that is something the previous government must and will be held to account for by residents.

The Bracks budget provides money to outfit part of Essendon hospital to bring back public health services. Unfortunately, the sale of the hospital was almost completed by the time the Labor Party was elected to government, but with the great help of the Minister for Health and his advisers it has been possible to negotiate with the current owners to get some land back. That has been given rent free for a number of years to provide public health facilities in the area. The project is currently under way and there is money in the budget for the outfitting of the public health area in the Essendon hospital. The government is working closely with the developers in the hope that those facilities may be returned as early as 1 July 2001.

Essendon has an elderly population compared with the average throughout Victoria. Those older and frail residents suffered greatly from the closure of Essendon hospital. They were particularly irritated when a lady from Essendon rang radio station 3AW one Thursday morning when the previous Premier used to take calls and expressed to him her concern that Essendon hospital had closed. His response was, 'Don't worry, Epping hospital is just down the road'. I am not sure how anyone can ever suggest that Epping is just down the road from Essendon, unless they are looking at some sort of alphabetical table, in which case Epping is not far from Essendon. However, in terms of distance, suggesting that Epping is just down the road from Essendon shows a bad geographical knowledge of Melbourne to say the least. It perhaps illustrates the total lack of care the previous government had for local

health services. I am not sure whether the previous Premier meant his comments to have received such extensive exposure around Essendon, but I can assure him they did.

I am pleased the Labor government is able to return public health services, particularly for older residents and women. The Honourable David White, a former Labor health minister in another place, set up Victoria's first public breast screening facility in Essendon. That facility will also continue on the site. It is a very good response for health in the Essendon area.

A couple of schools in my electorate rang me and told me of the wonderful promises that had been made by the honourable member for Wantirna who was gracious enough to promise funding to a number of Essendon schools prior to the September election. Residents were surprised by the sudden appearance of the honourable member for Wantirna because they had never seen much of him before. He turned up in my electorate bearing gifts.

Ms Lindell — An early Christmas present.

Mrs MADDIGAN — I should have thought of that.

The residents of Essendon show a healthy cynicism when it comes to members of the previous government turning up before elections — they also did it prior to the 1996 election. The residents were used to sudden arrivals from the sky, and so they discounted the promises that were made.

Essendon schools are well funded in the budget, although some have been waiting for a number of years for capital upgrades. I am pleased Strathmore Secondary College, which is a major secondary college in my area, has been funded for the second stage of its development. Since 1992 the college has had pressure put on it to take more students.

It is a direct result of the Kennett government policy in closing other secondary schools in the area, so significant change has taken place in secondary schools in my area. Strathmore Secondary College has been asked to take many more students than was ever envisaged, and it needs the money to provide extra resources, particularly for the technology area and the arts facility.

Last year when I invited him the previous Minister for Education came to Strathmore Secondary College and even he was shocked at the old-fashioned condition of some of the buildings. Members on this side of the house will understand it took a great deal to shock the previous Minister for Education.

It is not only individual grants to schools but other education policies that were promised during the Bracks election campaign and delivered through the budget. The funding to reduce class sizes and the additional money for integration aides is welcome.

Knowing the physical and financial efforts parents make to support a disabled child and give him or her the right to participate in the mainstream education system, nothing can be more disheartening than to be told there is no integration money available and the government cannot help at all. Few members of Parliament have not had constituents come to their electorate offices with those sorts of problems.

It is not reasonable for a caring government in Victoria — a wealthy state compared to other places — to say money is not available. The public is now hearing about the budget surplus. What a lie — to tell people with disabled children, or those who need assistance in caring for elderly people, or residents who are on a kidney machine, that the government cannot help because money is not available.

The information is now coming through on the amount — \$100 000 — that was spent on a book about the previous Premier. Most premiers are good enough for people to write books about them for nothing and do quite nicely out of it. To have to pay someone to write the story is a sad reflection on the nature of the former government. The community is now understanding the sort of thing money was spent on as the Bracks Labor government takes over departments and makes more discoveries. The people are becoming cynical about the previous government and its misuse of funds.

Nothing makes people more cross than having a good cause knocked back. Early in the days of the Kennett government I recall that a request for funding for the Grey Sisters was knocked back, while extraordinary amounts of money were spent on advertising and self-promotion and on such useless things as a sound system, books and exercise bikes — to say nothing of expensive tickets to the Olympic Games, presumably at the taxpayers' expense. I understand rents in Sydney are between \$6000 and \$10 000 a week during the Olympic Games, so presumably the people of Victoria would have been asked for another substantial grant to allow ministers and members of the Liberal Party intending to go to the games to stay in the manner to which they had obviously become accustomed under the Kennett government.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Mrs MADDIGAN — The honourable member for Dandenong North is suggesting another role for the previous Premier. I am not sure if it would be universally popular. Perhaps the honourable member for Bentleigh could be asked to do a survey — she is keen on surveys and has done extensive surveying on matters including the political allegiances of people in Bentleigh. She was able to tell us at length about the views of Australian Labor Party members in Bentleigh. I am glad she is listening to and consulting with the Labor Party members in Bentleigh because I am sure they are intelligent people. She also mentioned the Liberal Party members in Footscray, so she has apparently included them in the survey as well. I encourage her to continue her surveys and I am sure members of the house will willingly sit and listen to her further information.

The budget is a great one for Victoria. It reverses many of the evils of the past seven years and treats Victorians across the whole state — not just friends of the government — as people with the right to share in the prosperity of the state. Money has been allocated across the range of services and provision has been made for those who need additional assistance, including people suffering from drug-related illnesses.

It is sad that members opposite will throw out the proposal for supervised injecting rooms when so many people, including Professor Penington, who work in the area identify supervised injecting rooms as one way of saving lives. Few parents would not support the government provision and would support the view of the honourable member for Bentleigh. People care about their children. I am surprised the member for Bentleigh found Labor members in Bentleigh do not support supervised injecting rooms.

I have received totally the opposite response in Essendon. The community strongly supports measures to assist people with drug problems and to remove the scourge from the streets so children are not exposed to the use of drugs as though it is a normal part of society, and are not at risk of needle-stick injuries by falling over in parks where people have been shooting up. It is a great shame that people have closed minds on this issue.

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — My contribution to the Appropriation (2000/2001) Bill will highlight the absolute hypocrisy of the school education budget. The Minister for Education has failed to deliver on at least four counts. Firstly, Minister Delahunty has failed to deliver on resourcing, whether it be capital or recurrent. Secondly, she has failed to deliver on her own election promises, and I will come to those in a

moment. Thirdly, she has failed to deliver on any vision whatsoever in education; instead, we have this one-model-fits-all approach. It is all about financial inputs and not about education outcomes and quality results. Finally, she has failed completely to provide for high schools in the budget, and honourable members know the reasons why. This so-called senior minister is actually the junior minister to the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment. Nothing could be more apparent and evident.

I refer the house to budget table 2.1.1 at page 20 of budget paper no. 3. School education under this inept minister received a grand total increase of 5.8 per cent, according to the Bracks government's budget documents. What did the Kennett government provide in last year's budget? If one compares exactly the same table — 2.1.1 — it is clear the Kennett government provided a 10 per cent increase.

What do we have from the other Mary who runs education in this state, Mary Bluett? On the front page of the Australian Education Union's *AEU News* — which has become an interesting document to read — a cartoon shows a coin from the last Kennett budget being thrown into a busker's cup, and below it a bag full of dollars from the first Bracks budget is thrown into a much larger cup. I pose this question to the sycophantic members of the government: if Mary has delivered only a 5.8 per cent increase and Lynne has delivered 15 per cent in post-compulsory education, how can a 5.8 per cent increase be regarded as wonderful compared with a 10 per cent increase by the so-called slash-and-burn Kennett government?

Mary delivered half of what former education minister, Phil Gude, delivered last year. She is not even on the government's economic review committee. The so-called junior Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment is on that committee, so it is not surprising that Lynne delivered three times more for TAFE than what Mary could possibly deliver for schools.

I turn to examine some of the facts behind the figures. More money has been allocated for primary school teachers. Is there a single dollar extra for high school classroom teachers? Not one. Why are the teachers from Hampton Park Secondary College going on strike tomorrow and why did the teachers from Scoresby Secondary College go on strike yesterday?

Mr Wells interjected.

Mr HONEYWOOD — They were out the front of the offices of the honourable members for Knox and Wantirna.

Mr Wells interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Wantirna is interjecting out of his place.

Mr HONEYWOOD — The inept junior Minister for Education, Minister Delahunty, could not provide money for secondary schools. It has taken them two weeks to read beyond the propaganda of the Australian Education Union to realise there was not a coin in the cup for them — not a single dollar. The junior minister has failed to deliver on additional teachers for high schools. By the way, the Kennett government provided funding for an additional 1000 teachers in last year's budget — 1000 compared with zero.

I turn to capital works. According to the Auditor-General, over the past four years the Kennett government provided \$1 billion for school capital works. What has the new big-spending Bracks first budget provided? It has provided \$105 million. My arithmetic is not what it used to be, but \$1 billion divided between four years is \$250 million a year on capital works for school education, compared with \$105 million from this big-spending Bracks budget.

Whether it be additional teacher resources or capital works, what do we have? It is all rhetoric, but Lynne has won the day; Lynne is the senior minister and not Mary. That covers the resourcing of schools.

This ain't as good as it gets, because the government has a wonderful one-model-fits-all approach to education now. Last week I visited Bairnsdale Secondary College while on a trip through Sale and Bairnsdale. I was welcomed with open arms in the electorate of the Independent member for Gippsland East — not by him, but by his school community which wants some action. What did I find at Bairnsdale? The college is a centre of musical excellence which has been going for 25 years. It has 3.2 music teachers, which is two over its entitlement because the then Hamer government, supported by the previous Kennett government, resourced that centre of musical excellence. What is Mary doing?

Mr Pandazopoulos — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member for Warrandyte has referred to honourable members by their Christian names. He knows the custom of the house is to refer to honourable members by their appropriate electorate or ministerial titles, and I ask you to call him to order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Phillips) — Order! I am sure the shadow minister would have done it by accident and will be happy, in the event he has offended any person, to withdraw the comment and comply with the orders of the house.

Mr HONEYWOOD — I am happy to withdraw the name Mary from this chamber. I add that during question time today the same minister was pulled up by the Speaker for using the first names of colleagues on this side of the house. She can initiate it but we will not fall into her traps because she still has her L-plates on.

Bairnsdale Secondary College is aghast because a review into music teaching has been suddenly foisted on it. Bairnsdale Secondary College does not hold those music teachers to itself; it shares them with Orbost, Lakes Entrance and Swifts Creek. One of the music teachers was killed some years ago on her way to Swifts Creek to teach at that outpost. Now there will be a review of the music centre. The teachers' morale was incredibly high and it has now gone downhill. I should add that a graduate of Bairnsdale Secondary College is now one of the lead backup support artists for Savage Garden and is touring with the group internationally. The school is worried about its future because it dared to be different. It dared to specialise in a particular subject area — namely, music — and it has been given no reason why a review has been called.

The opposition knows what the reason is. The Minister for Education wants to equalise. She has raised great expectations around the state that she will deliver for high schools. I just pointed out that she has not provided a single dollar for high school teachers, which is why teachers at Scoresby went on strike yesterday and why those at Hampton Park will strike tomorrow. Centres of excellence are brought down to the lowest common denominator, where one model fits all, where instead of 3.2 music teachers, a 0.5 equivalent music teacher might be farmed out to each high school across South Gippsland, West Gippsland and the like. It will be interesting to hear whether the honourable member for Gippsland East mentions any of those educational issues — that is, if he bothers to come into the chamber and present his budget response.

The new Labor government purports to represent country Victorians, but last week during a visit to Bairnsdale I discovered that the Bairnsdale Primary School has received an edict from this inept minister that it is required to bank with one bank only — that is, the Bank of Melbourne. Which bank is closing down more branches in rural Victoria than any other bank? — the Bank of Melbourne!

For years, Bairnsdale Primary School has had an excellent relationship — with similarly high-yield interest — with the local Commonwealth Bank branch but the school is now being told by this inept minister that it has to bank with only the Bank of Melbourne. So much for sensitivity to rural communities! Of course the school subsequently wrote to me expressing concern about that edict. One must question this return to Big Brother-style government.

An Honourable Member — Big Sister.

Mr HONEYWOOD — That is debatable. The former government promised to provide new schools and to upgrade existing schools, in addition to the \$1 billion it spent in the past four years — compared with the meagre \$105 million meted out in this so-called big spending Bracks government budget.

Following my visit last week, an article appeared in the *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, under the heading 'Lack of action on new schools'. The former government promised Lucknow Primary School a new school. Land was allocated and I inspected the site for the new school. What do we find in the so-called big spending Bracks government budget? Not a single dollar for Lucknow Primary School!

Enrolments at Maffra Secondary School have increased from 450 to 830 students in eight years, and that school is looking forward to its new \$1.4 million science and technology centre, but, again, not \$1 is allocated in the Bracks government budget.

Whether it be on capital works or additional teachers for high schools, this minister has failed to deliver. Under this junior minister, no school will dare attempt to specialise in anything like the Bairnsdale Secondary School music program, because we have to have the Mary Bluett, or Australian Education Union (AEU), line; we have to have the one-model-fits-all approach; we do not want teachers compared with one another; we want to go back to seniority based on years of service, which has proven ineffective in any western country's education system anyone cares to nominate.

Even the Blair government in England, which the Minister for Youth Affairs spent months studying, has moved to self-governing schools. I am sure the minister is aware that under that Labour government they have charter schools.

What has happened in Victoria? There is a return to central bureaucratic control, because Labor does not trust principals or school councils. Labor trusts only Mary Bluett's one-model-fits-all approach — that is, a

lack of diversity in education — as a philosophy for the future.

Labor is big on inputs; it likes to throw money at problems. In this particular case, the government has not thrown any money at the problems. Labor's track record on education outcomes is appalling.

A report appeared in yesterday's *Age* newspaper about a visit from a Blair government-supported educationalist. What does he do in Socialist Labour Great Britain? He runs the school inspection service. He goes out with inspectors to compare schools. Labor members opposite are laughing because they do not want schools to be compared; they do not want AEU teacher members compared for quality-of-education outcomes. They want to camouflage the results and to ensure that no bad teacher is exposed. They want to ensure that no AEU card-carrying member is exposed as an inept teacher. We cannot have that here in Victoria. That is okay in Blair's Great Britain, but not here! We are returning to the 1970s. We are returning to the days of good old Ann Morrow, who used to carry the bag for Joan Kirner when she was Minister for Education.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr HONEYWOOD — My wife is a teacher. If the honourable member for Melton is alleging that — —

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr HONEYWOOD — I will not respond to the recycled member from another chamber. However, when it comes to — —

Mr Helper — Why do you hate the upper house?

Mr HONEYWOOD — I will not comment on that.

I turn to the glitz-and-glamour argument. All honourable members have heard the government say it will make savings in education by not paying for consultancies and glossy publications. Since then there have been truckloads of glossy publications and four full-page advertisements of propaganda promoting the inept education minister's changes. Now the government has produced volume 2 of the document entitled *Public Education — The Next Generation*. Volume 1 was also in glossy colour, but it was a hardback version. There has been some cost cutting because this time around the department has gone for a paperback version. It is still full of colour, so it probably cost about \$50 000 to produce. However, we are asked to believe that the government will make savings by dispensing with consultancies and glossy

publications. We look forward to the results. I wonder whether we will get any.

My next point is a sad reflection on the government's charter with the Independents. Do honourable members remember the charter, which has since been swept under the carpet?

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr HONEYWOOD — I will not respond to that. Do honourable members remember the charter, the so-called commitment to transparent and open government? I refer to a letter I received from the Department of Education, Employment and Training dated 22 May, which reads:

Dear Mr Honeywood,

I refer to your freedom of information (FOI) request received on 6 March 2000 for access to documents relating to the provision of additional funding for the construction of new relocatable classrooms.

Again, the inept education minister has provided not one dollar for new classrooms in the current financial year. The letter also says:

For the period up until receipt of your request I was not able to locate any documents specifically relating to the provision of funding for the construction of new relocatable classrooms. However, there are two documents that relate to funding for the government's initiative to reduce class sizes for prep to year 2.

The pledge was to reduce prep-to-year-2 class sizes to fewer than 21 students — which the opposition later revealed was not a maximum of 21 but an average. What has happened to the two documents that the FOI office identified? The letter continues:

As you have requested access to documents that relate to funding for the construction of new relocatable classrooms I have considered these documents, but I must refuse access to them for the reason that both are cabinet documents.

The two exempt documents are a letter and attachment conveying the decisions of the ERC on a range of matters —

of course the economic review committee (ERC) of cabinet does not have as a member the inept education minister —

including funding for the government's P-2 class size requirement initiative, and is exempt under section 28(1)(d) of the FOI act ...

As you are aware, Mr Acting Speaker, under the FOI act 'cabinet' also includes a committee or subcommittee of the cabinet, so where is the transparency? Documents that are embarrassing for the government are stamped 'Cabinet', 'Cabinet

committee' or 'Cabinet subcommittee' — you name it — as an excuse not to release them.

Two and a half months after the date by which all secondary schools had to submit information on their English class sizes, the government's excuse for not releasing it is that it is taking too long to collate! The honourable member for Footscray was given exactly the same information approximately six weeks after he put in a FOI request, yet two and a half months later this government of secrecy is hiding the truth from the people of Victoria.

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — I join the debate on the Bracks government's first budget with considerable pride. The budget commits funding to enact Labor's election promises and delivers a range of improvements in education, health and community services for the people of Victoria in general and the people of my electorate of Carrum in particular. I say for the record that the overwhelming majority of my constituents have greeted the budget warmly.

Six months ago I said in my first speech in this place that I was looking forward to the next four years of the Bracks government, which I said would restore openness and democracy to government in Victoria and was committed to addressing the large class sizes in our schools and the excessive waiting times in our hospital accident and emergency departments and providing our police force with more personnel to ensure the effective policing of our communities.

Mr Honeywood — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member has been reading her budget speech word for word. I ask her to table the document from which she is reading.

Mr Loney — On the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, considering that the clock has only just ticked over 1 minute I cannot understand how anyone could say the honourable member is reading her speech word for word from a document.

Ms LINDELL — On the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I was quoting from my maiden speech in *Hansard*. Because I was quoting, I thought I should read it word for word.

Mr Haermeyer — On a new point of order — —

Mr Hamilton — You have not ruled on the current point of order, Mr Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Phillips) — Order! On the current point of order, it has been suggested that the honourable member has been reading from a

document. I ask the honourable member for Carrum whether she has been reading from a document or referring to some notes. I also ask the honourable member if she would have any difficulty in tabling any document from which she has been reading.

Ms LINDELL — I have notes; and as you can see, Mr Acting Speaker, they are in dot form. I was always under the impression — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Phillips) — Order! The honourable member has not been reading from a document. I remind all members that while direct reading is not permitted, referring to notes is permitted. I accept that the honourable member is referring to notes.

Ms LINDELL — After the election of the Bracks government, my local paper, the Chelsea *Independent*, ran an article on 29 October 1999 headed 'Really so lucky in Kingston now'. The article, which reported on the election of the Bracks government, said:

With all the pre-election promises that have been made, it's hard to find an area where Kingston residents aren't going to come out winners.

I will spend some time referring to my expectations, the expectations of the people of Carrum and the expectations of the Victorian community as we looked forward to the Bracks government's first budget.

The government has done what it said it would do. Labor is committed to open and accountable government. When one looks at the actions it has taken in the past few months — many of them in its first 100 days in office — one can see that Labor is dedicated to openness and decency in government.

The government has extended the hours of Parliament and introduced a minimum of 50 sitting days each year, which was a condition of the Independents charter referred to by the honourable member for Warrandyte. It has guaranteed a minimum of 10 questions and answers at question time; it has introduced debates on matters of public importance; and it has amended the Freedom of Information Act, which the honourable member for Warrandyte also referred to and which was supported by the opposition when the legislation was debated in the Parliament.

The government has restored the powers of the Auditor-General and enshrined the independence of the Director of Public Prosecutions in the Victorian constitution. It has established the Intergraph royal commission, headed by Lex Lasry, as well as an audit

review to examine the major contracts entered into by the previous government.

The government also commenced a review of the state government's purchasing and contracting framework. In the lead-up to the last election the Bracks Labor opposition, as it was then, gave commitments to deliver on those initiatives, and it has done so.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Ms LINDELL — I am glad you can count.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Ms LINDELL — Very copious notes.

The Bracks government has also kept its promise to make education its no. 1 priority. Education is dear to me. I must admit that during the lead-up to the last election I campaigned strongly on the need for a primary school in Aspendale Gardens. I said in many of my campaign documents that building a primary school at Aspendale Gardens was a clear pledge of the Labor Party. I said Labor supports the notion of local neighbourhood schools, and I will always support new schools being built based on the needs of the community.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Ms LINDELL — The honourable member for Warrandyte seems amazed by that. The honourable member for Mordialloc has at every turn set up brick fences to block the building of a new school at Aspendale Gardens. Aspendale Gardens is a new and growing suburb that has 400 schoolchildren. Families should not have to drive to another area or relocate altogether to get access to a school. The Labor Party gave a commitment to provide a local school for the families of Aspendale Gardens, and I am proud that the budget has allocated \$3.5 million for the construction of that school. That funding will ensure that a local school will be opened in 2002.

Four kindergarten classes are currently being run in the area. There are so many classes that the preschool now runs them from both the kindergarten and the local community centre. Yet that area was not going to have one primary school, and the honourable member for Mordialloc is still running around town trying to put over some amazing story that a school that has operated happily for more than 120 years would be threatened if a school were established 4 kilometres away in Aspendale Gardens.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Ms LINDELL — He is my best electoral asset. I have said that many times, so don't pick on him — and don't replace him!

The Aspendale Gardens school will provide a focal point for a new and growing suburb. It will provide an opportunity for neighbours to work together in the pursuit of communal connectedness, which members on the government side of the house understand. The government understands that people need the opportunity to raise their children together and to work in partnership with other families so that their children feel connected to the community. Despite the interjections of the honourable member for Warrandyte, I am sure he knows how important it is for young people to feel they are part of their community. The new school in Aspendale Gardens will be vital for the growth of a safe and secure neighbourhood and will lead the children and young people towards productive and fulfilling lives.

The budget also allocates an additional \$615 000 for the redevelopment of Edithvale Primary School. That is a stage 2 redevelopment; stage 1 funding was provided under the former Kennett government. I remember visiting Edithvale Primary School with the former Labor member, Mal Sandon, and viewing the dire state of the buildings in 1993. It has taken seven years of successive budgets to finally see the completion of the redevelopment. I am pleased about the allocation of that funding for the redevelopment of the library and administration wing.

The budget also delivers funding to reduce school class sizes. As I have said before, when my son started school in 1992 there were 19 children in his class, but when he finished primary school in 1998 there were 34 children in his class. That is an amazing indictment of the previous government. I am pleased that the budget allocates \$23.8 million to provide an additional 350 primary school teachers for the start of the 2001 school year.

I remember working for the former member for Carrum in 1993 when he was the opposition spokesperson for education. At that time a review was being conducted to examine the expected teacher shortages in 2000–01. I do not believe any initiative addressed that predicted teacher shortage. I have always had grave fears about my children's secondary education, particularly given that they are both adept at maths and science.

We need trained teachers. In seven years of Liberal government no-one took any notice of the shortage of skilled teachers, particularly of language, maths and science teachers.

Another major commitment the Bracks Labor government delivered on in the budget is the boost to health services funding. Hospitals have been provided with a \$176 million boost to unblock emergency departments and reopen beds. My electorate of Carrum has already benefited to the extent of 99 extra beds provided to local hospitals under the winter emergency demand strategy, and the budget announces a further \$176 million for growth and new initiatives in the hospital system. For the first time in seven years hospitals will not have to do more with less.

The people of my electorate, especially my constituents who live in Seaford, Carrum and Patterson Lakes, welcome the \$12 million 76-bed redevelopment of the Frankston Hospital's general ward and coronary care and emergency departments. They are extremely welcome. There is also additional funding for dental services. Two dental services in the Kingston area have received an additional \$260 000 to provide dental services to eligible secondary school students.

Another of the major election commitments of the Bracks Labor team was to provide a further 800 operational police. That has now become an important part of the Bracks budget and has links back to one of the very reasons I am standing here today. In a big song-and-dance event during the election campaign the former minister for police came down to Chelsea with a big entourage and a great fanfare and opened the new Chelsea police station. It was a terrific day. The building was there and the sign was up, but even on opening day there were insufficient staff for the divisional van to make patrols.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms LINDELL — I do have high expectations of government, and I believe it can adequately resource a police force as well as give police officers a reasonable building to work in.

The Chelsea police station was promised in the 1992 Kirner budget and finally opened in 1999. Still, that is a better outcome than was achieved in Mordialloc, where the police station has still not been built. The money, I admit, is there. It was finally provided in the former Kennett government's last budget, albeit seven years in the waiting. The conditions under which the police are forced to work at Mordialloc police station are horrendous and bring great shame on this place.

Mr Wells interjected.

Ms LINDELL — Yes, and maybe we understand why you are sitting over there.

I have recently read a document the honourable member for Wantirna played some small part in putting together. It includes a lot of opposition waffle, but one of the things it does not acknowledge, and the opposition has never acknowledged, is how wrong the former Kennett government got the issue of police resourcing during its time in office and how big a factor police resources played in the election to office of the Bracks Labor government.

Mr Wells interjected.

Ms LINDELL — Yes, I have read the Staley report. Police resources are not mentioned in it. It is a great shock to me that the effect of police manpower shortages has not been acknowledged publicly by the opposition, although I am sure it acknowledges it behind closed doors. The opposition should acknowledge it publicly.

The budget has good news for the Carrum electorate about vital road funding and improvements in public transport. It includes \$30 million for the Dingley bypass, a project which was promised by the former Kennett government in its 1996 election campaign but for which we are still waiting. As I said, this budget provides \$30 million for it, and the residents of Kingston, Chelsea and Mordialloc are looking forward to its commencement. There is also \$250 000 for the construction of a pedestrian bridge over the Patterson River at Wells Road. I have a newspaper article stating that the former member for Chelsea declared it would be built by June of this year — but there was no money in the Kennett budget for it.

In the area of public transport, all those who travel on the Frankston railway line are looking forward to the new flyer trains. There is also funding in the budget for additional initiatives such as the \$240 million for the accident black spot program and 100 extra train attendants.

I represent the electorate of Carrum today because the former government forgot the essential tasks of government. It forgot that in a vibrant democracy it is the electors who have the last say. Although many teachers, nurses, principals and hospital administrators were silenced, the voters ultimately had their say, and the message they delivered was a message of rejection.

Mr DIXON (Dromana) — The people of Dromana have indicated, without prompting from me, that they are disappointed with the state budget, not only with what it provides for my electorate but with what it provides for the state as a whole. One thing that has been delivered is a grant of \$700 000 for a major

redevelopment of the Dromana Secondary College — a great secondary college in my electorate that was a former self-governing school. The grant was announced with much fanfare and it was disappointing no recognition was given that it was promised by the former government.

The budget has delivered nothing in a few other areas of vital community concern in my area. There is absolutely no detail in the budget about the upgrade of the Lotus Lodge hostel. The Dromana electorate has a population with the oldest age profile of any of the 88 lower house electorates and the much-needed improvements to the facility are important for the community. There is no provision in the budget for extension works and the provision of a hydrotherapy pool at the Rosebud rehabilitation centre, both of which are also of vital significance to the people of Dromana and were promised by the former government.

In a more general sense, Dromana is a bayside electorate that is surrounded on three sides by water, so the government's policy of turning its back on Port Phillip Bay is disappointing. If ever anything fired the imagination of Victorians generally and of those who live around and use the bay in particular it was the former government's Bringing the Bay to Life program. The program was given much prominence by the former government — its projects were overseen by a cabinet subcommittee — but it has gone; and the signs have gone. The money the former government poured into the bay to improve its water quality and develop its recreational facilities and infrastructure is no longer available. That is disappointing to the people of the peninsula, not only because they live there and use the bay but also because their livelihoods are likely to be affected because they rely on the bay's attraction as a tourism destination.

Earlier the Leader of the Opposition referred to an article that appeared in the *Herald Sun* of 13 May. It was a telling article written by Dr Ed Shann, the director of Access Economics, who is held up by the government as the guru of all things economic. Now that the hype is over and the cheer squad in the press gallery has got over the thrills of the first Bracks budget and is looking at things a bit more dispassionately, people are beginning to analyse what it means for Victoria. An interesting extract from the article bears repeating:

The coalition was already boosting spending, but was also cutting taxes.

Not surprisingly for a Labor government, this budget only raised spending.

Labor is back to its old ways already. And that remark was made not by me but by a renowned economic commentator.

Members of the business community are disappointed with the budget because it contains no vision for business. The thing that disappointed them most was the lack of tax relief for businesses. They need that sort of incentive so they know they are valued by the government for the work they are doing and the sacrifices they make. The government is not delivering on its promises. I cannot understand why the government wasted ink in the budget talking about a conditional tax cut in next year's budget. The government is treating businesses with contempt.

Those are not just comments by the opposition talking down the budget and the state's economy. In the article Dr Ed Shann refers to a lack of confidence among business operators and says:

The budget papers argue that Victorian business investment will rise in 2000-01, using ABS expectations survey data. That seems unlikely.

Polls show Victorian business confidence has collapsed.

Access surveys show few projects in planning. The government needs to restore business confidence quickly, or private investment will fall next year.

That is a sombre comment post the initial hype. The government needs to look at the situation and intervene heavily before the next budget. There is no point in the government waiting for the next budget and relying on the conditions it wants to be in place at that time for it to deliver the tax cuts it has promised.

There has been a lot of talk in the debate about the lack of business vision and about a lack of vision in the state generally. In a 90-second member's statement a few weeks ago I brought up a small item that was a telling comment on the lack of vision in the state — namely, the quiet dropping of the 'Victoria — on the move' numberplate slogan. It was not replaced with anything other than the word 'Victoria'. I am sure it was the prompting of my 90-second statement that encouraged the government to run a competition because it could not make a decision about a numberplate slogan.

Later the government launched its visionary slogan entitled 'Victoria — the place to be'. Victoria is a nice place to be, but that is hardly visionary; it gives a sense of standing still. A cartoon in the *Herald Sun* showed a picture of the bard Bracks sitting there with a collar on and saying, 'Victoria, the place to be — or not to be'. That seemed to sum it up: no vision, a bit of indecision and no big decisions being made.

Mr Smith interjected.

Mr DIXON — The opposition could spend hours on that subject, but I will not do so. I take an active interest in preschools across the state. I was pleased to see an increase in the preschool subsidy for parents of four-year-old children who are health care card holders. The kindergartens I visit welcome that.

The allocation of \$11 million over three years has resulted in an average increase of only 0.1 in the number of children from those families who are attending preschools, which is disappointing. Currently 99 fewer children from health care card families are attending preschool compared with the figure for last year. I have tried to question the Minister for Education about that, but she uses percentages to fudge her answers. Conservatively speaking, in the current year \$3 million has been spent for a net loss of 99 children.

Nine field officers were employed to attract children from those families, given that they were under-represented in the preschool population. It is good to have as many children as possible attending preschools. The Australian Education Union (AEU) recognises that, as does anyone who has been involved in education.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Mr DIXON — They were very good! Those nine field officers, with their on-costs, salaries and cars, attracted 11 fewer children each. What a waste of money! It would have been better if the money spent on employing them had been used to boost the recurrent budgets of preschools, as happened in the last four coalition budgets. Kindergartens were disappointed about not receiving any increase this year.

The minister was pleased to speak about the development of a so-called interesting trend — the increase in the percentage of four-year-olds attending preschools. However, a split appears to be developing between the minister, the AEU and the Kindergarten Parents of Victoria, which says that the government has vastly overestimated the increase in numbers. During a recent question time the minister had to tone down her comments about ill-informed data when she realised she was speaking about her friends in the AEU.

It is disappointing that much has been made about the increase in the numbers attending preschools when it is not really happening. Money could be targeted in far better ways. I am not the only one saying that; the members of preschool committees are saying the same thing.

The honourable member for Warrandyte referred to the education budget, the 5.2 per cent growth in which was disappointing compared with the 10 per cent increase promised by the coalition parties during the election campaign. Perhaps that is due to the lessening influence of the minister.

The Department of Education, Employment and Training is probably the second largest budgetary area, and the Minister for Education holds what would in any government be described as a senior portfolio. When a minister who controls a huge budget is not part of the inner sanctum, it devalues either the minister or her portfolio. Either way, education in Victoria is suffering.

The tertiary education budget has increased by 15 per cent, a threefold increase compared with the overall education budget. The portfolio of the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment is not as important as the portfolio of the education minister, yet the former belongs to the inner sanctum and holds sway. Perhaps they should swap jobs! Education is so important that it requires the involvement of a senior minister at every stage of the budget process.

Under the former government Victoria was renowned worldwide as the leader in information technology. Bill Gates singled the state out as having an education system par excellence that was going ahead in leaps and bounds. Despite that, under the Bracks government IT funding has been reduced. Given the rapid pace of change in the information technology sector, any impetus can be quickly lost. Victoria has already lost some impetus because the government does not see IT as important.

The honourable member for Warrandyte also referred to the great disappointment secondary school staff feel about the lack of funding for additional classrooms and English and science teachers. Some secondary college students have protested outside the offices of opposition members. They picked the wrong members because those members belong to a party that promised a 10 per cent increase in funding. They should have targeted the offices of government members. However, not many government members represent electorates in the eastern suburbs. Possibly the offices of the honourable members for Dandenong and Dandenong North are the closest!

I turn now to the capital works budget. As the honourable member for Warrandyte pointed out, the \$250 million for capital works promised by the former government has now been reduced to \$105 million. That is worrying, as is the reduction in the funds

allocated to deal with the maintenance backlog, which the Kennett government brought down from \$690 million to \$200 million. The end was in sight: it required adequate funding for only one more year for the backlog to be paid out. The government is now allocating only measly amounts for school maintenance. Without proper maintenance schools slowly fall into disrepair and governments reach the stage where they are chasing their tails.

With only small amounts going into reducing that maintenance backlog, we will be chasing our tails and never see the light at the end of the tunnel. We will not be eradicating that maintenance backlog, we will be falling backwards. Before we know it, Victoria will once again have a \$690 million school maintenance backlog.

I make one final point about the electorate of Dromana and the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund — one of the slush funds. There is a problem with the definition of 'regional area'. There is a split between the Minister for State and Regional Development and the Premier on how the money should be applied. From July this year some money will be available for three years. Everyone in the area considers Dromana to be a regional area. Unfortunately we are part of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, which is not listed as one of the municipalities that will qualify.

That is disconcerting because the City of Greater Geelong, which is just across the bay, is listed as a regional area. When I look around my area I see rolling hills and bush — it looks like a country area! The situation became even more complex and confusing when the Premier flew down by helicopter to my electorate. He was asked whether the Mornington Peninsula should be classified as a regional area. He was adamant and said, 'Yes, the Mornington Peninsula is a rural area, a regional area, and it should take advantage of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund'. He made that statement to a number of people and was quoted in one of the local newspapers.

I wrote to the Premier to ask him to confirm his statement. Like many pieces of correspondence, firstly it was lost and then it was apparently in the pipeline. I have not had written confirmation from the Premier on the issue. When the guidelines finally came out there was no mention of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council.

On behalf of the people of Dromana, who are looking forward to having a dip into the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, I ask the Premier to clarify whether the area is a regional area. Who was wrong? Was it the

Premier or the Minister for State and Regional Development? We would like to know the answer to those questions because we have some projects we would like to spend money on.

I will leave my comments on that note to allow my colleagues to contribute to the debate.

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — I am pleased to contribute to the debate. This is the Bracks government's 217th day in government, and it is 248 days since we were elected. A lot has happened in Victoria since 18 September last year, and I believe most Victorians would say that many changes for the better have taken place.

I admit to the house that prior to the election I thought it would be an uphill battle for the Labor Party to form government. It is no great shock to anybody that the Victorian community was surprised. Since that time the government has performed exceptionally well and handed down a budget that has been universally acclaimed.

A friend of mine who is a staunch Liberal supporter said that when the Bracks government was first elected he was not certain if it was a legitimate government. He thought we might have won the election by default, but since we won the Burwood by-election he now believes we have become a legitimate government — and that was before Benalla! In my wildest dreams as the member for Ivanhoe I never thought I would be praising the honourable members for Burwood and Benalla and welcoming them to the Labor Party! I may have had a few harsh words for the former honourable member for Burwood, but I will make it up to the current member this session.

The Bracks budget is a budget for the state and for the times. Since the election I am pleased to have my two Independent colleagues from the former Parliament with me — you, Madam Acting Speaker, and the honourable member for Mildura. I was also pleased to welcome the newest Independent member, the honourable member for Gippsland East. I welcome them to the house and believe they have brought stability and openness to the government and the Parliament like never before. I believe I am now safe from Madam Acting Speaker for some time.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Davies) — Order! The honourable member should stick to the appropriation debate. The comments are appreciated, but the budget calls.

Mr LANGDON — The budget has been well received in the Ivanhoe electorate. Prior to the election

of the Bracks government what was the perceived outcome for the Ivanhoe electorate under a Kennett government? The electorate had experienced seven and a half years of the Kennett government, and for four of those years Mr Vin Heffernan, who was the Minister for Small Business and the Minister for Youth Affairs in the first Kennett government, represented Ivanhoe.

Between 1992 and 1996 the Kennett government treated the Ivanhoe electorate with contempt. If it had not, why would I have been elected? If the former government had been the remarkable success it believed it was, why did the people of Ivanhoe turn against the Kennett government with an enormous swing of almost 6 per cent to elect me, a Labor member of Parliament in opposition? The electorate turned against the Kennett government in 1996, and I am pleased to advise the house that it has continued to do so with an increased majority of 5.43 per cent.

The electorate has never been impressed with the Kennett government. It may have voted against the Labor government in 1992, but since that time it has learnt its lesson well and has elected a Labor candidate. I am pleased to advise the house that I am the only member of the Labor Party to win the seat twice. It shows how well the Labor Party is doing and how well it is representing the area.

An important aspect of the Bracks government's election platform is that it came clean and told the electorate what it would do. Members of the government were honest and let people know exactly what our intentions were. That was in stark contrast to the previous government. I have mentioned in the house on more than one occasion the Colosseum Hotel site in West Heidelberg, where prior to the election the previous government promised a new police station would be built. It never eventuated. After my election I discovered that the land had a caveat on it from Mr Bruce Mathieson, which was signed a month before the 1996 election. The government went to the 1996 election with a blatant untruth. What it was planning to do after that, who knows, but since that time one of the biggest campaigns I have run as has been a fight against the development of the Colosseum Hotel site, the introduction of poker machines and Mr Mathieson.

Earlier this week I advised the house that I had attended the liquor licensing commission. I hope the issue has been put to bed. I would be more than pleased to advise the house and the Ivanhoe electorate that we have finally been successful in preventing the introduction of poker machines. It would be to the credit of the Bracks government if I could. The minister's policy on

regional caps on poker machines will also have a bearing on my electorate.

Madam Acting Speaker, you know the electorate of Ivanhoe well, having once lived there. You understand that parts of West Heidelberg and Heidelberg are not high-income areas like Eaglemont, where perhaps residents could afford to play poker machines.

Another issue that has added to the Bracks government's credibility is the restoration and enshrining of the powers of the Auditor-General. The issue of the powers of the Auditor-General played an important part in the electorate of Ivanhoe prior to the 1996 election. I ran several campaigns urging the former government not to dismantle those powers, but the Kennett government refused to listen. It ignored the electorate of Ivanhoe, and did so at its own peril. The Ivanhoe electorate was also concerned about planning. I mention both together because they affect the more conservative areas of my electorate — Eaglemont, Heidelberg and Ivanhoe — where perhaps the biggest concerns were inappropriate overdevelopment and the attack on the powers of the Auditor-General and every other independent authority within the state system.

I am pleased to advise that on Monday, 22 May, a town planning forum was held by the Eaglemont neighbourhood conservation group, which was attended by approximately 100 people. The shadow Minister for Planning and representatives from the Minister for Planning's office attended the meeting with me. People in my electorate still have concerns, but they know this government will act to prevent inappropriate development. Many constituents would like the minister to act more quickly, and I can understand that as a gut reaction. However, they also acknowledge that consultation is an important aspect of the government's approach to changing the planning process. They understand that to act as quickly and as autocratically as the previous government would be wrong and that two wrongs do not make a right. The government is slowly and carefully changing the town planning regulations as a result of public consultation and will address the issues of inappropriate development and heritage in the Ivanhoe electorate.

The biggest swings to me in the last two elections were in the more conservative areas, where there were concerns about planning and the Auditor-General. I outscored the federal figures in the Eaglemont booth — I did exceptionally well.

People in the electorates of Burwood and Benalla have told us that they cannot be taken for granted. They want hard-working local members who will address their

concerns. Your election, Madam Acting Speaker, was the forerunner to many changes which continue. You serve your electorate well, as do the Labor members for Burwood and Benalla. As a result of the Independents Charter Victoria 1999 the government has changed the running of Parliament. For example, the Parliament now sits for more than 50 days — although honourable members may regret that it is still sometimes at 4 o'clock in the morning.

Mr Hamilton — Seems like 100.

Mr LANGDON — It does seem like 100 at times! The government has also changed the running of question time. Under the Kennett government, question time ran for 45 minutes on Tuesdays and 30 minutes on every other day the Parliament sat. Invariably the opposition at the time was able to ask only between four and six questions a day. The Labor Party knew that the more it played up during question time the fewer questions it could ask. Unfortunately the standards in the house have seriously deteriorated since the new arrangements have come into force. The opposition is now able to ask 10 questions, with a minimum of 30 minutes for question time. The opposition appears to be abusing the house and its systems by taking points of order during question time. That is a discredit to all honourable members because the press is picking up on that. The opposition knows it can play up because it will still be able to ask between 5 and 10 questions.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr LANGDON — Had the honourable member for Mordialloc been listening he would have realised that in opposition the Labor Party had only 30 minutes in which to ask questions, and the more it played up the more limited its questions were. That was a telling factor in how its members behaved. Unfortunately it does not apply to this opposition.

The Bracks government has introduced a time for members statements, a very innovative approach for the house. Labor and Independent members tend to use the time to point out fine examples of what people are doing within their electorates. Instead of using the time as a point-scoring exercise, perhaps members of the opposition should try the same approach. Perhaps they do not work hard enough in their electorates to know what their constituents are doing!

One of the Independent members has used the time to move a private member's bill, and although I was not in Parliament for the whole life of the Kennett government, I cannot remember debate on such a bill ever being allowed during its seven and a half years.

A big issue in my electorate is that of the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre. In 1996 it was one of the issues on which I was elected. The Kennett government was keeping secret the privatisation plans for the centre. During its election campaign the Labor Party announced that \$155 million would be spent on redeveloping the hospital, keeping it out of private hands. I am pleased to advise that since the election of the Bracks government the plans for the privatisation of the centre have stopped. My opposition colleagues in the other place are getting itchy to know what the government is doing for the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre. For the past four years the previous government floated idea after idea and now the community is concerned to know, after 217 days of the Bracks government, what solution the government has come up with that the previous government could not achieve in four years.

The Minister for Health is an outstanding minister. He asked for a review, which has been handed to him, and he will make a decision in the near future. Knowing the government and the Minister for Health, I am certain it will be a sensible decision my electorate will endorse. The previous government lied to my electorate about the former repatriation hospital, which is now the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre, and it paid the price — it lost the seat. I am pleased the Ivanhoe electorate is represented by a government member because it is possible for the Bracks government to do the things for the centre that should have been done in the last seven and a half years.

The concerns I pick up as the local member present a challenge for the government. Hospitals were neglected so severely in that period that much of the money allocated is to be used to fix the neglect of the past seven and a half years. The hospital is severely run down — it has been appallingly neglected and a lot of work needs to be done.

Previous opposition speakers have shown hypocrisy — it is hard to believe opposition members would be hypocrites, but they appear to be claiming time and again after question time — —

Mr Leigh — On a point of order, Madam Acting Speaker, it is one of the rules of the Parliament that the word 'hypocrisy' can be used but members in the chamber cannot be called hypocrites. I ask that you remind the member that is a term that cannot be used.

Mr Hulls — On the point of order, my recollection of what the honourable member for Ivanhoe just said is that it would be hard to believe that members of the opposition would be hypocrites. He did not call them

hypocrites but said some of the statements of members of the opposition were hypocritical. He went on to say that it is hard to believe that members of the opposition would be hypocrites.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Davies) — Order! There is no point of order.

Mr LANGDON — Opposition members have said the government has not spent enough money. It is claimed in the adjournment debate and other debates that this money is needed for electorates, for the schools that have been underfunded and so on. At the same time the opposition claims the government is spending too much money and is back to the free-spending days of the Cain–Kirner governments. Opposition members cannot say that the electorates are short of funds — if they are short of funds it begs the question of what the previous government did for them in seven and a half years of government. Perhaps that is why members of the Labor Party are sitting on the government benches and they are not.

Again I refer to the hypocrisy of the opposition in saying on one hand that it wants money and wants the government to fund projects and programs but on the other hand that it does not want us to be free-spending — as the opposition would describe us.

The government has been remarkably responsible with its budget. Under the Treasurer, now the former Treasurer, the commitment to a healthy surplus has been kept as part of the budget process. The budget has also increased funding for schools in my area. Rosanna Primary School which services my electorate will receive \$420 000. It is important that class sizes will be reduced. My oldest daughter, Kate, who is 10, started school under the previous government, and class sizes then were larger than is the goal of the government.

The need for education is a fundamental principle that must be inculcated in our children. As a father of three — two in primary school and one three years from primary school — I am pleased that a Labor government is in power and will treat the children well. I am looking at secondary colleges within my electorate and will be happy to send my children to a state school. State education has been severely neglected.

Recently the honourable member for Dromana spoke about schools and how capital works funding has been reduced by the budget. I point out again the hypocrisy of the previous government, which sold school site after school site — where did the money go?

Mr Leigh — Back into schools.

Mr LANGDON — It did not go back into schools. I am pleased by the amount the government is spending in public health, in education — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Davies) — Order! I remind members that electronic devices are excluded from the house or should be put into silent mode.

Mr LANGDON — I commend the budget to the house.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Wimmera) — I am glad to add my contribution to the debate on the budget on behalf of the Wimmera electorate. The budget has been well received in the Wimmera electorate, but there are some concerns about it.

I refer to the comment of the honourable member for Ivanhoe about the support being shown to the government and remind him of a story I was told over the weekend: if you are ever lucky enough or unlucky enough to win Tattsлото you discover you have a lot of friends and a lot of relations. The government has a war chest of money and a lot of friends. I hope it will look after the friends across Victoria — in four years time others will say they are friends of yours or friends of someone else. The test is with the government.

This is a big-spending budget, and that is how it should be with a \$1.5 billion surplus. I remind the house that the circumstances are different from those that applied when the previous government came to power. It did not have such a surplus but had a \$2 billion deficit and a \$32 billion debt. The windfall that the government has gained and the AAA rating inherited from the previous government enable the government to deliver a number of election promises. As a representative of the people of Wimmera I will lobby hard and keep the government up to task.

I will cover a few matters that have been achieved thanks to the government. In the early stages the government has given support to the Stawell Gift — a major sporting event in country Victoria. Not only did it give financial support but the minister attended the event — —

Mr Dixon — Did he run?

Mr DELAHUNTY — He was not fast enough! A 16-year-old from Albury was faster and he won the gift. It was a successful meeting — the weather was kind, and again I express thanks to the government for its support which I hope will continue, helping to make this major event bigger in the future.

The government has said it will continue the commitment to the upgrade of the facilities at the Dimboola Hospital nursing home. It is badly in need of upgrading, and it is pleasing to see that the government will continue the funding.

The next matter I want to talk about is education. The Horsham Secondary College and the Horsham Special Development School cater for students from a wide area and badly require upgrading. The students are special members of our community. I congratulate the government on its decision to continue the financial support of the special development school.

The Victorian Institute of Dryland Agriculture, commonly known as VIDA, plays an extremely important part in the dryland agricultural area of western Victoria. I am pleased the government has provided funds to upgrade the research and development facilities of the institute at both Horsham and Walpeup. I am sure the honourable member for Mildura is also grateful for those funds so that research and development can continue. R & D plays an important part in the continued upgrading and creation of opportunities for agriculture, which is important for economic development and job creation.

I remind the house that over the past three years more than \$100 million was spent in the Wimmera electorate, including \$27 million to upgrade health facilities and \$24 million to bring natural gas to the area, which had been sought by the electorate for many years. It finally happened under the Kennett government and it is working well. We have to ensure that we fully utilise that cheaper source of power. An amount of \$26 million was spent on the upgrade of infrastructure for water and waste water. Why shouldn't the residents of small and remote towns have facilities appropriate to the health standards in the rest of world, and particularly in other parts of Victoria?

The Australian Centre for Oilseed Research received \$1.8 million. The Wimmera is one of the largest growing areas for oilseed in Australia. It is important that further research at the centre be undertaken into value adding the growing crop, even though it is having some problems at the moment. It is important for the development of the oilseed industry not only in the Wimmera but across Australia.

In the past three years about \$5 million was spent to improve roads at Stawell, Warracknabeal, Kalkee, and Halls Gap. Most councils received funding to improve road maintenance. The federal and state governments introduced a program to standardise rail from Adelaide to Melbourne. By doing that it disfranchised the rail

lines north of Dimboola and Murtoon and also south from Ararat to Portland. I am delighted that the previous government was able to obtain those funds during a difficult time. It cost about \$20 million to standardise the spur lines so that grain and other freight would not have to travel on local roads and council roads to Portland, but could be kept on rail. It is great to see heavy freight on rail. Again, I thank the Kennett government for doing that.

Mr Kilgour — I did not think anything happened in country Victoria!

Mr DELAHUNTY — I have a bit more to go. Some \$8.4 million was spent on higher education at Stawell and Horsham. The upgrading of the TAFE facilities of the Ballarat University has created excellent amenities not only for staff but also for the students. More than \$6 million went into upgrading and building new school facilities at Nhill, Kaniva and Stawell. I hope the Minister for Education can spare some time to visit the Wimmera electorate to open the new facilities.

An amount of \$3.2 million was allocated to upgrade aged care facilities at Warracknabeal. A new base hospital was built at a cost of \$12.5 million to service the Wimmera region. Also, \$1.15 million went into the redevelopment and upgrading of the Kaniva hospital. I was pleased to see the Minister for Aged Care at Kaniva to open that facility. It was a fantastic day for the people of Kaniva. Some \$4.8 million went into allied health care at the Wimmera Base Hospital; \$1 million was spent on upgrading tourist facilities in the Grampians; the Community Support Fund provided moneys for the arts and youth, and also facilities at the Wimmera field days, which are among the biggest field days in country Victoria and Australia.

The embankment at Lake Wartook was upgraded at a cost of \$10.5 million. That is an important reservoir in the Wimmera, particularly for Horsham. There was a concern that there would be major problems if the wall collapsed. Also, \$1.7 million went into a water treatment plant at Edenhope. At the moment there is a problem because Lake Wallace is so low in water. The locals currently need water rather than a water treatment plant. Some \$2 million went to improve water pressure facilities at Rainbow, Dimboola, Minyip and Rupanyup.

The last major item I wish to refer to is an amount of \$13.5 million that went into water treatment facilities at Stawell, Halls Gap, Pomonal and Ararat. I am pleased to see in the chamber the honourable member for Ripon whose electorate covers part of that area. The funds have been spent in the Grampians Water catchment so

we are both pleased with those water development facilities. It is certainly beneficial to the residents of Halls Gap, Stawell and the like. It gives greater opportunities for not only the treatment of waste water but also for the economic development of industry, particularly the vineyards.

I turn now to budget paper no. 2. Honourable members have heard much about the budget. It has been fairly well received in the community but I raise some concerns. The first relates to the comments of the honourable member for Ivanhoe about working with the private sector. Page 142 of budget paper no. 2, under the heading 'Public-private partnerships', states:

The government is promoting infrastructure spending through a responsible use of the resources of both the public and private sectors. Hence, a policy on the use of public-private partnerships to provide public infrastructure and related services is being developed.

I welcome that statement because there are many opportunities for that in regional Victoria, particularly in the Wimmera. I refer also to a major concern for my electorate. Page 154 of budget paper no. 2 under the heading 'Total cash surplus available for financing activities' indicates that this year the budget surplus will be \$628 million; in 2001-02 it will be \$47 million. Guess what? In 2002-03 it will be minus \$55 million; and in 2003-04 it will be minus \$135 million. Our total cash surplus goes from a big positive to a big negative. That is the worry of people in my electorate. The government says it wants to be an open, accountable and responsible government so I hope it can address those concerns.

Page 175, under the heading 'Statement of risks', states:

The budget operating position, over the entire forward estimates period, is likely to be highly sensitive to changes in the levels of economic activity ... or wages.

Further down the page it states:

In contrast, the budget operating position appears relatively less sensitive to fluctuations in consumer prices and interest rates.

Page 179, under the heading 'Sensitivity to prices', states:

A 1 per cent rise in the level of consumer prices is estimated to improve the operating position by \$24 million in 2000-01.

It would be good if that could happen.

The next item on page 179 of budget paper no. 2 is a real worry. Although we would all like a little more money, the worry for the government is that it must try

to balance its budget. Under the heading, 'Sensitivity to wages' it states:

A 1 per cent rise in the level of wages is expected to lead to a deterioration in the operating surplus of \$71 million in 2000-01 ...

That major concern will make it difficult for the government to balance its budget. I wish the government all the best in its attempts to do so.

At page 269, under the heading of 'Fast rail links to regional centres' it states:

The government is contributing \$80 million to reduce travel times between Melbourne and the key regional centres of Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong and Traralgon.

Guess what? Those areas are all represented by Labor members!

People in my area are talking about the continuation of the rail line with Sprinter trains running from Ballarat to Ararat. Again, I hope the government can make that happen. Why can't the government continue the Sprinter trains that operate to Ararat? The government has talked so much about rail travel, let's see it do that now — it has the money.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DELAHUNTY — Over seven years the former coalition government fixed up the financial position that the previous Labor government had left, so this government has the money to do something.

Also on page 269, budget paper no. 2 has an item headed 'Regional and metropolitan arterial road links'. It is about the only statement about roads that I could find. It states that:

Key projects include the next stage of the Calder duplication to Bendigo (Carlsruhe), Narre Warren Road North duplication and the Pascoe Vale Road duplication.

Money has been allocated in the budget for the road accident black spot program in rural and regional Victoria. I hope some of that \$120 million will be allocated outside the regional centres to which I have already referred.

It is a bit like the proposed cattle underpasses, which are to be commended — when do we get details? Do we have to wait for seven months? Honourable members waited for nearly six months to get details about the rural infrastructure package.

If we look a bit further on, the budget paper — the government's own document — refers to sport and recreation, which is very important. I know the

Attorney-General is a bit of a fitness freak and that he rides horses.

Mr Hulls — Don't be cheeky!

Mr DELAHUNTY — Cheeky is the horse he was supposed to have ridden!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DELAHUNTY — It is very important that the government provides improved facilities for sport and recreation right across rural Victoria. But at page 289 nine projects are listed: at Ballarat, Bendigo, Castlemaine and Seymour — again not outside the ring around regional centres. I would love to get some money out of the sport and recreation fund for some projects in my area. For example, some of the very large shires with small populations have major infrastructure problems with their swimming pools and would love some funding from that program, but details are not available at this stage. I hope the government will address the issue. Another possibility is funding for the proposed leisure centre at Horsham.

Roads are a major concern in my electorate. One I want to talk about is the Wail-Polkemmet road. As a result of the changing environment this road is being used as a major freight corridor by gypsum trucks, tourist traffic to the Little Desert, and large trucks accessing the new Dimboola grain terminal.

The second road of major concern is the Dimboola-Minyip road which is a major east-west thoroughfare which domestic, interstate and tourist vehicles and coaches access. Heavy commercial vehicles and school buses, cars and caravans use that road — it badly needs to be widened and upgraded to cater for that major upsurge of traffic. Both those roads could be funded under the old Better Roads program.

Fences are a major concern in my electorate, particularly those around the national park. During the previous Parliament the Law Reform Committee conducted a review of the Fences Act, the report on which is with the minister. The Laharam Landcare group, whose members are very responsible, is seeking government support to erect a fence along the national park perimeter. That initiative will have a significant impact not only on the environment but also on the economy of the local community because it will create jobs.

As was made clear in a debate in this place two weeks ago, the government does not support the retention of the Essendon Airport, which is vital to regional Victoria. It is disappointing that the government will

not allow the airport to be developed, given the many opportunities that are available, as we have seen with the development of Tullamarine airport.

Water supply is another major concern in my electorate. The Wimmera–Mallee pipeline requires further development. That major project so far has improved the security of the water supply and allowed for environmental flows down the Wimmera River.

I have spoken to each of the five councils in my electorate about the budget. The Shire of Hindmarsh is seeking funding for roads and a visitor information centre at Nhill. The Rural City of Horsham is seeking \$2.1 million for sewerage and water infrastructure work at its Burnt Creek industrial site. It is also seeking funding for roads and \$2.5 million for a proposed leisure centre. The Shire of West Wimmera, which is a small shire right on the South Australian border, is seeking funding for roads and for the construction of the Johnny Muller interpretive centre. I point out to the house that Johnny Muller was the first Aboriginal cricketer to play for Australia.

An Honourable Member — At Harrow.

Mr DELAHUNTY — At Harrow, thank you. The Shire of Yarriambiack is seeking funding for roads and the continued development of the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline. The Shire of Northern Grampians is seeking funding for roads; for vision coordination at the community level — that is, for identifying the visions and desires of local residents; and for the capital refurbishment of heritage buildings. It is also seeking government funding for information technology (IT) support services. The Minister for State and Regional Development has been doing some work in the area to raise community awareness about IT, and the shire wants that to continue. It is also seeking capital improvement funding to undertake a study with a view to building bike paths.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Davies) — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — I support the appropriation bill, which implements the 2000–01 budget of the Bracks Labor government. It is always a pleasure to speak after the honourable member for Wimmera, as he and I went to the same school. I am sure he would agree that it is a great budget for Victoria and for Burwood.

It is a budget that delivers on the government's commitments time and again. All the promises that Labor made during the 1999 election campaign have been implemented, perhaps with the exception of the

footy tipping competition. It deals with the need for additional funding for health, schools and community safety. It is not about core or non-core promises. It is not a question of saying maybe or maybe not; and it is not a question of saying, 'Sorry we couldn't do it'. The budget delivers over and over again.

The budget is consistent with the promises Labor made in the last state election and in the Burwood by-election — that is, it is about responsible financial management; growing Victoria; better services, especially in education, health and policing; and the restoration of a democratic, open and accountable government. The budget is financially responsible and socially progressive. That is what Victorians wanted and what the people of Burwood wanted, and it is what the government has delivered.

I will look at some of the budget issues that relate specifically to my electorate, the first of which is the budget's financial responsibility. My constituents are well aware of that and of my own strong interest in good governance, strong and sensible financial management and appropriate budgetary practices, all of which are encapsulated in the budget. I spent many years managing large budgets as a senior manager in the federal public sector. I did so either on a corporate-responsibility basis, managing budgets of well over \$1 billion, or on a program basis, where I managed hundreds of projects worth over \$500 million a year.

The voters in Burwood knew that. They also remembered the video we sent them during the by-election campaign in which Steve Bracks told them while discussing financial responsibility with me that he knew my views on good fiscal management. He promised a balanced and fair budget. That is exactly what the budget has delivered to Burwood and Victoria.

All the initiatives are fully funded and all the promises are kept. A substantial budget sector operating surplus of \$592 million is estimated for 2000–01, as well as an average surplus of more than \$450 million in the following three years. The honourable member for Wimmera talked about negative cash figures for the final two out years, but I am not sure where he got his figures from. For the same period the estimated budget sector operating surplus, which is calculated based on all the assumptions, will be \$401 million at its lowest point. However, sensible financial management allows for a range of scenarios: in the worst-case scenario the operating surplus will still be more than \$100 million in any of the out years. I was a bit surprised about that. I am as concerned as the honourable member about

financial management. However, the operating surplus is specified in chart 2.1 on page 15 of budget paper 2.

Chart 2.2 on page 17 refers to real budget sector capital stock, which is an important measure. That is estimated to grow from \$37 billion in 2000–01 to \$39.5 billion in 2003–04. Any good accountant knows that stock as well as cash flow has to be looked at on an accrual basis.

The budget is about more than fiscal responsibility. The government has made open and careful provision for superannuation liabilities. It aims to fully cover all such liabilities much earlier than previously planned, bringing it forward a number of years. That is out in the open in this budget, whereas in the past one had to burrow deep to find even a mention of the superannuation provisions.

Steve Bracks has kept his promises to Burwood, just as I have kept mine. We have delivered! I will also comment on the delivery of services, which is what Labor went to the people on at the state election. We did the same during the Frankston East supplementary election, the Burwood by-election and, most recently — and after the budget had been brought down — the Benalla by-election.

Labor talked again and again about the need to deliver long overdue improvements in education, health and community safety. The budget delivers in those areas, in spades. As promised, new services worth \$426 million are being provided, and a further \$211 million has been allocated for the unavoidable priority delivery of certain services.

The budget delivers more than Labor promised. The government looked at what could be lacking in technical and further education, for example, and allocated funds to meet urgent priority needs.

Education is a key area for my constituents. They suffered a great deal during the seven years of the Kennett government as a result of losing teachers and schools. They never knew where they were with the previous government. A heavy cloud of uncertainty hung over their schools. Now the people of Burwood will share in \$165 million, which will be allocated over the next four years to lower average class sizes from prep to year 2.

I can already see the changes in Burwood. I have visited all the schools in the electorate to talk to teachers, parents and school councils. Already average class sizes from prep to year 2 are coming down. Based on my discussions with principals, on my reckoning they have come down by an average of one child per

class. Average class sizes have also come down in years 4 to 6.

Under the administration of the Kennett government there was a huge number of classes with more than 30 students, but now the number is falling rapidly. Having visited those Burwood schools, I can assure the house that there is a new spirit of confidence and enthusiasm in the air. Those schools are also sharing in the infrastructure funding.

I have assisted many schools in my electorate with their applications for funding for new infrastructure. I have also helped them with getting their programs up and running and with various negotiations with the regional offices and facilities branch.

It was announced in the budget that Solway Primary School would receive a new staff administration area, a new multipurpose hall, a new library and new art and craft areas. There was an enormous degree of scepticism at the school because the school community was not able to believe any of the promises given in the past. Members of the school community kept asking me to have the promises put in writing. They could not believe the promises made in the past, but this budget has delivered this government's promises.

The budget also provides for a new administration area, general purpose facilities and a library at Wattle Park Primary School. Only last week following my specific intervention through the department, the final hurdle was cleared for the tender process to begin.

The budget goes on to provide for a new hall and canteen at Hartwell Primary School. The school community has matched the government's contribution of just over \$200 000. Some \$650 000 will either be raised by the school community or the school council will borrow it. That is an absolutely magnificent achievement by the local community. It is building on the assistance provided by the government.

The budget also provides for a new long-term agreement for new facilities to be hired by Glen Iris Primary School — namely, a hall and music rooms. I helped to facilitate that agreement. The plan is to use the new multipurpose facility to be built next door by the Uniting Church.

Funding in the budget for health services for the elderly will also be well appreciated by my electorate. However, many young families are now also moving into the area. Only a couple of days ago I was talking to a principal of one of the primary schools who said that when he contacted nine preschools in the area last year to try to recruit new prep students for this year he was

told that there were around 350 to 360 children in those preschools. When he contacted the preschools this year — the school had its open day the day before yesterday — he was told there were just over 500 children in the preschools. Clearly, many young families are moving into the area and a growth pattern is starting to occur in my electorate.

I share the concerns of both the elderly and young families about health services. Health came up as the no. 1 issue right across the board during the election campaign and the subsequent by-election. The government is delivering on what it promised during the election campaign, and more health services will be delivered across the board. A whole range of new health programs will be delivered by the budget, including more funding for health education, hospitals, attracting more nurses into the system, better ambulance services and a whole range of other activities. This winter 10 additional beds will go to the Box Hill Hospital. They will be used in conjunction with Maroondah Hospital. During winter waiting lists in hospitals blow out unless something is done, because people catch illnesses like colds and tend to stay in hospital a bit longer than they might in summer. I will continue to work with the community and the Box Hill Hospital to further improve health services over the next few years.

My constituents in Burwood have particularly welcomed the government's commitment to improve dental services. We all know what happened to dental services under the federal coalition government, which has the same dog-eat-dog economic philosophy as did the failed Kennett government. The federal government withdrew \$240 million from the dental health services scheme. The Victorian government will put funding back into those services. My constituents in Burwood go mainly to the Whitehorse Community Health Service in Box Hill and the Monash health service in Clayton for dental services. I visited the dental service in Box Hill last week. It had one chair, but the provision of its services for pensioners and small kids will be extended into the night.

Under the Kennett government the waiting list time was four years. Mr Kennett was the member for Burwood, so that is most surprising. The waiting time will be reduced rapidly with the injection of funding from the government — it is expected to halve in the next six months. The additional funding going into dental services for kids, particularly those in years 9, 10 and above, and for elderly citizens will bring down the number of people on waiting lists. The community health centre in Box Hill is now starting to plan for that

extended dental service, and plans are also afoot to extend the provision of services in Clayton.

I will be delighted to help with any plans to extend and improve those services for Burwood. I circulated a report to all my constituents just after the budget was brought down. Many of them contacted me to specifically praise the additional funding for dental services. It is obviously an area that is of strong interest to people.

My constituents have also welcomed the transport programs provided for in the budget. One of those programs is the extension of tram services from Mont Albert to Box Hill and from Burwood to Knox. They have been very well received, particularly the transport interchange facilities that will be developed both in Knox and in Box Hill, both of which will become hubs for buses, trains and trams.

People say, 'So much for promises'. I talked to people about that at times during the by-election campaign, and they were very sceptical, but I said, 'It is in the budget. It is there, and we will deliver it'. Once again, we are delivering in spades in the transport area.

A further area of strong interest to Burwood constituents is public housing. Many of my constituents in Box Hill, Ashburton, Ashwood, Chadstone, Alamein and Jordanville live in public housing — and they all voted for me! The issue of well-maintained, affordable, accessible public housing is strong in my electorate. My constituents living in public housing suffered seven years of neglect under the previous member for Burwood. I have talked before about the neglect of those people.

On day one of the Burwood by-election campaign I dragged the Premier, Steve Bracks, down to the blocks of flats at Alamein–Ashburton. Nothing had been done to them for seven years, and I doubt they had ever been visited by the previous Premier. I showed the Premier the neglect and said, 'This is what we have to fix up'. I am pleased to say that in the budget, following years of neglect under the stewardship of the previous member for Burwood, they will be fixed up. The Alamein–Ashburton public housing site is set for redevelopment.

The project has been welcomed by the local residents because it will remove a social disaster and eyesore and replace it with well-designed, integrated public housing. I am sure that will happen right across the board in public housing. I have been working with the local community in Ashburton, the minister and Eastern Tenancy Housing, which is a public housing advocacy

group that is doing a magnificent job. I have also spoken with local community groups at the Alamein Community House about how to ensure the best possible services for people in public housing.

Another important area of the budget for the people of Burwood is community safety. Many honourable members have talked about that. The important thing is that it is being delivered in the budget. There are already more police in Victoria than we have had in recent years, so police numbers have turned a corner. The budget, by providing for 800 more police officers to be available to the people, including the people of the Burwood electorate, ensures a better outcome; and it also delivers on better consultation about community safety.

I mention in brief the considerable interest in the budget among small businesses in my electorate. They are already all suffering under the effects of the goods and services tax, and as a result will all, I am sure, vote Labor at the next federal election. They welcome the review of the business tax system in Victoria and the tax cuts of at least \$400 million promised over the next four years. They are eager to participate in the review process, which is due to report by the end of the year.

A lot of community groups based in my electorate, including representative groups such as the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Association of Victoria, the Autism Association, the Chinese elderly citizens association and the elderly citizens club in Ashburton have received increased funding and increased support from the Bracks government for people with disabilities and elderly citizens.

My final point is that the budget helps restore democracy. I was amazed to hear the shadow Treasurer saying the audit report seemed to be qualified. Hasn't she ever read an audit report? The audit report on the budget is a clearance by the Auditor-General. That is what an audit report is. I am amazed the shadow Treasurer seems not to understand that.

The budget is all about bringing democracy back to Victoria. That is what I campaigned on, and that is what the budget delivers in spades.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Davies) — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Sitting suspended 6.28 p.m. until 8.03 p.m.

Mr SPRY (Bellarine) — It is my pleasure to rise and make a contribution to the Appropriation (2000/2001) Bill. Rarely, if ever, has an incoming government in a parliamentary democracy been

presented with a financial windfall of a magnitude of that available to the fledgling Bracks government. The \$1.76 billion budget operating surplus of 1998–99, most of which has already been applied to either debt reduction or to reducing unfunded liabilities in statutory bodies, plus the estimated \$1.3 billion 1999–2000 surplus, has presented the new Bracks government with nearly \$2 billion of unfettered opportunity.

Honourable members should compare that with the position with which the incoming coalition government was confronted in October 1992 — a daunting \$32 billion hard-core debt and a \$2 billion budget deficit. When Labor took government nearly a decade earlier the \$11 billion debt it inherited had taken 150 years to accumulate, yet it almost trebled in 10 years of that government's occupation of the Treasury benches. It was \$32 billion of hard-core cash debt, together with a further \$30 billion plus of unfunded liabilities associated with government bodies.

Labor has now inherited a cashed-up economy courtesy of the tough and responsible decisions taken by the former coalition government and the sacrifices made by a largely understanding community. Members of the community knew what the problem was and they responded well to it. With any financially conservative administration, however, it is always difficult to judge the timing for the loosening of the purse strings. The former coalition government was probably judged as excessively conservative, as one would expect of a responsible government. It underestimated the revenues being generated by a booming economy and not even the Treasury anticipated the windfall receipts that were flowing into its coffers towards the end of last year.

The Bracks Labor government should have the grace to acknowledge the extraordinary job done by the Kennett administration in restoring Victoria's financial reputation, and the equally extraordinary commitment at the time by Victorians in recapturing their pride and self-respect. That result was in no way attributable to the Bracks Labor government that is now sitting on the Treasury benches. To the contrary, it should never be forgotten that when the Kirner government was wreaking economic devastation on the state and was blowing Victoria's economy to kingdom come, Premier Bracks was a Kirner adviser. I do not think the people of Victoria will ever forget that indictment of the Premier.

Labor has come to the Treasury benches with the state's coffers overflowing. What has Labor done with the money? Predictably its no. 1 priority in framing the budget has been to try to convince Victorians that the government is a responsible economic manager. That is

a pretty big ask given its appalling reputation. In fact, Labor is meeting most of its pre-election commitments and promises. I say 'most' because there are a couple of glaring examples of that not being the case in the Bellarine electorate, to which I will return later. The budget is therefore necessarily conservative and forecasts a surplus.

However, the so-called surplus is qualified. The Premier, who was Treasurer when the budget was delivered, warns in budget paper no. 1 that the key economic indicators of economic growth — population trends and business investment — which in the lead-up to the election he promised would continue to improve are not expected to grow and expand as they did under the former coalition administration. His lack of confidence is shared by the Auditor-General, who in paying lip-service to the Premier's promise that the Auditor-General would audit a surplus and report to Parliament on budget day, could only say in his letter to honourable members, and I quote from page 228 of budget paper no. 2 :

As a result —

this refers to a forecast based on future events and actions —

I am not in a position to obtain the level of assurance necessary to express a positive opinion on those assumptions and the accompanying forecast information included in the estimated financial statements. Accordingly, an opinion is not expressed on whether the forecast will be achieved.

By those words the Premier is gonged out on two counts. Firstly, so much for open and accountable government when the Auditor-General's comments are so restricted and guarded. Secondly, what the Auditor-General does say reflects little confidence in the budget predictions in any case.

That lack of confidence is shared by many businesses, as surveys conducted by the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry show. They were published in *Hansard* following the contribution by the shadow Treasurer. Perhaps that was due to Labor's backflips on promised tax cuts. Perhaps it was due to the realisation that the industrial landscape under a militant union movement is likely to go unchecked by a compliant Bracks government. Perhaps it was due simply to an inherent lack of business confidence in Labor's ability to shape a buoyant economy. Whatever the reason business is not showing much confidence in the new Bracks Labor government.

The reaction to the Bracks government's first budget in my region has been reserved. It has been judged to have failed to have the expected impact or to have provided

any inspiration in the electorate and the region generally.

Mr Trezise interjected.

Mr SPRY — Unlike the honourable member for Geelong, I get around the electorate and speak to a vast variety of people. There is concern about budget sector blow-outs and about Labor's ability to contain public sector salary increases to its predicted average of 3.5 per cent. I do not think many people believe that. In light of the industrial unrest that is prevalent throughout the construction industry and the anticipated unrest in the manufacturing industry, who in their right mind — I include even honourable members on the Treasury benches — would expect the anticipated salary and wages rise in the public sector to be contained at 3.5 per cent? That is simply not realistic.

In the Geelong region there is more concern about a slowing economy. The *Geelong Economic Indicators Bulletin 1998–99* revealed that the area had a buoyant economy and reflected that there was great optimism in the area. I suggest that the publication will act as a benchmark as the years go on. At page 1, under the heading 'Regional highlights' the economic report states:

During the 1998–99 financial year the Geelong economy experienced strong growth with key indicators, such as the value of building activity and Port of Geelong trade, again at record levels.

Employment trends complement the economic indicators, with unemployment dropping and the demand for labour by local employers increasing.

Population is growing at a fast pace, with City of Greater Geelong records indicating that at least 1000 families moved into the city during the year.

That is an enormous growth in confidence in the Geelong region.

An Honourable Member — They should have had the new numberplates then, not now.

Mr SPRY — I do not think the new numberplates were needed. The confidence in the coalition's administration at the time was enough to bring people back to the Geelong region. The report continues:

Investor confidence was reaffirmed with a number of major organisations choosing Geelong as the ideal location for their industrial and commercial pursuits.

...

Geelong's reputation as a world-class centre for the aerospace industry received a major boost with a number of investment announcements.

Under the heading 'Building activity', the report further states:

For the second consecutive year expenditure in residential and commercial construction reached record levels, peaking at \$332.8 million.

Flipping through the pages of the economic report I see that on page 4 under the heading 'Tourism', it states:

Geelong's reputation as one of Victoria's premier holiday destinations was supported by City of Greater Geelong estimates showing the overnight population of the region swells from its permanent number of 187 010 people to 264 625 on peak holiday nights.

They are the sorts of economic indicators the previous government left as a legacy to the region and the people of Geelong when it left office so unexpectedly last year.

I turn to the effects the budget will have on the people of my electorate of Bellarine. The budget and forward estimates are distinguished in Bellarine not so much for what is included in the figures as for what is omitted. I focus on three specific pre-election commitments by the government.

The first was for a 24-hour police station for the Bellarine Peninsula. The honourable member for Geelong looks away and shakes his head. He should look away in absolute disgust because his government is turning its back on what it committed to the people of the Bellarine electorate. That broken promise does not even exist in the budget papers. The second commitment was for a \$3 million upgrade for the Ocean Grove campus of the Bellarine Secondary College. The third commitment was for \$1.5 million for gas pipeline extensions to Portarlington, Indented Head and St Leonards.

Firstly, I will focus on the proposed 24-hour police station on the Bellarine Peninsula. The publication entitled 'Action plan for Bellarine' published by the Labor candidate for my seat at the election, Kerri Erler, refers to community safety. It is puzzling how suddenly there are no more problems with safety-related issues at Geelong and all crime has disappeared from the region since the Labor Party came to office. That is no coincidence. The government was being hassled to death by the Police Association and the media. The beat-ups that were promoted by various elements of the Labor Party in the lead-up to the election had to be seen and heard to be believed.

Labor promised a 24-hour police station for the Bellarine Peninsula. The promise of a 24-hour police station is contained in Labor's pre-election documents,

which were apparently scrutinised by Access Economics, but where is it in this year's budget?

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr SPRY — It does not exist. The honourable member for Melton is laughing his head off. He knows when it is coming; he knows very well it will be part of a pork-barrelling exercise when Labor next faces the electorate three years from now. He knows what Labor has up its sleeve. That is the sort of cynicism that Labor projects in the electorate. However, the people of Bellarine will not put up with that nonsense because they can see through the men and women who occupy the Treasury benches as if they were not even there.

Where in the budget papers is the \$3 million commitment to upgrade the Ocean Grove campus of the Bellarine Secondary College? Where is it in the forward estimates? It simply does not exist. Is it a myth? I know it was dragged out of thin air in a pork-barrelling exercise that would have put any out-of-favour political party to shame. The exercise that was conducted in the electorate of Bellarine by the Labor Party was an absolute disgrace. I have never seen the likes of it before and I am never likely to see it again.

Finally, I come to the biggest pork barrel of all. I refer to the \$1.5 million commitment to extend the gas pipeline to the people of Portarlington, Indented Head and St Leonards. I could not embrace a concept more enthusiastically. Since 1993 I have worked at trying to encourage commercial enterprises to extend the gas pipeline right through to those cinderella towns in the Bellarine Peninsula, but without success. I worked as hard as I possibly could. But what did Labor do? It repeated the exercise of the 1980s to ensure it had a chance of regaining the seat of Bellarine.

Bellarine has always been a swinging seat. Labor wanted to ensure its chances of retaining it when my predecessor, Graham Ernst, occupied it, so it channelled gas through to the townships of Drysdale and Clifton Springs in one of the most blatant pork-barrelling exercises I have ever seen. Labor has done it again, but this time it has added the additional extraordinary commitment of agreeing to subsidise a private enterprise business to the tune of \$1.5 million to encourage it to put the gas through.

No-one should misunderstand me: I have no argument with that. As I said, I have worked with the people of Bellarine since 1993. The decision is a repetition of the former Labor government's pork-barrelling efforts. It sets an interesting precedent for all the towns on the

fringe of the gas pipeline network. Labor is now fair game so far as the subsidising of the private distribution companies is concerned. I invite the honourable members for Cranbourne, Pakenham, Evelyn, Polwarth, South Barwon, Narracan, Seymour, Gisborne, Bendigo East and Bendigo West, Ballarat East and Ballarat West, and Ripon to have a go. It's open slather, because Labor is open for business. Any member with a small enough margin will get it. All you have to do is open your mouth and ask.

In conclusion, the budget potential remains untapped. The uncommitted \$1 billion in the Growing Victoria reserve and the inadequate but nevertheless significant Regional Infrastructure Development Fund give the government a unique opportunity, courtesy of the former government, to provide infrastructure to assist and encourage the Victorian industry and business sectors. Let us hope the money is not squandered to placate the demands of sectional interests or used as a slush fund for the government's re-election campaign.

As I said, the funds are there thanks to the former Kennett government. The Bracks government must use them to grow the state and increase the prosperity of all Victorians.

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — I am trying to catch my breath after the whirlwind speech of the honourable member for Bellarine. He seemed to send a mixed message. One minute he was complaining that the new Bracks government did not give his electorate enough, and the next minute he was complaining about there being too much pork-barrelling in Bellarine. I struggled to understand where he was coming from, although it is clear he is disenchanted about being on the opposition benches. When one looks at the Bracks budget, which I am pleased to be speaking on, one sees why the people of Victoria voted the Labor Party into office and why the honourable member for Bellarine sits on the other side.

I am pleased to have been elected to represent the people of Ballarat East. The electorate is diverse: it encompasses not only part of the City of Ballarat but also such significant rural and regional centres and towns as Daylesford, Ballan, Meredith and Elaine. I am also pleased to stand in this place as the newly elected member for Ballarat East and say that the Bracks Labor government has delivered on the promises it made during the election campaign and that it will continue to listen to the concerns of my constituents. Despite my stature, I am able to stand tall!

I refer initially to the funding the budget delivers for education, health and community safety in my

electorate. Because the government represents all Victorians it will make up for the losses experienced by regional Victoria under the former Kennett government.

I was pleased to see that \$165 million has been allocated to employ more teachers in primary schools so class sizes can be reduced. The residents of Ballan are excited to have received \$445 000 for the further development of Ballan Primary School. Likewise, my constituents in Daylesford are pleased to have received \$62 000 to continue work on the science block at Daylesford Secondary College. The budget allocates funding for specific work at other schools in my electorate, and I look forward to work being done on more schools in the years to come.

Another aspect I am pleased about — as, no doubt, is the honourable member for Hawthorn — is that institutes of technical and further education (TAFE) across the state will receive \$127 million. The School of Mines TAFE campus is part of the University of Ballarat. The TAFE division will receive significant funding to enable it to meet its regional needs, and the staff, management and students are very excited about the proposed improvements to their facilities. They are well aware of the extent to which those facilities were eroded during the seven years of the previous government. The range of courses will be widened and the infrastructure in which those courses will be offered will be improved.

I turn now to health. I am pleased about the allocation of \$6 million for the completion of work at the Ballarat Base Hospital and the Queen Elizabeth Centre, both of which offer the people of Ballarat a great range of services. Now those facilities will be even greater!

Along with other people in the region I have been crying out for years for more funding for MICA ambulance facilities. I want to see those facilities made available on a 24-hour basis right across the state, not just in the metropolitan area — and that will now happen in Ballarat. It was disturbing to learn that people who were injured in road accidents in regional Victoria had a lower chance of arriving at hospital alive than those injured in accidents in the metropolitan area. The residents of regional Victoria will now have a better chance of survival because of the provision of that 24-hour MICA ambulance service.

The budget contains some good news for regional projects. Funding has been provided for the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, and \$5 million has been earmarked for vocational education and training and post-compulsory education facilities. The

honourable member for Ballarat West and I have been pleased to work with members of the Ballarat education community over the past few weeks, and we will be working with them in the months ahead to finalise this exciting opportunity for Ballarat, which will benefit students in their post-compulsory years by assisting them to move into employment.

That \$5 million will be of great value. It will enable exciting things to happen by facilitating coordination between the TAFE sector, government and non-government secondary schools and adult education and group training centres, all of which offer courses in the vocational education and training and post-compulsory education sectors. Students will gain the advantage of having access to improved facilities, backed up with increased funding through the post-compulsory education grants, which will be announced later.

The Camp Street project, a central Ballarat infrastructure project, has been allocated \$13 million. It will help to bring new life to the city because students from the University of Ballarat will use the new performing arts centre in Camp Street and the arts gallery will extend into the Camp Street precinct. It will be an imaginative art culture precinct that will inject a lot of life into the central business area of the city. It will be of benefit in invigorating the city and in providing opportunities for economic development. It will help the people of Ballarat realise that Ballarat is a great place to live.

The Eastern Oval upgrade has been allocated \$200 000 and the Eureka Pool has been allocated \$50 000. They will enhance the facilities in Ballarat. Although the community of Ballarat has been looking for an upgrade of those facilities for some time it did not happen under the previous government, despite regular applications to the Community Support Fund. Under the Kennett government there was knock-back after knock-back, but now money is being allocated for the upgrade of the Eastern Oval and the Eureka Pool. It is no wonder my community is excited about the budget.

Part of the reason the people of Ballarat voted for the Bracks government was because \$80 million is being allocated to reduce the rail travel time to Melbourne. They are excited about the fact that the money will be allocated during the government's current term. However, not all the money is being allocated to the Melbourne-Ballararat route. My colleague the honourable member for Geelong — and perhaps the honourable member for Bellarine — will be pleased that some of the money will be allocated to improve the rail service to Geelong. Perhaps the honourable

member for Bellarine will not want an improvement in the service.

Black spot issues have been of great concern to the Ballarat community. The poor condition of country roads was not addressed by the former Kennett government. However, \$240 million has been allocated in the budget for black spot projects across the state, half of which must be spent in regional Victoria. The \$120 million for regional black spot programs will be extremely useful.

I turn now to issues that my colleague the honourable member for Ballarat West and other honourable members have not commented on. I am the Parliamentary Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment and I will refer to some of the programs that are administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. They are terrific initiatives that have not been highlighted as strongly as issues such as education, health and regional infrastructure.

Honourable members will be pleased to note that the Bracks government recognises that water is an important issue in regional Victoria. The catchment management levy introduced by the Kennett government was unpopular because it was imposed from on high and it was inequitable. People also recognised that the former government had cut back funding for catchment management authorities. The Bracks government has committed \$12.9 million in the coming year to replace the catchment management levy. The money will come from consolidated revenue. The money was collected through taxes in the first place and people should not have to pay twice.

Another \$45 million was allocated in the budget for stormwater and sewerage works in recognition of the fact that we need to ensure that wherever we can, silt traps are put in place, or other measures to stop rubbish going into catchment areas to provide better quality water. The new Bracks initiative will assist in providing cleaner, better water for Victorians.

I turn to irrigation. The government realises that in rural Victoria a number of irrigation issues need to be addressed. The honourable member for Benambra will be aware of the irrigation issues, as you will be aware, Mr Acting Speaker, in northern Victoria, such as salinity and a range of other hydrology problems. Some \$30 million has been allocated to do more work on ensuring that agricultural practices can be sustained and that we gain more information on these issues so that we can act appropriately to ensure ongoing water flows in the future.

The government has been concerned to address the Snowy River flow issue, and in this budget has allocated \$12.3 million to provide for better flows down the Snowy as part of the rehabilitation plan. The Snowy River rehabilitation plan will be enacted this year, and the government recognises that we can save water in our irrigation systems by implementing clear initiatives that will be of long-term benefit.

I turn to the issue of forests, which people in my electorate have been concerned about. A number of people in regional Victoria live close to Crown land forestry areas. Every summer they worry about the possibility of bushfires. Some \$31.43 million has been allocated to assist with maintaining fire preparedness by ensuring that fire tracks are cleared to provide ready access to fires and that fuel management practices are kept up so that fire authorities can quickly deal with fires. The risk of fires is reduced by having fire management programs in place ahead of time.

Some \$6 million has been allocated to upgrade equipment for people dealing with Department of Natural Resources and Environment land. That will help to reduce the fear of dealing with bushfires for people living near Crown land. It will be a great benefit to people in rural and regional Victoria.

The government inherited the regional forest agreements (RFAs) when it came to office. Many RFAs were already in place but the government had to put in place the last two. The issue has caused a great deal of anxiety among people in regional Victoria. I am pleased that the government was able to ensure that a greater amount of consultation than had occurred under the previous government took place. Through the budget allocations aimed at ensuring our forest practices are sustainable the government has addressed a number of the issues raised in that consultation process.

The Bracks government recognised that if it were to do that it needed to cut back on the amount of forest that would be available for timber. In acknowledging that, I will tell honourable members about some of the funding that has been provided to help ensure communities affected by changes in forest practices can move forward.

Some \$25.1 million has been put into forestry programs under the Growing Victorian Forests program. It is a great benefit because it will enhance our state forests by looking at opportunities in private forestries, regeneration works and improving silviculture. More people who may have been employed in other areas of the forestry industry will be employed. They will be

employed not in cutting down the forest but in enhancing it and growing more forest. The \$25.1 million will turn the forestry industry around by ensuring that jobs are still available in regional communities and people are put in the right area to assist sustainable forest development across the state.

In a further initiative \$1.3 million will go to the Creswick School of Forestry to further enhance its opportunities to undertake more research into forestry, train more foresters and ensure the industry has a future. Some \$500 000 will be put into the forest and forest product industry plan, which provides opportunities for enhancing value adding to forest products. The government is examining all aspects of forestry processes and is allocating funds to ensure that forests are sustainable and opportunities are provided for further value adding to create more jobs in rural Victoria.

Some \$750 000 has been allocated for a pilot scheme for international environmental forestry practices to further enhance the way the state practises forestry and to learn more about what is happening in other parts of the world and trial new techniques. Some \$700 000 has been provided to ensure that the Code of Forest Practices will operate soundly and make the community confident about what is happening in state forests.

The Commission for Ecologically Sustainable Development is a new office within the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. Some \$4 million will be allocated to examine ways of improving future decision making across all government departments and to encourage industry to examine ways of making decisions to make practices more ecologically sustainable. Some \$2 million has been provided for an Environment Assessment Council to ensure that the area will be further enhanced.

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — I applaud the honourable member for Ballarat East for detailing the expenditure in many areas of natural resources, conservation and the environment. I was concerned that he seemed to say that once it had a regional forest agreement (RFA) one could forget about an area. The RFA in my area left the Mount Beauty timber mill with a resource that is certainly not secure. It had to change its milling technique to meet that requirement. The present government understood the plight of the industry in Mount Beauty. Nevertheless the budget did not contain an allocation for that industry. There has been only a federal government commitment. There is nothing in the budget to meet that RFA. I do not like to hear the government crowing too much about those agreements. The incoming government, which has

money to spend, is not looking after industries that will require protection and assistance as a result of the introduction of RFAs.

By way of contrast it was a pleasure to follow the honourable member for Bellarine who has passion. He loves his electorate and speaks of it in glowing terms. If ever there were a seat with a small margin it is Geelong. Before the election, the Labor Party indulged in pork-barrelling about issues like natural gas. What happened? The honourable member for Bellarine is still with us because he loves his electorate.

Mr Baillieu interjected.

Mr PLOWMAN — As the honourable member for Hawthorn interjects, his constituents equally enjoy the fact that they have a member who responds to his electorate.

It is disappointing to speak on a budget that has been introduced by the Bracks Labor government. The Kennett government set up the Labor government with a \$1.3 billion surplus in the current account and left the state with a degree of confidence that I have not seen for 20 years. That confidence is reflected in business and in the way people conduct their lives — the way people enjoy being Victorians because of the seven years put in by the Kennett government.

I am disappointed to be here tonight to witness a Bracks government riding on the back of seven years of Kennett reformist government. It is important to look at statewide unemployment. In my own area the unemployment rate has dropped from 9.2 per cent in 1992 to 5.6 per cent in 1999 — a phenomenal improvement in unemployment figures in a regional centre.

The government says the Kennett government did nothing for country Victoria, but the figures belie that claim. Jobs were created with an employment growth rate in north-eastern Victoria of 15 per cent. How does that lot on the other side explain an increase in employment of 15 per cent and a decrease in unemployment from 9.2 per cent to 5.6 per cent in that period? It is inexplicable when they claim that seven and a half years of Kennett government did nothing for country areas.

Like the honourable member for Bellarine, I proudly represent a country electorate. Over that seven and a half years the Kennett government changed the vitality of country areas. Wodonga is the fastest-growing city in country Victoria, and I am equally proud of that — approximately a thousand families per year come into the area. That reflects the enormous amount of work

that has been done in that area of country Victoria. I can tell honourable members what has happened in my patch, and I refute any criticism from the opposite benches — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr PLOWMAN — I will refrain from getting into the argument about car parking.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The honourable member should ignore interjections.

Mr PLOWMAN — The government has delivered its first budget. It has fallen on its feet. The government that did not expect to be a government came in with a record surplus; a dramatic drop in unemployment; job creation; industry confidence and Victorians being once more proud to say they are Victorian. All I can say is that the government's time will be short lived.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The honourable member should speak through the Chair.

Ms Campbell interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! The minister knows that interjections across the table are disorderly.

Mr PLOWMAN — I looked at the budget's effects on my electorate and whether the promise for funding eventuated. The former government promised funding of about \$7 million for the building of a police station courthouse complex in Wodonga. New courthouses will be constructed in Mildura and Warrnambool to replace undersized and inadequate court facilities, but there is nothing in the budget papers to suggest funding for the promised courthouse and police station in Wodonga.

If the government is not prepared to meet the commitment of the past government, it will break with a longstanding tradition of a commitment to funding at the point of going to tender. If those other two police stations are built it goes to show the government does not meet its promises.

Another area in which I was looking for funding was for the Beechworth Hospital. The previous government promised the Beechworth Hospital that it would be funded. I visited the hospital with the current Minister for Health. We met with the board and the minister said nothing about that commitment not being met in the budget. It is not in the budget papers. The community is disappointed that it will not be met.

There is no major infrastructure funding in the budget for north-eastern Victoria, so there is no funding for any major new initiatives. A representative from the *Border Mail* rang me on budget day and asked, 'What can you find in the budget papers?'. I had a hunt to see what I could find. As I said, no new courthouse construction for Wodonga. The former government put \$3.3 million into the alpine resorts risk mitigation program, with the promise of an additional \$3.9 million and \$1.4 million. The only new initiatives that I could find in north-eastern Victoria include an annual summit for mayors and shire presidents. What a big deal! It is great to have the mayors and shire presidents going to an annual summit, but if that is one of the major things in the budget papers it does not say much for what the government is doing for rural and regional Victoria in my electorate. There will be an upgrade of the office of rural communities. Again, so what? The promises we were expecting to see for rural and regional Victoria have not eventuated.

I went to the trouble of ringing all the hospitals in my electorate with the following result: Tallangatta hospital, no additional funding; Corryong, no additional funding; Wodonga, no additional funding; Beechworth, with a promise of a new hospital, absolutely nothing. I then contacted all the schools. The ones that got back to me included: Wodonga West, no funding; Bandiana, \$43 500 for replacement asphalt, which is fantastic but it was approved by the former government; Dederang, no funding, and it is waiting for a portable classroom — I hope it will not have the problems discussed earlier today in question time — and Talgarno, no funding. The results for secondary schools are: Beechworth, no funding; Corryong, no funding; and most of the Wodonga secondary schools, no funding.

If one wants to understand the rural aspects of the budget, one should read the *Weekly Times* of 10 May. Peter Walsh of the Victorian Farmers Federation is reported as saying:

Agricultural research and development is an important investment in our future. The VFF sought additional funding for agricultural R & D in its pre-budget submission, but this was overlooked.

The biotechnology revolution will have a huge impact on farming and the government should be showing greater leadership by investing in the state's research capacity to take advantage of these developments.

The VFF would also like to have seen a stronger financial commitment to natural resource management.

Despite a strong submission by the VFF in this area, the additional funds provided by the budget are minimal.

The *Weekly Times* of 3 May states:

Despite trenchant criticisms, for example, that the previous Liberal–National government spent none of its major events money promoting major events in country Victoria, the Bracks government has allocated just \$2 million to promote regional tourism and events under its Living Regions Living Suburbs Support Fund.

So, while Mr Bracks has loosened the purse strings for rural Victoria, he has not been overly generous.

Stock and Land of 4 May states:

... there were several areas where it had missed the mark for rural and regional Victoria.

VFF president Peter Walsh said the federation had sought additional funding this year for agricultural research and development, which had not been forthcoming.

Another quote from the *Weekly Times* of 17 May under the heading 'Funding a cruel blow to a vital service' states:

Hands up those who want to pay for the National Livestock Reporting Service in Victoria.

With the state government seemingly hell-bent on withdrawing its \$110 000 subsidy, a meeting has been organised ...

The meeting was trying to find alternative funding for that vital service for country Victorians.

So much for the promises and the rhetoric! I am a country Victorian and I would like the rhetoric and the promises met. The government made promises to country and regional Victorians about sewerage charges. The *Weekly Times* of 24 May states:

However, expensive plumbing fees to connect households to the sewerage schemes will also continue to apply.

It continues:

... those which have been recently sewered can now choose to pay a once-off fee of \$800.

Alternatively, they can pay \$80 a year for 20 years.

The major costs of connecting those households will still exist. The state government is supporting the charge by \$300 per household on average, and yet the major connection costs of up to \$2000 to \$3000 will still have to be met. Those are all things that will be of great benefit to country Victoria.

There are winners in the budget, but they are in the marginal areas. Under the heading 'Windfalls for Ballarat in health, policing, transport and education', the *Ballarat Courier* of 3 May states:

The budget saw windfalls for Ballarat in the areas of health, policing, transport and education, Mayor Cr John Barnes said yesterday.

With reference to Gippsland East, the *Weekly Times* of the same date says:

Heading the wins is \$12.3 million to be spent next financial year to prepare the lower Snowy River for rejuvenated flows.

Honourable members know what that means — more floods as those additional flows will be let down. 'Rejuvenated flows' is a lovely way of saying 'more floods'. Some \$12.37 million will be spent to try to overcome the additional flood problems that putting more water down the Snowy River will eventuate in. There is no million dollars allocated to pipe the Woorinen irrigation scheme. And why not? So water can be saved to go back to East Gippsland and the Snowy River. I am not against putting some extra water back into the Snowy River, but the prospect of all that money being directed to the Snowy River is totally out of accord. The majority of funds should be going towards saving water.

I could go on at length but I want to say in closing that in my electorate over the seven and a half years of productive Kennett government new and revitalised hospitals were developed, with \$16 million spent in Wodonga, \$2.3 million in Corryong, and \$1.6 million in Tallangatta. A total of \$24 million was spent on hospitals in my electorate, and \$5.5 million was spent on the major secondary colleges in my electorate.

The mayor of Wodonga said that in the last term of the Kennett government it committed to \$70 million being spent on the City of Wodonga. Never before has such an amount been committed to the fastest-growing city in Victoria, and never again will that happen — certainly not under this government. It is full of promises and rhetoric. Honourable members will live to realise that the sort of development that occurred over the past seven and a half years of Kennett government will never be seen again.

Sooner or later the lie in the funding allocated to country Victoria by the Bracks government will be understood by the electorate. Once that realisation occurs the question will be asked: how can Labor be trusted again?

Ms DUNCAN (Gisborne) — It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2000/01) Bill. Tonight I will talk about the benefits the bill brings to my electorate, but before I outline some of those benefits I will make a point about the speech of the honourable member for Bentleigh earlier this afternoon. The honourable member referred to the budget as a Santa-type budget, with the Premier playing the role of Santa.

Ms Campbell — You never shoot Santa.

Ms DUNCAN — You would never shoot Santa, heaven forbid — although that might depend on the sorts of presents you got at Christmas! My view of Christmas and Santa is that you receive all sorts of goodies and gifts. You get all the things that you would like to have but cannot afford to buy yourself — the special little things like the bottle of perfume you would never bother to buy yourself in the course of the year. That is where government members depart hugely from opposition members in their perception of the budget.

The opposition describes the proposals in the budget as superfluous — as the icing on the cake or the cream in the coffee. I disagree strongly with the view of the honourable member for Bentleigh. The government did not provide in the budget goodies or extras but absolutely basic services. I do not see anything that could be described as cream in the coffee; I see the rebuilding of hospitals and schools, the upgrading of police stations and the acknowledgment that our road systems, particularly in rural and regional Victoria, are in dire straits.

People in outer Melbourne felt seriously neglected. That was not just a perception because when one examines how much of the budget allocations from sources such as the Community Support Fund was spent in inner Melbourne and how much filtered out to the rural and regional areas of Victoria, it is clear those people were badly done by. Their share of the Victorian cake got smaller and smaller, year after year.

I do not understand how schools, hospitals, police stations and other forms of infrastructure could be described as presents from Santa — they are bare essentials and the core business of government. If governments are not supposed to concentrate on, emphasise, support and encourage things like schools and hospitals, I wonder what they are supposed to do.

Among many criticisms, my general criticism of the previous Kennett government would be that it — and I presume Mr Kennett himself — wanted to hoard money. He considered that governments were like banks. He was a bit of a squirrel and wanted to stock up for winter, or for a rainy day. I am not sure when he thought the rain was starting — which is probably an appropriate point, given that we have had four years of drought. He viewed government as operating purely and solely as a business.

Certainly governments should operate on good business principles. However, businesses are predominantly concerned with profits and making sure their

shareholders are taken care of. Governments do a whole lot more than that, which is something honourable members on this side of the house recognise but members on the other side do not. Governments should operate efficiently using sound business principles and practices but they have a much broader mandate than that.

The thing I really like about the state budget is that it recognises that mandate — it is both fiscally responsible and socially just. That comment has been made again and again by members on this side of the house. It seems that the opposition considers those two attributes to be mutually exclusive — that is, you cannot have one with the other. This budget proves that is possible, and — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster should cease interjecting.

Ms DUNCAN — I was very pleased to be able to announce many initiatives to the electorate of Gisborne. The headlines that appeared in the local newspaper give an indication about how people felt. An article that appeared in the *Macedon Ranges Telegraph* of 9 May under the headline ‘Promises fulfilled’ certainly demonstrates that people thought the budget was good for them. The first paragraph of the article states — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! If honourable members wish to carry on a conversation, I ask them to leave the chamber. I ask the Minister for Community Services and the honourable member for Doncaster to cease interjecting across the table. We all want to hear the honourable member for Gisborne.

Ms DUNCAN — The headline in the *Macedon Ranges Telegraph* is ‘Promises fulfilled’ and the article states:

Millions of dollars have been injected into the Gisborne electorate for capital works projects.

The two biggest coups include \$11 million to upgrade Kyneton hospital and \$3.5 million to replace and upgrade the Bacchus Marsh police station.

One of those initiatives was the allocation of \$11 million for the Kyneton District Health Service. The Kyneton hospital, like many country hospitals, has been struggling for many years. The board of management had repeatedly had meetings with the former Minister for Health in an attempt to clarify

whether the hospital had a future. It was borderline. The hospital’s weighted inlier equivalent separation (WIES) funding was very low and had been determined at a time when the hospital was having some works done.

The WIES was calculated by looking at the number of patients currently being treated, and in that year the number of patients treated in the Kyneton hospital was down because of the improvement works being done. From the very beginning the hospital was behind the eight ball because the WIES allocation did not accurately reflect the number of patients it had always treated.

The Kyneton hospital was for the past three or four years unsure about whether or not it had a future. When the then Minister for Health came up to speak to board members — it was their second or third meeting with the minister — they wanted to know how the government viewed the hospital and what sort of future it had. They were not asking for bucketloads of money or promises of grants; however, they wanted to know whether the hospital would still be there in three or four years.

At the end of that meeting with the minister yet another feasibility study was offered to the board — the third or fourth feasibility study at that stage. However, no commitments were made to its ongoing viability. Prior to the election Labor committed \$11 million to rebuild the Kyneton hospital, and the budget puts that into effect.

That initiative has been a terrific boost for the town of Kyneton, because the townspeople were equally unsure about the future of their hospital. Honourable members on both sides of the house would understand and appreciate how people feel about their local hospitals. They are an important part of a community. The thought of losing theirs was of great concern to the people of Kyneton.

The \$11 million funding will provide 32 acute and 20 aged care beds, together with new accommodation for a range of allied health and other services. The new hospital will co-locate services, expand access to services and provide significantly higher standards of facilities. While the upgrade will not add huge numbers of new beds, it will allow a lot more patients to be treated, create greater flexibility and bring the hospital and its facilities up to the modern standard the people of Kyneton deserve.

The upgrade will also help attract medical staff to the area. All honourable members know that it is difficult to attract doctors and specialist medical staff in

particular to country areas. If a town has a daggy, old, run-down hospital it makes it that much harder to attract medical staff.

The upgrade of Gisborne Secondary College is another great benefit the budget will bring to the electorate of Gisborne. Gisborne Secondary College was originally built for approximately 700 students. It is now attended by almost 1200 students, and just over half of its classrooms are portables. The school has outgrown its original infrastructure. The previous member for Gisborne made loads of promises about the college, saying, 'Yes, Gisborne Secondary College will receive its upgrade' and, 'Yes, it is on a priority listing'.

We heard that a number of times from the previous government. Members opposite now say that the upgrade was on the priority list and the Labor government is only delivering what they would have done. We know that schools, police stations, ambulance stations and many other things can stay on the priority list for years and years but that does not result in their being upgraded. The previous government considered that putting something on a priority list might make people feel warm and fuzzy even though it did not do them any good. I am thrilled that the budget has delivered the desperately needed upgrade to the Gisborne Secondary College.

The Bacchus Marsh Primary School received \$820 000 in the budget for stage 1 of its upgrade, about which people are very excited. They have been working for that for many years. The plans have been ready for some time and the entire community has been eagerly awaiting the delivery of that stage 1 upgrade. In addition, Woodend Primary School received \$266 000 for the last part of its upgrade.

One of the best things in the budget is not necessarily the biggest allocation. I was quite aggrieved about the Romsey ambulance station and I am happy that it will now go ahead. Last year when the former Minister for Health, Rob Knowles, knew that we were five days away from the announcement of the election, he went to a meeting at Romsey. It was well attended by keen, hard-working and sincere Romsey residents. Mr Knowles announced that the Kennett government would build the Romsey ambulance station. That announcement was a con because when Labor came into office it found that there was no money for the Romsey ambulance station in either the forward estimates or the campaign budget.

It has been reported to me that at that meeting in Romsey a number of people suggested that it was just an election promise. Apparently the then minister's

response was that the government was not in an election campaign, that it was not an election promise but a guarantee. He told them they had his word for it — but the money was not there.

A number of weeks ago I raised the issue in the house with the current Minister for Health. The community of Romsey has already raised a fair bit of money towards building the ambulance station. Several years ago it lost the Lancefield bush hospital and the money from that was held by the community to go towards the ambulance station. In addition, the community worked hard and raised a lot of money. It was a cruel con because not only had people worked hard for the ambulance station but there is a huge need for the ambulance station at Romsey. I am thrilled at the announcement in the budget that the planning for the ambulance station will be undertaken this year and that it will be constructed next year.

The other budget bonus for my electorate is still to be matched by the federal government. Honourable members would be aware of the current upgrade of the Calder Highway, which is probably one of the most dangerous roads in the state. The Black Forest section is particularly dangerous, especially in winter when there is black ice on the road. That section will be finished midway through next year and we are ready to start the Karlsruhe section. The government has committed \$7 million, with \$12 million next year for its contribution to that road of national importance. Roads of national importance are jointly funded by state and federal governments. The state government is meeting its commitment but the federal government's budget does not include any money to meet its commitment.

I admonish the federal government for that and call on it, as I did in the adjournment debate several weeks ago, to meet that commitment and to come up with its share of the funding.

In the few minutes left to me I would like to talk about sewerage. It is not a particularly glamorous subject but it is a great necessity and has been a big issue in the electorate both before the election and since. Many of the towns in the electorate are in need of sewerage, and the townspeople for the most part acknowledge that.

However, many people telephoned me saying they had just put in new septic systems only to be told they are unsatisfactory. The people involved will have to pay a minimum of a \$2000 up-front fee for sewerage connection. More likely it will cost them closer to \$6000 or \$7000 when the plumbing work is done. As I said, many of those who rang had just upgraded their septic systems or had new homes with state-of-the-art

septic recycling systems. They were upset that a year or two down the track they will have to fork out a great deal of money to have their houses connected to sewerage. Many old people were extremely worried about it; old people hate to incur debt. It was creating a real trauma for many people.

However, the allocation in the state budget will mean that instead of people having to pay a minimum of \$2000 up front, the most they will be asked to pay if they choose to do so will be \$800, which is a huge difference. Not only do they have a reduced up-front cost but they will now have much more say in whether their town is seweraged and will also have the opportunity to become involved in the decision-making process.

I guess I have been somewhat greedy and selfish in concentrating on the electorate of Gisborne and not talking about the other wonderful initiatives that will benefit the entire state.

Mr LUPTON (Knox) — I do not like talking about what has gone on in the past; I prefer to talk about what will happen in the future. However, I take to heart the remarks of the honourable member for Gisborne, who said the former government squirreled away \$1.7 billion.

In 1992 when the Kennett government came to power the state had a debt of some \$32 billion — that is, \$32 000 000 000! That is an absolute disgrace, particularly when one realises that prior to the years of Cain and Kirner Victoria was considered to be the jewel in the crown of Australia. It was progressive, had a balanced budget and its finances were in surplus. Yet in 1992 the state was bankrupt. Had Victoria been a private enterprise the directors would have been locked up in jail.

However, I will talk about what has happened in the Knox electorate since 1992. When the 2000 budget came down Knox received zilch — absolutely nothing — from the current government. Under the heading of education, Knox received an allocation of \$8.7 million to build a new campus for the Rowville Secondary College; \$3.2 million to replace the Lysterfield Primary School; \$1.5 million for maintenance works at Ferntree Gully College; \$504 000 for major maintenance at Fairhills Secondary College; and \$354 000 for maintenance at the Wattleview Primary School. That school now has a school population that requires additional facilities. Although I have raised the matter many times in Parliament the school has achieved nothing, whether under the Bracks government or, to a lesser extent, the Kennett government. At least the Kennett government

was prepared to investigate the matter. Approximately \$340 000 was also spent in the Knox electorate on computers.

The Labor Party went to the 1999 election on the issue of health as much as on anything else. In the Knox electorate there had been a proposal for a new \$3 million community health centre headquarters, but that idea had been ignored throughout the Cain–Kirner years. It was only when the former Kennett government came to power that the project was adopted — and even then there were enormous battles with the bureaucracy and jealousies between municipalities — and steps were taken to develop the facility. It is now being built and fitted out.

The biggest health item in the Knox area was the promise by the former Kennett government of a new tertiary hospital, which I shall call the Knox hospital. It was to be a private hospital to be built in Wantirna to service the heart care, cancer care, neurology, emergency services and maternity needs of the people in the outer eastern suburbs and to link with universities as a tertiary health education facility.

When the Bracks government came to power it cut the Knox hospital without any consultation with councils, the local communities or anyone else. It got rid of the concept forever, or at least so far as it is concerned. Fear was expressed that the Alfred hospital in Prahran might close if the Knox hospital went ahead. What a load of rubbish! The outer eastern suburbs have a large population and need medical facilities. Labor went to the polls in September of last year advocating health as a principal issue, but then the people living in areas around the proposed Knox hospital — which was going to serve the municipalities of Knox, Maroondah, Upper Yarra and numerous others — found that, without consultation, Labor had decided the hospital was not going to be built. That is a great shame.

I still believe governments, no matter what their persuasion, should take a bipartisan approach to health. If people believe a hospital is required in Knox, Berwick or anywhere else, the best possible service should be provided.

One of the most startling issues facing the community today is drug prevention. I was able to convince the Minister for Health in the former Kennett government, Rob Knowles, to allocate \$20 000 to a program called How to Drug Proof Your Kids. From my investigations as a member of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee I believe the drug problem in Victoria, and probably in Australia and worldwide, is principally associated with the breakdown of the family unit. The

former Kennett government was prepared to allocate \$20 000 to attempt to educate families about how to recognise drug problems among their children and in local communities. That was a small attempt to alleviate the drug problem in Victoria. I suggest \$20 000 is not a lot of money, but it was allocated by the Kennett government and is now being spent.

The Kennett budget allocated \$1.2 million for a home for the aged in Station Street, Ferntree Gully. It allocated \$1.4 million to the Knox electorate under the sport portfolio for the construction of new basketball courts at the Rowville community centre and \$100 000 to sporting facilities at Knox schools.

The \$8 million expended at the Institute for Horticultural Development in Knoxfield, which is part of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, would be some of the best money spent by the former government. A bloke from New Zealand said he discovered a disease in Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens that would wipe out some of Victoria's primary exports. Officers from the institute at Knoxfield researched and checked the orchards in and around metropolitan Melbourne and out into the country in a successful attempt to eradicate the disease.

I remind the house about the \$28 million allocated for work on the Boronia Road railway crossing in the Knox electorate. That must have been one of the worst intersections in Victoria — and they are not my words, but those of the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria. A former Minister for Transport in a Labor government, Steve Crabb — a good bloke! — could not make it happen, but it happened under the Kennett government. Now the railway crossing has been placed underground and a new shopping centre is being built above the station; that will help shoppers in the township of Boronia. The former government allocated \$10 million to duplicate Wellington Road between Waverley Park and Stud Road.

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr LUPTON — I should ignore the interjection, but many people think Waverley Park should be used for football. I, too, think it should be used for football, but it is apparent that the Australian Football League is out of touch with everybody in Victoria; anybody associated with football knows that. The previous government allocated \$10 million to those roadworks, and \$500 000 was provided for improvements to Dorset Road.

I am concerned that the Bracks government budget gives nothing to the electorate of Knox. It could be said

that the budget papers are not user friendly but convoluted and that they hide the funding.

Mr Haermeyer — That's what I said about the previous budget.

Mr LUPTON — The budget papers of two years ago were better than this year's papers. There is no way one can find what the hell the government is spending money on because the items are hidden under various headings.

However, that is beside the point. The closure of Boronia police station was a typical example of the actions of the Cain–Kirner governments. They actually closed three police stations in the City of Knox, despite community agitation, at Boronia, Bayswater and Ferntree Gully. Yet the former Labor government opened a Taj Mahal police complex on Burwood Highway at a cost of \$670 000 per year over 10 years — that is, \$6.7 million. The Boronia police station was one of the busiest stations in Victoria. That was hopeless!

The Kennett government allocated \$1.3 million to the Boronia fire station. Nothing in this budget has been directed to the City of Knox, my electorate or any neighbouring areas.

The Kennett government said it would spend about \$500 000 on Heany Park Primary School and about \$800 000 on Wattleview Primary School.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr LUPTON — I take up the interjection of the honourable member for Melton. The money was to be expended because a so-called professional analyst determined that the schools required maintenance. The reason the program was brought into being was to stop political interference and to make the process more professional, so that when a school required maintenance, it was done.

Rather than Hurtle Lupton, the honourable member for Knox, or Gordon Ashley, the honourable member for Bayswater, going to the minister and pleading their case, it was going to be done more professionally. The former government allocated a total of \$1.3 million to those two schools. Not a zack has been given in this budget for those schools.

Kent Park Primary School is another school that requires maintenance. Although money was spent under the former government, there is no funding for that in this budget.

I will refer to the roads issue. One of the reasons I stood for Parliament after attending the Save Australia March on 4 July 1991 was that as a former councillor of the City of Knox I witnessed the way the road infrastructure in the municipality had deteriorated. That was one of the main reasons for my standing for Parliament after my candidature had been initiated by someone else.

The former government gave a commitment to provide some \$3.8 million for the duplication of the High Street Road extension between Stud Road and Burwood Highway. It is interesting to look at the history of the duplication. Construction started under the Cain–Kirner governments. I emphasise the word ‘started’. Construction for the duplication began, then guess what happened? The former Labor government ran out of money and the road sat there for a couple of years — a two-lane highway going nowhere.

It was only when BP Australia wanted to build a service station on the corner of High Street Road and Burwood Highway that the additional funds were provided by BP for the High Street Road extension. The Kennett government was going to duplicate the road at a cost of some \$3.8 million, and this government was supposed to duplicate the road because it was necessary. However, the government has not picked up on that proposal and has not provided the necessary funding for it.

For the benefit of the house I will describe Burwood Highway between Scoresby Road and Ferntree Gully Road. Travelling along Burwood Highway brings one to the Knox City Shopping Centre on the corner of Stud Road. Travelling in an easterly direction towards Upper Ferntree Gully one is on a three-lane highway between Stud Road and Scoresby Road. Upon reaching Scoresby Road the road becomes a two-lane highway between Scoresby Road and Ferntree Gully Road. Past Ferntree Gully it again becomes a three-lane highway. The proposal under the former Kennett government was for the road between Stud Road and Ferntree Gully to be made into three lanes at a cost of \$2.8 million. I would think that was commonsense.

The funding was going to be allocated after the election. However, the election turned bad. The fact is that no funding for the proposal appears in the budget. No matter what one thinks of the former Kennett government, it did not throw money away for stupid reasons.

I will now refer to the proposed Scoresby freeway. The proposal for that freeway has been considered since 1990 when as the mayor of the City of Knox I first

launched the campaign for it. The proposal has been argued and analysed, and environmental studies have been done. The fact is that while it was being approved the Bracks government completely wiped the Scoresby freeway proposal, without any consultation at all.

In last year’s budget debate the honourable member for Mitcham said that Stud Road went across to Ringwood. I do not know how Stud Road goes from Mountain Highway to Ringwood. There is no way known that it can do that. It stops at Mountain Highway, Bayswater, which is some 6 kilometres from Ringwood. That is how much the honourable member for Mitcham knows about the roads in the electorates of Knox, Bayswater and Wantirna. The government has totally ignored the Scoresby freeway because its members are not aware of the facts.

I am delighted that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services is at the table because I want to raise with him the position of community support facilitators and the Country Fire Authority. There are a number of CFA community support facilitators in the electorates of Knox, Bayswater and Wantirna. Their task is to assist and support the local CFA brigades in their work. Despite the fact that I have written two letters to the minister I cannot get a response on the government’s perception of the current status of those people. The CFA is an important aspect of country and urban Victoria, yet I cannot get an answer on this important matter. The minister does not have the time to reply to any letter at all.

Mr Haermeyer interjected.

Mr LUPTON — Although the minister is interjecting, and the little red button on his lapel is flashing, the fact is he will not respond to correspondence.

The Knox electorate has received basically nothing — absolutely zilch — from the Bracks government in the 2000–01 budget, whereas in the past funds were allocated. It is another example of the Bracks Labor government looking after the west and ignoring the residents of the east. It is important that the welfare of my constituents is considered and that their needs are looked after.

Mr LEIGHTON (Preston) — It is a pleasure to join the budget debate. The first budget of the Bracks Labor government has returned trust and faith to country Victorians by providing substantial support for rural and regional Victoria. But at the same time the government has not forgotten its traditional heartlands, and that is certainly the case in Preston. On any test —

for example, the issues on which Labor campaigned such as health, education and community safety — the budget is very good news for Preston. Some \$5 million was allocated for an integrated health care centre to return some of the health services that were ripped out of Preston with the closure of the Preston and Northcote Community Hospital; \$7 million was provided to finally deliver a new police station for Preston after the contract was torn up by the previous Kennett government; and there was additional funding for schools.

During the debate a number of opposition members have complained about the war chest they say they left the Labor government. However, that was not their position previously — and I know, after having sat in opposition for seven years. When in opposition Labor claimed there was an underlying surplus at a time much earlier than the coalition government would admit, and that was at a time it was cutting services. Why did the former government try to hide the surplus? Was it related to its desire to increase taxes and charges, or to privatise and sell off many of our assets like water, electricity and gas? The surplus meant that a large part of the former government's justification for taxes and privatisation was lost, so it disguised the surplus. I do not have much sympathy for the bleating of honourable members opposite about having left Labor a war chest. The government has a responsibility to fund a range of services within the financial constraints it has set itself.

The Bracks government is both providing increased funding for a range of services and election commitments of \$426 million and achieving a budget surplus of \$529 million. The previous Kennett government seemed to not want to be a real government. It showed hostility to the very responsibilities and activities that people look for in a government, and did so at its own peril. A government can be both socially progressive and financially responsible, as the budget demonstrates.

Before returning to the Preston electorate I will make a few comments on information technology (IT).

Mr Perton interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! The honourable member for Preston will ignore the interjection and the honourable member for Doncaster will stop interjecting.

Mr LEIGHTON — The first matter I refer to on IT is the webcasting of the budget.

Mr Perton — It was a major disgrace! It cost \$35 000 and nobody could see it!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster should cease interjecting now.

Mr LEIGHTON — Without revisiting the debate on who should have webcast it and whether it should have been available for the responses, I take up one interjection of the honourable member for Doncaster. He said, 'Nobody could see it'. One of the problems with the Parlynet system established under his government was that it had insufficient capacity. I remember that in the early days of Parlynet the Comtech engineers advised very strongly that we all needed integrated services digital network (ISDN) connections. Instead, the decision was made — —

Mr Perton — I brought you an ISDN connection.

Mr LEIGHTON — I am eternally grateful to the honourable member for Doncaster for that, but he and I are among a privileged half dozen. The reason why people in other electorate offices could not watch the budget webcast was that they had ordinary dial-up connections. The Comtech engineers advised otherwise but that advice was not taken up by the previous government.

One aspect of the webcasting relates to Microsoft. Even those who are only casual users of IT will be aware of the action by the Department of Justice in the States of America against Microsoft. It is about not only the battle over web browsers but also a number of other matters. Technology moves so quickly that that battle, while still before the courts, is to a large extent redundant. Microsoft has won the battle of the browsers and Internet Explorer has come out on top of Netscape.

However, the next battle is already occurring with Microsoft over the streaming of video and the streaming of audio. Microsoft's product is the Windows Media Player and although Realplayer is probably a better product I suspect it will go the same way as Netscape. The point I am leading to is that the budget was webcast only in Windows Media Player and I would have liked to have seen it broadcast in Realplayer as well. I am not naive enough to think that the state of Victoria could single-handedly take on Microsoft, but I believe that it has an obligation to promote competition.

Mr Perton — Have a look at my web site. It uses Realplayer.

Mr LEIGHTON — I do look at it from time to time. I also believe that there is a need to be more focused in specific areas of IT, and I am prepared to give a tick to the previous government for its work on

multimedia, which enjoyed bipartisan support. The time has arrived to be more focused in two areas in particular: firstly, as a social justice issue for the technologically disadvantaged and the information poor; and secondly, economically to promote e-commerce specifically.

I believe the budget and other actions of the government do both. The budget contains an allocation of \$9 million to boost public Internet access, with a focus on regional areas and on communities that do not have convenient Internet access; and \$3.5 million for the expansion of Skillsnet, a community-based program targeted at technologically disadvantaged Victorians, and for the establishment of an electronic export assistance centre to help Victorian businesses in trade readiness, promotion and financing. As honourable members will recall, the Electronic Transactions (Victoria) Bill was passed a couple of weeks ago and the house will shortly deal with its twin privacy legislation bill.

Victoria has some excellent high-tech firms, including Comtech Australia Pty Ltd, which was involved in setting up Parlynet, and a firm I had an opportunity a few weeks ago to visit at Mitcham called Megatec Pty Ltd. Those firms aim particularly at gaining business at the big end of town.

The third aspect of information technology on which I want to comment is electronic gaming. Once I had a fairly relaxed view about the introduction of poker machines: to each his own poison. However, during the past seven years I have seen the impact they have had on my electorate. Constituents who come to see me are about to have their gas or electricity cut off and do not have enough money for housekeeping because it has gone through the poker machines, so I have taken time to read the literature, particularly on pathological gaming.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 4*, the bible of psychiatric disorders, recognises that these days gambling is a psychiatric illness. Having said all that, the problem is a lot harder to regulate on the Internet, because as we all know the Internet knows no boundaries. Last year under the previous government the house passed electronic gaming legislation which had the support of members of the then opposition. That was the right course of action to take and it is naive of the federal government to believe that somehow it can outlaw gaming on the Internet. Currently anybody can call up a casino online, despite the fact that no licences have yet been issued in Victoria. Governments are better off trying to provide some sort of regulation and control to ensure that those

who want to bet online can do so with reputable casinos rather than with shadowy outfits based in Barbados or elsewhere.

Returning to the Preston electorate, the budget delivers for it in the three areas to which I have referred — health, education and community services and community safety. For instance, it contains a funding allocation of \$237 000 for the Preston Girls Secondary College to complete its staff administration and technology upgrade. That is an example of how the government is keeping its commitment to both education and technology.

In the area of community safety — I am pleased to see the Minister for Police and Emergency Services is at the table — the major feature of the budget as it applies to people in Preston is the announcement that the rebuilding of the Preston police station will go ahead. Talk about the government keeping its promises! As I recall, the election commitment was for \$3.5 million, but to my pleasant surprise in the budget the figure had increased to \$7 million to be spent over three years — \$1.5 million in 2000–01, \$3.5 million in 2001–02 and \$2 million in 2002–03.

The Preston police station is staffed by fine police officers but is physically an absolute disgrace. It is Dickensian. I know that both as the shadow minister and in his current role the Minister for Police and Emergency Services has visited the station on a number of occasions. The cells are an absolute disgrace and do not provide for privacy between the sexes. For example, a solicitor who wants to interview a prisoner must lean his folder against the bars while he talks to him. In some cases the plea might be that the prisoner is a police informer. So much for privacy or protection when other prisoners are in the cells!

Under the previous Labor government contracts were signed to build a new Preston police station that involved the then City of Preston and a developer in a three-way land swap. After the change of government in 1992 those contracts were torn up; and despite the Preston police station sitting at or near the top of the Victoria Police priority list for seven years, nothing happened. I am pleased that the government has honoured its election commitment. The decision was clearly made on merit based on the priorities of the Victoria Police.

The implications of that for other facilities in the immediate precinct should be examined. It forms part of the Preston district business centre, houses the Preston courthouse and is at the back of the town hall. The Returned and Services League branch is on council

land, and a car park is opposite. Several options should be examined, including the relocation of the RSL or the removal of one of the car parks. The council may be interested in a multistorey car park development, which would benefit the business district centre. All that not only honours the government's commitment to community safety but also is a marvellous business and economic opportunity for Preston.

Another community safety issue that is related to the decision by the former government to close the Preston courthouse was kept secret during the election campaign. As part of a pork-barrelling exercise to try to win back a marginal seat, the former government announced that additional courts would be built at Heidelberg. What it did not disclose was that as a consequence the Preston courthouse would close. Several weeks ago the Attorney-General visited both Preston and Heidelberg. Following his visit he announced that the Preston courthouse would remain open. Things are now looking good for the Preston police station and courthouse.

Another major initiative is the development of the new Preston integrated care centre. Under the former government the electorate's large public hospital, the Preston and Northcote Community Hospital was closed. In an attempt to mute public criticism the former Kennett government gave a commitment to build a new integrated care centre on the old PANCH site. I will read from the Metropolitan Health Care Services plan, which was released under the signature of the former Minister for Health, Rob Knowles. These are the words the former government used:

Following the move of PANCH services to the new Northern Hospital by early 1998, the site currently occupied by PANCH in Bell Street will be redeveloped as the new Preston integrated care centre. This centre will provide a range of day services including day surgery, renal dialysis, chemotherapy, medical procedures, outpatient clinics, diagnostics and aged care programs. Local patients who continue to need stays in hospital will be treated at our hospitals in Heidelberg ... or the new Northern Hospital at Epping.

No sooner had the hospital closed than the government reneged on its promise. One of the ironies of the election campaign was that the Labor Party was able to make a commitment to recommit to a promise that the Kennett government had broken! Not only that, the Labor government is now in the satisfying position of being able to deliver on that commitment. The budget allocates \$5 million for that new centre.

The government has formed a consultative committee, which I chair, and it will soon hand down its report. As the Duckett review of ministerial health networks

points out, the centre will be linked up with the Northern Hospital.

As the time for the adjournment debate is approaching I will conclude my remarks so that when the bill is next before the house another member will have an opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Debate interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! Under sessional orders the time for the adjournment of the house has arrived.

Freeza

Mr WELLS (Wantirna) — I ask the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment to ensure there is adequate funding for the Freeza program. Table B5 on page 245 of budget paper no. 2 sets out new initiatives for the minister's department. It indicates that \$2 million has been allocated for the Freeza program for the next financial year. Page 250 of the budget paper under the heading 'Freeza (drug and alcohol free entertainment)' states:

The Freeza program provides young people with drug and alcohol free events within a harm minimisation framework. Freeza events are also an important vehicle for providers to deliver adolescent health promotion. Funding has been provided to extend and enhance the Freeza program for 2000–01. The effectiveness of the program will be evaluated in 2001.

I have no problem with the minister evaluating the program, but I ask her to ensure that adequate funding is provided.

The former Premier initiated the program in 1996. He was concerned about young people aged between 14 and 18 years being on the loose on Friday and Saturday nights. He was concerned that they were going to pubs and drinking illegally or hanging around shopping centres. The Premier gave the responsibility of running the program to the then Minister for Youth and Community Services, now the Leader of the Opposition, and to me. I worked on it on a daily basis.

It is an important program for rural and country communities. It operates in such places as Bairnsdale, Morwell, Portland and Mallacoota. In fact, it operates in 120 locations. It is important that young people have smoke-free, safe and secure entertainment on Friday and Saturday nights. Young Victorians have the opportunity to play in bands. I know that 1800 young people turned up at the Fruitbowl in Eltham on one

night. It is a successful program that must be adequately funded.

Palliative care: children

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — I ask the Minister for Aged Care to provide information on government initiatives to assist families in the Ballarat electorate who may need palliative care services for children. I was pleased that the minister recently announced the doubling of funds from \$700 000 to \$1.4 million for bereavement counselling for community-based palliative care services in Victoria, which included the Ballarat region.

Grampians Palliative Care is the service provider in my electorate and I have nothing but admiration for palliative care workers. Unfortunately, a number of families in Victoria and in my electorate require palliative care for their children. I ask the minister what assistance is available to assist those families.

Somerville Rise Primary School

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Education a letter the Department of Education, Employment and Training sent to Mr David Ferguson, who honourable members will recall identified the asbestos at the Somerville Rise Primary School. That parent has had difficult challenges with the department in trying to prove, which he has done through independent analysis, that his children and other children were exposed to dangerous asbestos particles.

The letter from the Department of Education, Employment and Training is quite revealing, and I will briefly quote from it:

The normal process, put in place in September 1999, is that an audit of the unit to be moved is completed prior to relocation as required by part 6 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (1992). This audit is to ensure that the contractors that are hired to work on the unit do so in accordance with the regulations ...

Once delivered to the school, the building was painted internally and had new carpet installed with no interference to asbestos-based products. At this stage a visual inspection was undertaken by the contractors to ensure that there was no damaged lining. A further audit under part 5 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (1992) was planned. It is this audit that is normally provided to the school so that, where necessary, an asbestos management plan can be developed. In the case of Somerville Rise Primary School this audit was brought forward as a result of the concerns expressed by the school community.

In other words, there was no intention to have an asbestos audit carried out by the department until the

issues were raised by the parents. The only audit that took place was when the portable unit was at the point of dispatch.

Some of these units are cut in half to enable them to be put on a truck. They are disturbed in shipment and then reconstructed at the new site. The department, on its own admission, does not do an audit once that asbestos-affected portable is located at the new site.

I ask the minister to investigate whether the departmental protocol is appropriate, given the health risk posed to children and teachers. I sincerely hope members opposite agree that this occupational health and safety issue has been created by a minister who, given that she had no money for classrooms, was determined to try to dredge back into service inappropriate asbestos-affected portables to bring class sizes down.

I call on the Minister for Education to explain why an audit was not done after the portables had been reconstructed on the school site. The students and teachers were unaware that for four months they were being exposed to the asbestos contained in those structures.

Schools: retention rates

Ms ALLEN (Benalla) — I ask the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment to outline what action the government is taking to ensure that young people, particularly in regional and country areas, do not drop out of the education system early but remain connected to learning so that they have the best chance of accessing future opportunities.

Mr Perton — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the honourable member is new to the Parliament; however, she has not asked for action on the part of a minister but has asked for an explanation in the house. That is not a matter one can raise on the adjournment debate. Under all rulings of previous Speakers it is a ruse used as an alternative to a question without notice.

Mr Cameron interjected.

Mr Perton — Perhaps the Minister for Workcover could go back to the bar. I am happy for the honourable member to start her question again and ask for some action by the minister rather than putting it as a question without notice.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The honourable member for Benalla had been on her feet for only 32 seconds. I remind the

honourable member for Benalla that on the adjournment debate she needs to request some action of the minister.

Ms ALLEN — Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. As I was saying, in my region 43.8 per cent of boys and 22.1 per cent of girls drop out of school before completing year 12. The region already has a high youth unemployment rate of 22 per cent.

As honourable members know, students who drop out of school at an early age or before completing year 12 have a higher rate of unemployment in both the short and longer terms. Recent school-to-work transition surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveal that more than half the students who left school after completing year 11 only did not go on to full-time work, training or further education. They ended up either unemployed or in part-time work.

The outlook for students who complete year 10 and then leave school is far worse, with 60 per cent of those youngsters not ending up in full-time work, training or further education but finding themselves either unemployed or in part-time, low paid and low-skilled jobs. Those young people end up in marginalised work. There is no doubt that students who leave school before they complete year 12 are at a significant social disadvantage and are at great risk of becoming detached from the system and from accessing further opportunities.

I ask the minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment to outline what action the government is taking to ensure that young people, particularly in regional Victoria, do not drop out of education early and that they remain connected to learning and have the best chance of accessing future opportunities?

Echuca Regional Health

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — The matter I raise for the attention of the Minister for Health concerns funding for accident and emergency services at Echuca Regional Health. I have had considerable correspondence on the matter dating back to 1998. I wrote to the previous minister and to the current minister pointing out that Echuca has a busy subregional hospital in a growing area with acute inpatient separations of 4606 in 1992, 5944 in 1998 and 6800 in 1999.

Mr Langdon — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, following the example of the honourable member for Doncaster, the honourable member for Rodney has not yet asked for any action.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! I remind the honourable member for Rodney to ask for action to be taken by the minister.

Mr MAUGHAN — I have no difficulty doing that. I addressed my question to the minister and I will ask for what I want when I come to the conclusion of my contribution. I am setting the scene. The hospital has had a 40 per cent increase in inpatient separations and, more importantly, in the accident and emergency department the number has risen from 9621 to more than 12 500 in 1999, which is an increase of more than 25 per cent.

The increases have been achieved with no increase in the training and development grant for three hospital medical orderlies, two interns and one senior medical officer. Not only is the hospital being squeezed to provide an adequate service in accident and emergency services, but also the area has a number of busy weekends, with an influx of tourists at Christmas, Easter, Queen's Birthday and during the Southern 80 boat race.

The hospital facilities are cramped and inadequate. The Leader of the National Party visited the hospital with me last week and saw the inadequate accident and emergency services. That is about to be addressed with a new \$20 million investment in the hospital. I seek a commitment from the minister to increase the \$550 000 funding that has remained virtually static since 1992 so that the hospital can fund an additional medical health officer to provide an adequate accident and emergency service for people living in the Echuca area.

I reiterate that I have written to the minister and the previous minister on numerous occasions. Given that the Bracks government prides itself on providing a better deal for country Victoria and more money for health services, I ask the minister tonight to give some of the increased health services funding to the Echuca Regional Health service.

Housing: Maribyrnong defence site

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing and seek her involvement in the planning of the defence estate north of Cordite Avenue, Maribyrnong, which is currently owned by the federal government. Following the example of the black hand of the Kennett government the federal government is also seeking to sell everything it can lay its hands on.

The future development of the site has yet to be determined. It is around 140 hectares in size and is attractively located on the bend of the Maribyrnong

River. The site has a long industrial history and many Victorians have been employed there over the past 100 years, so it is of importance to the local community.

The estate — this will particularly interest the honourable member for Mitcham — was the site of Melbourne's first horse track and is probably the last resting place of Sandy, the only light horse to return from the First World War. The site also has significance for the indigenous community.

Of interest to the local community is the considerable potential for development of the site as public open space and as a home for community facilities. Equally, many people in the local community believe the land should be set aside for public housing as there is a severe shortage of it in the western region, particular the inner western region. The public advocacy for more public housing is being led by my colleague in the federal Parliament Nicola Roxon and is also being strongly supported by the Maribyrnong council and by me.

I ask the Minister for Housing to involve herself in the planning for use of the defence estate site, not only to generate jobs during the construction but to overcome a widespread perception of an extreme shortage of public housing options facing the western region of Melbourne.

Buses: Yarrowonga–Wangaratta service

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — In the absence of the Minister for Transport I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment. Last night I referred to an issue of concern about the reinstatement of the passenger rail service from Shepparton to Cobram. Tonight I raise another issue in relation to transport matters: the proposal to implement a bus service between Yarrowonga and Wangaratta. The minister will be aware I have raised the issue in correspondence with him following strong representations from people in the Yarrowonga area seeking a regular daily bus service between Yarrowonga and Wangaratta.

Mr Langdon — On a point of order, after 32 seconds the honourable member has yet to ask for action.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! There is no point of order. The honourable member did call for the Minister for Transport to institute a bus service between Yarrowonga and another town.

Mr JASPER — The honourable member is deaf and does not listen.

The issue I have raised has been of great concern to the people of Yarrowonga. I have presented a petition to Parliament and had correspondence with the minister. Geoff Smithwick of V/Line Passenger has responded and indicated the issue will be investigated with all the other issues about the provision of transport services in country Victoria.

I seek from the minister recognition of these strong representations and indicate to him that I have received many letters from people in the Yarrowonga area seeking the implementation of the bus service on a once-a-day basis. People from Yarrowonga visit Wangaratta regularly because it is the largest centre in proximity for medical and a range of other services. Major government departments are represented at Wangaratta. Of course, a range of educational facilities will also be important in the area.

There is no doubt that there is a strong case for the provision of the service. I seek a positive response from the minister for the people of Yarrowonga and Wangaratta. Yarrowonga has a large range of tourist activities and I am sure the bus will be able to be used. I want to make sure the house is aware of the importance of the provision of a bus service between Yarrowonga and Wangaratta. We want an immediate response from the minister and the implementation of this service in the very near future.

Police: Ouyen station

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — In the absence of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services I refer the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment to the staffing levels at the Ouyen police station. Historically the station has been manned by a sergeant and two other officers, but the 800 unfilled vacancies under the previous government meant a cut in staffing of 33 per cent. Ouyen lost one officer, which represented a 12 per cent cut to the Mallee police district.

The vacancy at Ouyen means that for 18 weeks of the year there is one officer at the station who works as part of a cluster with the other two stations, at Murrayville and Underbool. For 36 weeks of the year there are only three officers available. The area is very remote and long distances have to be covered. Ouyen is at the intersection of the Calder, Sunraysia and Mallee highways and experiences significant interstate traffic now that a new tunnel has been built in the Adelaide Hills.

The policing requirements at Ouyen are acute. There are not sufficient officers to cover this significant town in the Mallee region. I request that the minister ascertain from the chief commissioner when the vacancy might be filled to alleviate the acute staffing problem at Ouyen. It is having an impact on the community and is placing Ouyen staff under additional stress. It is a matter of both public safety and the occupational safety of the police members.

The situation at Ouyen is an indication of the previous government's policy of downsizing and the allocation of 800 additional police over the next three years will have a positive impact. I ask the minister to inquire as to the status of the vacancy at Ouyen.

Taxis: driver standards

Ms BURKE (Pahran) — In the absence of the Minister for Transport I refer the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment to a matter relating to taxi services. Although I have raised this issue with the minister previously another case has been brought to my attention by a constituent. Often taxidriviers do not know where they are going and have absolutely no idea of the basic city tourist precincts, let alone the Melbourne streets.

A tourist couple in their 80s were travelling from outer Melbourne to the Royal Botanic Gardens — —

Ms Overington — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member has not asked for any action. To be consistent with other rulings tonight, I ask the Chair to require the honourable member to ask for action.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! I remind the honourable member for Pahran that she needs to ask for action by the minister, and I ask her to do that in a reasonable time.

Ms BURKE — The elderly couple from the United States of America were going from the outer suburbs to the Royal Botanic Gardens. They had been given clear instructions to be delivered to the Park Street iron gate, which is gate D at the gardens. The taxi delivered the couple to the absolute opposite side of the gardens. When I discussed with them their explanation to the taxidriver they told me that he had no idea where he was going.

This is not the first time this has happened either to me or to some of my elderly constituents. I request the Minister for Transport to direct the Victorian Taxi Directorate to instruct its drivers on the road system in metropolitan Melbourne. People who use taxis often cannot use other forms of transport, particularly if they

are disabled or elderly. It makes life extremely difficult if a taxi takes them to a place that is completely opposite to where they really want to go.

Many taxidriviers give a fabulous service throughout Melbourne and the surrounding areas, but I am encountering these unfortunate circumstances again and again. If Melbourne is to be a world-standard tourist destination, it is a basic requirement that taxidriviers know where they are taking tourists.

I would like the Minister for Transport to investigate not only the training of drivers but also why there are so many drivers at the moment who have no understanding of where they are going. Some of them are not even clear about the traffic rules.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms BURKE — If he wants to have a full inquiry, I will be absolutely delighted. It is important that people have confidence when they are being driven in taxis, particularly the elderly and the disabled.

Regional Victoria Working Together

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — I ask the Minister for State and Regional Development to consider a report called *Regional Victoria Working Together* and to advise me of the government's position on the issues contained in it. The report was prepared by Strategic Enterprise Development Pty Ltd on behalf of a number of groups from Ballarat including the City of Ballarat and Ballarat First. It has also been discussed with the mayor and chief executive officer of the City of Ballarat.

The proposition it contains would benefit all of regional Victoria. The report suggests that a Melbourne central business district site could be developed to promote lifestyle, business and tourism opportunities in regional Victoria. The report seeks the support of the government and the regions in putting the project together. Such a facility would provide an opportunity for people in regional Victoria to come to Melbourne to promote their regions.

I hope the Minister for State and Regional Development will consider the report seriously and provide advice as to how Ballarat and other regional centres can promote themselves in the areas of lifestyle, tourism and business development.

Responses

Ms PIKE (Minister for Aged Care) — I thank the honourable member for Ballarat West for her interest in palliative care. Palliative care is an important area of

work in our community, involving the care of people at an extremely vulnerable time of their lives. More specifically there is the little known and often unrecognised area of paediatric palliative care. As a community we expect old people to die but we do not feel very comfortable when young people and children die. The area of paediatric care has been neglected in our community for a long period.

Victoria has a well-developed palliative care system, which provides good quality care for terminally ill people, whether in a hospital, a residential setting or their own homes. However, to date the system has been primarily based around and concentrated on the needs of adults and their families, particularly older people. We know that we all die.

I am pleased to announce that the government will be making available on a recurrent basis \$617 600 to support the needs of children with life-threatening illnesses and their families. That is a first step towards addressing those needs. Some \$217 600 will be provided for a consultancy service to bring together health care professionals from the Royal Children's Hospital, Monash Medical Centre and Very Special Kids, a fantastic program acknowledged across Victoria as contributing to services in the area. That will ensure children and their families throughout Victoria receive the best possible care.

The honourable member for Ballarat West would be well aware of the organisation Very Special Kids because it has a strong link and partnership with Ballarat, particularly with the Loreto community. In addition to the \$217 600, Very Special Kids will receive \$400 000 each year to maintain services for children with life-threatening illnesses and provide assistance to their families.

I had the opportunity to launch the program a couple of weeks ago and was moved by the courage and resilience of the many families who have children with life-threatening illnesses — children who are going to die. Very Special Kids is a wonderful program that provides support to people in that extremely difficult situation.

The funding I have announced more than doubles the recurrent funding available for Very Special Kids. It is about looking after the people who most need help. It is about looking after those people we often do not want to know about, people often hidden in the community who have enormous needs and face great challenges that most of us cannot even imagine in our own lives.

I am proud that the government is offering additional support to those families and in particular that it is

acknowledging that people in rural and remote Victoria do not always have the capacity to access those services. Our efforts in that regard need to be redoubled. The government is getting on with the job of looking after people in the area.

The honourable member for Footscray raised the issue of the commonwealth government wishing to further use the old defence estate site in Maribyrnong. He asked about the potential for the area to be used for broader purposes, and particularly about the capacity to secure public housing on the site.

I am aware of the site. I have received correspondence on the matter from the federal Labor member for Gellibrand, Ms Nicola Roxon. She has taken a keen interest in the estate and is generally working hard to promote the west of Melbourne, including promoting tourism, economic development and education, and enhancing the capacity of the west to take its place with pride within Victoria. I can advise the honourable member for Footscray that I have recently written to the federal member for Gellibrand on the issue and that the future of the site has been the subject of some preliminary discussions between Ms Roxon and my office.

I am advised that for the Office of Housing to secure a public housing presence on the site, any sale of the property by the federal government would need to include a condition that ensured that a certain percentage of the land be developed as public housing. Obviously that is a difficult precondition, but not including it would create some challenges for the Office of Housing. Given that the commonwealth government is looking to dispose of the site and ensure that market forces are incorporated in its sale, the challenge is to work through the mechanism for public housing to be incorporated.

Under the current processes the Office of Housing could attempt to purchase land at the estate when it is released to the market at the Valuer-General's valuation. That would have to be drawn from the capital funds of the Office of Housing and matched and balanced against the statewide targets as identified by the office's housing needs analysis. The Office of Housing is constantly engaged in analysing housing needs right across Victoria, so the particular purchase would have to be benchmarked against those needs.

I am also advised that the land may not be available for at least three to five years, given that the sale by the defence department has to be finalised and much work still has to be undertaken. Nevertheless, I commend the honourable member for Footscray for his passionate commitment to the provision of affordable housing in

his area and his recognition that public housing continues to play a significant part in the whole fabric of the provision of affordable housing in our community. The western suburbs need appropriate, affordable and good public housing.

The government is currently undertaking significant redevelopment of public housing properties in Maidstone and Braybrook. As part of that redevelopment and the government's efforts to get a good mix between public and private housing, some land in the area will be sold, which may free up some resources to reinvest in other areas. It is certainly possible that the Office of Housing may have some involvement and presence in the defence department estate.

I would be very happy to take part in ongoing discussions with the honourable member for Footscray, the federal member for Gellibrand, and — as we always do in all such developments — people from the local community, including local government and public housing tenants, to ensure that there is continued good access to affordable housing, to public housing and to community housing for the people who need it most in our community.

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr BRUMBY (Minister for State and Regional Development) — I thank the honourable member for Doncaster for his congratulations. The honourable member for Ballarat East referred me to the proposal for a city base for regional councils. That issue was raised by the regional councils at a meeting with the Premier and me six weeks ago at which we discussed further opportunities for increased investment in regional Victoria.

One of the proposals put forward by the regional councils was to create a city base for regional councils to promote investment opportunities in regional Victoria. I therefore understand the concept proposed by the City of Ballarat in conjunction with key stakeholders in the Central Highlands. I understand from the honourable member's contribution tonight and a submission of which I have a copy that the shires of Moorabool, Hepburn and the Pyrenees have all expressed support for the concept in principle.

It is envisaged that a high-profile shopfront centre promoting regional Victoria be established in a central business district location and that it operate on a five-year trial basis. Exhibitor space at the centre would be allocated to the five regions. It is proposed in the draft submission that the state provide half of the \$700 000 annual operating costs. It would be quite a

substantial shopfront operation, the intent and objective of which would be to facilitate new investment in regional Victoria.

The concept has much merit. However, it needs further investigation and consultation with other regional cities and councils. The City of Greater Geelong, for example, already has promotional showrooms at Southbank. They could potentially be used as a model for such a centre. I understand those showrooms work well. When Federation Square is completed it will house tourism promotion facilities. Federation Square could provide a location for a Melbourne office for those regional councils.

I do not want to prejudge or pre-empt the proposal. Further consideration is needed. But as the Minister for State and Regional Development I am happy to put the issue on the agenda for discussions by the councils at the summit of mayors later this year. I am happy to advise the house that the Premier will be opening the annual summit and welcoming delegates from councils throughout regional and rural Victoria.

The summit will be held in late July. It will be the first time any government has brought all regional and rural councils together as a body so that the government can listen to them, work with them and harness their drive and commitment to new investment in regional Victoria.

The government has made substantial commitments to regional Victoria, as the honourable member for Ballarat East is aware, including \$170 million to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund; the program for regional development organisation; the rural community development program; and the Living Regions Living Suburbs fund, which is for regional councils and councils on the urban fringe.

In short, the government believes the concept has considerable merit and is keen to work with councils to explore it in more detail. I compliment the honourable member for Ballarat East on the initiative he has shown in working with local councils to further the opportunities for increased investment and growth throughout the Ballarat region.

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment) — The honourable member for Wantirna raised the Freeza program. He was probably a bit humble in saying that the previous Premier came up with the idea and drove the program — I know that the member for Wantirna has a major interest in and has been a strong supporter of the program. I would love to talk about the Freeza program but it is not within my portfolio responsibility.

I am happy to pass the issue on to the Minister for Youth Affairs in the other place.

The honourable member for Benalla asked what action I could take to halt the decline in retention rates in the post-compulsory education years. The member has wasted no time in getting to her feet and raising matters on behalf of her constituents — she made her inaugural speech only this afternoon. Across the state retention rates in the post-compulsory years are not good. They dropped from 86 per cent in 1992 to 81 per cent in 1999 — and that is not acceptable to the Bracks government. We need to make every endeavour to keep young people connected to education, employment and training.

The unfortunate aspect of leaving school early is that many young people who do so do not connect with full-time employment or training. They get a job here and there and then they tend to drop out. Work done by the Department of Employment, Education and Training shows that the previous government did not track those students well. We do not know what happens to those young people, but they are not picked up in employment. We need to make a difference to their lives and connect them to education, training or employment.

The Pathways project I announced yesterday will go some way to doing that. It will work with young people to map out their futures in education, training and employment. It will link them with community agencies, provide hands-on support and guidance and allow them to come back and change their plans if they want to do so. It will maintain a connection with young people who leave school early or think about doing so to ensure that they do not drop out of the system.

Yesterday I announced \$700 000 funding for 12 shires and municipalities across Victoria, including the shires of Delatite and Wangaratta, which are represented by the honourable member for Benalla. I am pleased to be able to also tell the new member for Benalla that in a state first and as part of the new Pathways project an additional \$25 000 has been allocated to The Centre, the adult and community education (ACE) provider in Wangaratta, to deliver Victorian certificate of education foundation English and mathematics to a small group of young people who have left school.

The money is being provided to the Yahoo program, which is run by a terrific group of people who are trying to make a difference in the lives of young people who leave school early because they are sick of it but who do not necessarily want to leave education. That very small group of young people wanted to be connected to the VCE and the government has allowed

the ACE provider to deliver that VCE program to them. Some of them may return to school, others may not, but an educational opportunity is being provided for them.

I congratulate the people who run the Yahoo program at The Centre in Wangaratta because it has made a difference for young people in that area. The government is recognising that by providing the funds to allow those people to do what they do extremely well. I am pleased that The Centre has finally been recognised financially for the work it has done. It will be a model we can apply across the state.

I also congratulate the people at the local schools with whom those conducting the program have worked. The schools were keen to ensure that young people who wanted to leave school did not necessarily have to leave education. I am pleased to announce that an additional \$25 000 has been made available for The Centre in Wangaratta which will service schools in Wangaratta and Benalla in a pilot program that will show the way across the state. I congratulate the honourable member for Benalla on being so active in raising the issue in her community.

The honourable member for Warrandyte raised for the attention of the Minister for Education the issue of asbestos in classrooms. I will ensure that that matter is brought to her attention. I know she will respond very quickly.

The honourable member for Rodney raised an issue concerning the Echuca hospital for the attention of the Minister for Health. I will raise that matter with him and he will respond very quickly as well.

The honourable member for Murray Valley raised a matter for the Minister for Transport. I will bring that matter to his attention so that he can respond quickly.

The honourable member for Prahran likewise raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport concerning taxi services. I understand she has previously had some discussions with the minister about the issue. I will bring that matter to the minister's attention so that he can respond quickly.

The honourable member for Mildura raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I will bring that matter to the minister's attention and I know he will respond quickly.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) —
Order! The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned at 10.51 p.m.