

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION**

**9 November 1999
(extract from Book 2)**

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¹ Resigned 3 November 1999

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Tuesday, 9 November 1999

The **SPEAKER** (Hon. Alex Andrianopoulos) took the chair at 2.04 p.m. and read the prayer.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

The **SPEAKER** — Order! The Chair welcomes to the gallery the Honourable Jim Plowman, the immediate past Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Broadcasting and televising of proceedings

The **SPEAKER** — Order! I advise the house that I have given permission for the use of two cameras in the chamber. The use of the second camera will be in accordance with the guidelines on the televising and broadcasting of proceedings adopted by the house on 18 February 1998 and amended on 27 May 1999.

I further advise the house that I have given permission for two government and two non-government media advisers to enter the press gallery during question time.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Drugs: safe injecting facilities

Dr **NAPHTHINE** (Leader of the Opposition) — I remind the Premier that during the election campaign he said on 3AW that if local councils objected to heroin shooting galleries they would have the right to veto them. However, yesterday the Deputy Premier contradicted him, saying that councils would have no such power of veto. Who is wrong, the Premier or the Deputy Premier?

Mr **BRACKS** (Premier) — I can inform the Leader of the Opposition that he will see on this side of the house a completely different style of operation from the style of the previous government.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr **BRACKS** — The government will work in partnership with local government. It sees local government not as an adversary or a creature of the state government, as the previous local government minister called it, but as a partner. I give the assurance that the government will work in consultation with local government and its communities on the sensitive matter of safe injecting facilities. They are one part of a broader policy, which should be taken in concert with

the provision of increased law enforcement, more rehabilitation beds, attempts to prevent drug taking in the first place by providing more apprenticeships and traineeships, and achieving a lift in school retention rates. The safe injecting facilities are one part of that plank.

I am pleased that Dr Penington has agreed to complete some unfinished business and assist the government by overseeing the implementation of its policy. That will provide him with the brief to work with local government and local communities — —

An **Opposition Member** — Answer the question!

Mr **BRACKS** — You do not understand. Dr Penington will work with local government and local communities, and the work will be done in cooperation with — not in opposition to — local government. That is the difference — —

Mr **McNamara** — You are wrong!

Mr **BRACKS** — That is the big difference — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The **SPEAKER** — Order! Honourable members are getting far too noisy, particularly members of the opposition. I ask them to refrain.

Mr **BRACKS** — The big difference between the former government and this government in the implementation of those plans is that we will work shoulder to shoulder with local government and communities. We do not see them as adversarial or as a separate arm of government. We will work with them to achieve the outcomes together. That is the big difference!

The Leader of the Opposition has so much trouble understanding it because it is a different style of operation. He has trouble — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The **SPEAKER** — Order! I ask the Premier to address his remarks through the Chair, and I should have asked the Leader of the Opposition to ask his question through the Chair. The Chair will not tolerate the across-the-table debate honourable members are engaging in at the moment.

Mr **McArthur** — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, today for the first time we see in practice the new sessional orders the house debated at considerable length last Thursday. I direct to the attention of the Chair sessional order 3(5), which states that all answers

to questions shall be direct, factual and succinct. I suggest the Premier's answer is anything but succinct. He has avoided the question throughout almost the entirety of his response, and he is yet to put one fact before the house.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair is well aware of sessional order 3(4), which deals with asking questions, and sessional order 3(5), which deals with answering questions. I remind the house that these are the sessional orders the house has adopted. However, it is up to individual ministers to answer questions in that manner. The Premier was being relevant in his answer, and I will continue to hear it.

Mr BRACKS — The opposition finds it difficult to understand that we will work together with local government. The Minister for Health and the Premier will work with the new committee headed by Dr Penington. We will do it together, and we will do it with the agreement and support of local government.

Public sector: waste and mismanagement

Mr LEIGHTON (Preston) — I ask the Premier to provide to the house details of the efficiencies he will achieve in the public sector to enable more resources to be committed to our schools and hospitals.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for Preston for his question and for his continuing interest in ensuring that we have less waste and mismanagement in the public sector.

As most honourable members know, on Friday I announced a major offensive against public sector waste. As a reflection of that effort to reduce waste and mismanagement in the public sector, one of the first steps taken by the new government was to establish an expenditure review committee of cabinet. It is the first cabinet subcommittee, and it was announced before any other cabinet subcommittee was in place. That subcommittee was set up to meet the commitments given by the government before and during the election campaign. I am able to announce to the house that the government has undertaken three major steps to achieve the 80 per cent cut in expenditure it proposed during the election campaign.

The first part involves the removal of 116 senior executive positions from the public sector by June next year. The second part involves a 1 per cent reduction in supplies and consumables used by government departments and particularly targets political advertising, consultancies, credit cards and other waste. The third part involves a review of the structure of the Department of Treasury and Finance, for which I am

responsible as Treasurer. There will be a cut of \$10 million that reflects the priorities of the new government through reducing the department's privatisation services, which are no longer required. That review will be delivered in the first term of the government.

By the end of the first term of government we will have \$135 million in expenditure reductions for every year thereafter, which will be delivered by the budget next year.

I refer to one particular aspect briefly — the 1 per cent levy on consumables, which reflects waste and mismanagement. The government will accept recommendations from the expenditure review committee only about consumables such as credit card use, political advertising and consultancies — that will be the requirement to be ticked off by Treasury and the expenditure review committee. As part of the initiative further measures will be undertaken to cut expenditure in Victoria. I will refer to some of the efficiencies to reduce waste in the public sector.

Last week I received two briefs. One of them concerned Colonial Stadium. I have now reduced expenditure in that area, particularly on the former Premier's request for taxpayers' money to be used to buy six platinum members seats at Colonial Stadium. The department's description of them in the brief was that the seats were:

... not unlike first-class airplane seats with their own television monitors and located in the best area of the stadium.

Those seats were purchased for an up-front cost of \$30 000 with a total cost of \$170 000 over five years. That was the cost to enable ministers to use those premium seats at Colonial Stadium. I inform honourable members on my side of the house that I have taken action to cancel those seats and return to the Victorian taxpayer \$170 000 that will now go into schools and hospitals.

A further brief has crossed my desk on a related matter, as a result of which I have also cancelled, where possible, further purchases by former government ministers of Olympic tickets and premium Olympic tickets. I refer in particular to the former Premier, the former Minister for Sport and the current Leader of the Liberal Party in the upper house, Mr Birrell, all of whom set aside additional Olympic tickets for themselves over and above the entitlements of all state premiers and ministers. I inform the house that the cost of the former Premier's tickets was \$6 224, tickets for the Leader of the Liberal Party in the upper house cost \$4 744, and — the pièce de résistance — the former

Minister for Sport, who was retiring at the time and would therefore not be taking up his tickets, had two tickets for 16 events for a grand total of \$12 500. You have to ask who those tickets were for when the minister was retiring.

I can inform the house that, as in the Colonial Stadium case, I have taken action to cancel the tickets and refund the money to Victorian taxpayers. Those not paid for we have cancelled. Where there was a bill I said, 'No, we will not do it'. That is an indication of the difference between the priorities of the previous government and the priorities of this government. We are serious about waste and mismanagement. We will reallocate those moneys to health, education and police budgets.

The previous government did not care. It feathered its own nest. We will stop the waste in government.

Schools: class sizes

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — I remind the Minister for Education that during the election campaign the Labor Party promised there would be no prep, grade 1 or grade 2 class of more than 21 students. Can the minister now advise the house how many additional teachers that will require and what the total capital and recurrent costs of the promise will be?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Bentleigh will desist.

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — I thank the honourable member for his question about education. Education dropped off the radar screen under the previous government. We are delighted that one of our highest priorities in government has also engaged the interest of members of the opposition.

I assume from the question that opposition members concur with our policy of bringing class sizes down to 21 in prep to grade 2. We have taken a lot of advice on this matter from teachers, parents and school communities. If we want quality education — and all of our children deserve a quality education — we have to have classrooms that are not crowded.

Our pledge made earlier this year, before the election campaign, was very clear. We pledged that we would bring those class sizes down to 21 — and we will. The Premier and I have already announced the first tranche of money to go into the schools' global budgets so that students in each of those classes can have teachers in front of them at the beginning of next year.

The Premier announced an amount of \$12.6 million for the first half of next year, to be followed by — —

Opposition members interjecting.

Ms DELAHUNTY — Ah! But there is more. Another \$12.6 million will go into school budgets for the second half of next year.

Most Victorians have looked very closely at our education policy — and they love it. They loved it in regional Victoria and right across Victoria. They are waiting for us to deliver.

We have also allocated capital so that classrooms and relocatables will be made available over the term of this Bracks Labor government to implement our class-size pledge.

Opposition members interjecting.

Ms DELAHUNTY — Mr Speaker, they did not listen during the campaign, and they are not listening now.

Over the next four years the rest of the \$40 million retrieved from government waste and mismanagement, including those six platinum tickets for the Colonial Stadium at \$30 000 each, is allocated to go straight into my budget — the education budget.

We are looking forward to our policies, which were scrupulously costed by Access Economics and independently ticked off, being implemented during the forthcoming four years of the Bracks Labor government.

Drugs: government strategy

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I ask the Minister for Health to inform the house of what the government is doing to tackle the drugs crisis in our community.

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — I thank the honourable member for Footscray, who has had a lot of involvement in the drugs issue, for his question. There are major drug problems in his electorate, even right outside his own electorate office. He has faced the serious consequences of major drug abuse.

The drug problem is one that causes concern to members on both sides of the house because drugs affect not just one area or municipality but the whole of Victoria. When I visited Bendigo recently I spoke with the parents of a person who is addicted to drugs. The story they told was so tragic that it influenced me personally and also influenced the policies I want to

implement as the Minister for Health. That is, in part, why our strategy is aimed at giving support to parents of people who are addicted to drugs. In the past many of those people have been ignored and have been left to face the problem without any proper support.

A key part of the government's drug strategy is to give parents support, advice and assistance with the terrible tragedies they face. The drug death rate is rising at a shocking rate with a massive increase last year of 60 per cent. This year 247 people have died from drug overdoses. The government is determined to do everything it can to stem the number of deaths, stop the terrible tragedies caused by drugs and get the drug nuisance off the streets.

That is why the Premier announced yesterday the setting up of an expert committee headed by Professor Penington to oversee the implementation of the government's policy. Professor Penington was originally appointed by the former Premier, and right throughout his appointment the Labor Party gave the Penington committee and its outcomes absolute bipartisan support. I look forward to the same level of bipartisan support from the other side of the house so that we can move together on a problem that should be above party politics — that is, reducing the number of people who are dying and getting the drug problem off the streets. That is why the government has adopted a comprehensive strategy that covers a range of factors.

The press has concentrated on the safe injecting facilities, but the government is also looking at providing more drug rehabilitation beds, more support for families and, most importantly, more police on the streets. The government is committed to providing 800 extra police, many of whom will be located in the crime and drug hot spots to try to get the drug problem off the streets and ensure that the death and crime rates caused by drugs are reduced.

I look forward to a bipartisan position. I notice members of the opposition seem to be twisting themselves into knots trying to come up with issues it can disagree with about the government's policies. Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition was reported as opposing safe injecting facilities, which provide a safe environment but which do not provide heroin, and supporting heroin trials, which are the same thing but which also provide the heroin. It seems there is an inconsistency, and the only way I can explain that is that perhaps the opposition — —

Mr McArthur — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I again draw your attention to sessional order 3(5) which says:

All answers to questions shall be direct, factual and succinct.

I suggest to you, Sir, that the Deputy Premier's current foray into discussing opposition programs and policies is neither relevant nor factual; nor is it direct or succinct.

Mr THWAITES — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, the opposition's position on an overall drug policy is very relevant because the government is calling for everyone to take a bipartisan approach.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order; the Deputy Premier was providing information to the house. However, I remind the house of the new sessional orders it has adopted in regard to the number of questions to be asked during question time. It appears to the Chair that at this stage the length of answers will certainly not result in 10 questions being asked in 30 minutes. I ask the Deputy Premier to conclude his answer.

Mr THWAITES — The final point on the issue of bipartisanship is that the opposition has previously supported a heroin trial, and I look forward to its support for safe injecting facilities. Prior to the election the former government was planning for safe injecting facilities and discussions were being held at a high level involving the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition may not be aware of those plans because the former Premier did not share many of his proposals with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

I look forward to the opposition and the government genuinely working together. Many opposition members have made major contributions in this area now and in the past, as have many government members. I seek a clear commitment from the opposition to bipartisanship so we can work together on this serious problem.

Schools: maintenance

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — Given that the previous government inherited a \$670 million maintenance backlog in government schools, as confirmed by the Auditor-General, I ask the Minister for Education — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Warrandyte is entitled to ask his question and be heard in silence. The honourable member for Footscray will desist from constantly interjecting during question time.

Mr HONEYWOOD — Given that the former government reduced the backlog to \$130 million, will the Minister for Education provide a time frame by which this backlog will be fully eliminated?

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — On the subject of what governments have inherited, I will run through what the Bracks government has inherited: 380 schools closed; 9000 teachers ripped out of the system; and a target of 30 per cent of teachers on contracts.

The Bracks government has stated that it will put respect and resources back into education. That is what has been ripped out of education, and the government will put it back. Teachers will be provided for students, and class sizes will be reduced.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Minister for Education is debating the question. I ask her to come back to answering it.

Ms DELAHUNTY — The Bracks government has inherited a huge challenge to repair education. The maintenance backlog is being worked through, as will be all applications for upgrades and for new schools, which the government is committed to. The government has stated that it will deliver on those promises, which were scrupulously costed and ticked off by Access Economics. The costings were never challenged during the campaign — opposition members never laid a glove on us over those costings! The government will implement those promises: reduced class sizes; working through the maintenance backlog; and capital improvements over the term of the government.

Schools: self-governance

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — Will the Minister for Education inform the house of the government's plan to terminate the former government's self-governing schools program?

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — It is nice to have education as top of the pops in question time — it has not happened for seven years! I thank the honourable member for Mitcham for his question. I know he has had a longstanding interest in and championship of education matters in his electorate.

The Bracks Labor government believes education is not a business — it is a public benefit, a personal benefit and a benefit to the community. The government believes all students, regardless of which school they

attend or where their parents live or work, should have the opportunity to achieve excellence. That is why I am delighted to announce today in Parliament, which the government believes is the correct forum for major policy announcements, that the Labor government will put an end to the division and hostility created by the former government's flawed self-governing schools program. From next year all schools will enjoy the same funding and employment conditions.

During the election campaign the government made it crystal clear that it would not continue the flawed model but would return the tiny handful of schools involved — 51 out of a total of 1636 — to a strong state framework that sets educational standards. That is what the last government forgot about under its self-governing schools program. That framework will demand accountability for the way schools spend public money. Confidence in all schools will be lifted.

Yesterday I met with leading principals from the self-governing schools, and they have accepted the government's position. They have accepted that the government went to the people with a clear policy to terminate the self-governing schools program and that it now has a mandate to implement the policy.

Victorian schools can be confident that self-management is here to stay, but the government wants an enhanced model that involves cooperation between schools, not competition — one that does not foster a culture of winners and losers.

The former government allocated substantial funding to entice schools into the flawed model. Labor will divert the savings from the termination of that program equitably across all state schools according to need. That is the difference: the government will fund schools according to need rather than the formula set up by the former government that rewarded winners.

In keeping with the commitment made by the Premier during the election campaign, all contracts will be honoured providing they were entered into in good faith prior to the commissioning of the new government. Contracts that were slipped in after the commissioning of the government will not be honoured. It is my intention to have the many excellent leaders and school councils among the 51 schools join the strong state system.

The Department of Education will today send a memo to all schools outlining the current policy. No more schools will be granted self-governing status and all future employment of teachers and principals will be under the Teaching Service Act. Steps will be taken to

encourage teachers and principals employed by school councils to transfer back to employment under the act.

The department has set up a small audit team to work individually with each school. Transition arrangements will ensure that no school or child is disadvantaged. The government wants quality education for all students, regardless of where they go to school.

The SPEAKER — Order! Question time has been going for 37 minutes and the house is now dealing with question 6. I ask honourable members to adhere to the sessional orders adopted last Thursday. The length of the answers leads me to believe honourable members are not adhering to the spirit of those sessional orders.

Teachers: contracts

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — Given the answer by the Minister for Education to the previous question, I ask: as school councils have employed several teachers of high standing on a salary range of \$58 000 per annum, how does the minister propose to bring them back into the fold given that the highest salary level for a department teaching contract is \$49 000? What compensation will the minister guarantee those teachers for their massive potential loss of earnings?

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — The man who was sitting around the table when the Kennett government savaged education in Victoria and who was a member of that government — —

Mr McArthur — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the minister is clearly debating and not responding to the question.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. The minister had hardly commenced her answer.

Ms DELAHUNTY — The Bracks Labor government will repair the education system that was savaged by the Kennett government. As I said, and if the honourable member for Warrandyte was listening he would have heard me say, that although the government will terminate the program it will honour all contracts.

Ovine Johne's disease

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) — Will the Minister for Finance advise the house of the financial status of the Ovine Johne's disease eradication program introduced by the former Kennett government in 1996?

Mr BRUMBY (Minister for Finance) — The financial status of the scheme is of major concern to both me and the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Mr McNamara — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, under the organisation of government arrangements matter this is the responsibility of the Minister for Agriculture. Is it appropriate for a minister who is not responsible for animal health to answer the question? The question should be referred to the Minister for Agriculture. Let honourable members see what he knows about it!

Mr Bracks — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, it is appropriate for the Minister for Finance and Minister for State and Regional Development to comment on two relevant matters. Firstly, it is a financial matter with significant implications for the budget and that is why the Minister for Finance is commenting. Secondly, the Minister for State and Regional Development has overarching responsibility for general portfolio matters.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have not yet ruled on the first point of order. I remind all honourable members that when the Speaker is on his feet all members shall desist from speaking. To ensure the smooth operation of the house, under sessional order 10 the Speaker now has the power to remove any honourable member from the chamber for up to 1½ hours. I will not hesitate to use that power should it become necessary.

There is no point of order, but I ask the Minister for Finance to restrict his comments to matters relating to his responsibility and jurisdiction.

Mr BRUMBY — As I said, the financial status of the scheme is a matter of grave concern to the Department of Treasury and Finance, me as Minister for Finance, and particularly the state's sheep producers.

The background to the scheme is that in 1996 the then Minister for Agriculture introduced a new ovine Johne's eradication program. It marked a significant departure from the previous control scheme and introduced a compulsory slaughter arrangement with compensation payable. When the scheme was introduced a government contribution of \$1 million was provided; the scheme was to be financed by the sheep industry with the loan of \$1 million to be repaid in three years through a levy of 9 cents on each sheep sold. These new arrangements were introduced despite the advice of groups such as the Veterinary Association Australian and others. By 1998, the scheme had blown

out to such an extent that the government was required to fund additional millions and was forced to increase the levy payable by sheep producers from 9 cents to 12 cents. The period of repayment was extended from 3 years to 10 years.

The former government did not see the writing on the wall. I am advised that the liability of the Ovine Johne's disease eradication scheme is now in excess of \$16 million. At the current rate of repayment of 12 cents per sheep stamp duty, it will take sheep producers 47 years to repay the loan! A loan which was to be repaid in 3 years will not be repaid for 47 years!

It is a financial disaster. It is no wonder the former Minister for Agriculture was desperate not to have the matter raised in Parliament. It is bungling on a monumental scale. The original scheme was introduced against the advice of groups such as the Australian Veterinary Association and despite the warnings of the former opposition about the cost blow-out.

The government and sheep producers now have to work out how to address the \$16 million liability, which is currently increasing by around \$1 million per week. The Minister for Agriculture has been examining this matter and will make a major statement in the near future. However, it is this government that is going to have to fix up the mess the former government created.

Teachers: contracts

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — Given the statements of the Minister for Education, both last week and today, that in future fixed-term employment contracts with teachers will cease, will she inform the house whether that applies only to school-council-negotiated contracts with teachers or whether it includes all employment contracts with teachers in Victorian government schools?

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — This is delicious — there has not been so much focus on education in seven years. I thank the honourable member for Warrandyte for his suddenly developed interest in education.

The government believes if it is to provide quality education, and attract and hang on to the best and brightest teachers in the school system, it has to provide professional terms and conditions for teachers. A teacher shortage is looming next year, a fact the previous government would never acknowledge.

Under the previous government's flawed notion of the contract system some teachers, particularly new graduates, were offered contracts of a few weeks — a

term here or there. A lot of them had the permanency of a person with bar work, and could not ask for a bank loan based on such short-term employment.

The Bracks Labor government believes that if it is to attract teachers — —

Mr Rowe interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have already told the house that unless honourable members desist from interjecting they will be ordered to spend the next 1½ hours outside the chamber.

Ms DELAHUNTY — Teachers should be offered ongoing employment; contract positions should be offered only in exceptional, short-term circumstances. The government will offer teachers employment on an ongoing basis so that schools can plan and every parent can be assured that his or her child is being taught by a teacher who will continue for the entire school year and will not disappear in the middle of the June holidays, as happened under the previous government.

The government wants quality education, and that means having professional teachers. The government will deliver it.

Housing: crisis accommodation

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — Will the Minister for Housing advise the house of the government's response to the increasing level of unmet demand for crisis-supported accommodation services?

Ms PIKE (Minister for Housing) — Homelessness is an issue of grave concern to people across the community, and addressing the problem is a high priority of the Bracks Labor government. It has become clear to me that there are high levels of unmet need in the community.

On Monday, I had the opportunity to launch a report to the inter-agency working party on crisis accommodation. It provides a snapshot of the services and the way they respond to need in three major inner city crisis centres. It provides up-to-date and comprehensive information about the real demand for services for the homeless. The results were extremely alarming and distressing and raise serious questions about the lack of attention paid to the area by the previous government over the past seven years.

I will tell you about some of those responses and about the results of the survey. Only 30 per cent of requests for crisis accommodation were able to be met under the current situation. Thirty-five per cent of the people who

fronted for crisis accommodation and services had been sleeping rough the night before, and a further 25 per cent had insecure accommodation. Those people had multiple support needs that were not met. The survey also indicated that people are drifting in from the outer suburbs and rural communities and seeking support from the inner city crisis centres. The city has had to take up the slack.

The government will establish a crisis accommodation centre for single women in the St Kilda area and offer housing and additional support from the support and accommodation program. It will also set up 14 crisis accommodation centres for young people in the eastern suburbs and make available 5 per cent of public housing stock for emergency accommodation.

The government will make a serious attempt to integrate these programs. No comprehensive information technology plan exists for improving the integration of services. This may surprise the house. People who front up to one crisis accommodation centre and are sent away have to tell their story repeatedly at other centres. How humiliating for those in great need in our community! Over 50 per cent of those interviewed in the snapshot survey were young people, and the government will expand inner city crisis support for them.

Further, I announce that for the first time a comprehensive strategic plan addressing homelessness in Victoria will be developed so there will be a thorough integration of services. The government will proceed to another snapshot survey in rural and outer metropolitan areas so that the issue of homelessness can be addressed and Victorians will know that the government's concern will be picked up in strategic policy directions.

The SPEAKER — Order! The time for asking questions has expired, and the minimum number of 10 questions has been asked.

Mr McArthur — The point of order I wish to raise concerns sessional orders and those matters raised in the house previously. When the Premier made his response to the Independents charter and entered into his secret arrangements to gain their support, he promised —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr McArthur — Not the secret ones! When he entered into some of those arrangements he promised to put an end to the bad practices that he said had occurred previously during question time. Last Thursday the house introduced sessional orders which required

ministers to be succinct, direct and factual in their responses to questions.

A plea was made for ministers to be direct, factual, succinct and relevant in their responses. Government members have flouted both the Premier's instructions and your plea, Mr Speaker. I ask that tomorrow you bring to the house guidelines for implementing the sessional orders adopted by the house last week.

The SPEAKER — Order! On the point of order.

Mr Batchelor — On the point of order, we have just finished a question time which went for nearly one hour. In that time 10 questions were asked and 10 answers were provided. That is in line with sessional orders and what was envisaged by the standing orders.

The government wants an open and accountable Parliament. The new sessional orders provide for that, particularly in relation to question time. The grandstanding we have just seen is another attempt to stand over and intimidate people in the Parliament following the failed attempt last week. The point of order raised by the honourable member for Monbulk should not be entertained.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. However, I remind the house of the sessional orders adopted and the spirit of them. The Chair has enforced the requirement that a minimum of 10 questions be asked. The sessional orders require 30 minutes or a minimum of 10 questions for question time. Members of the house, particularly ministers, should adhere generally to the time limit. I listened to and read the contributions of all honourable members to last week's debate — the general intention was to keep it to around that time. The Chair cannot force ministers to answer in a particular way or within a particular time limit. There is no point of order.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair recognises and welcomes to the public gallery the Honourable Clyde Holding, a former federal member for Melbourne Ports and a former Leader of the Opposition in this Parliament; Senator Judith Troeth; and Petro Georgiou, the federal member for Kooyong.

PETITION

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

Food: genetic modification

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

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens sheweth that:

We oppose the introduction of unlabelled genetically engineered food and ingredients;

We believe that all genetically engineered food and ingredients should be labelled so that they are clearly identifiable;

We believe that genetically engineered food should be extensively tested before it is allowed into the food chain;

We believe that irradiation should also come into this class.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the meeting of health ministers on 22 October will decide in our favour.

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

By Mr STEGGALL (Swan Hill) (82 signatures)

Laid on table.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Agriculture Victoria Services Pty Ltd — Report for the year 1998–99

Chief Electrical Inspector — Report of the Office for the year 1998–99

Environment Conservation Council — Report for the year 1998–99

Environment Protection Authority — Report for the year 1998–99

Justice Department — Report for the year 1998–99

Legal Practice Board — Report for the year 1998–99

Victorian Catchment Management Council — Report for the year 1998–99

Victorian Dairy Industry Authority — Report for the year 1998–99.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Matters of public importance

The SPEAKER — Order! Following the adoption of sessional order 9 relating to matters of public

importance, I propose to adopt guidelines for the operation of this procedure similar to those used by the House of Representatives. In deciding whether a matter submitted to me is in order, I will consider the following:

Whether the matter is definite — that is, single, specific and precise in its wording.

Whether it relates to or concerns a subject in respect of which the house has an authority to act or a right to discuss.

I intend to exercise wide discretion in accepting matters which anticipate discussion on any subject which appears on the notice paper, subject to the proviso that discussion on a bill due for imminent debate should not be canvassed.

A matter encompassing a subject under consideration by a committee of the Parliament may be allowed provided no other criterion is transgressed.

Discussion will not be permitted on a matter which is sub judice.

In considering a matter which is the same in substance as any question which has been resolved during the same session, I will consider whether new, different or extenuating circumstances exist and therefore whether it is still a matter of public importance.

Matters involving legislation may be permitted.

Matters submitted should not relate to the character or conduct of a person whose actions can be challenged only by means of a substantive motion.

Remembrance Day

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I move:

That on Thursday, 11 November, the Speaker do take the chair at 12 noon.

I put this procedural motion to enable members to attend Remembrance Day functions prior to Parliament commencing its activities. I have moved the motion today to give honourable members ample opportunity to make the necessary arrangements and to participate in this important community event.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling for statements by members I advise the house of two matters. First, statements by members is a new debate where each honourable member called shall participate for 90 seconds. Unfortunately, the timing devices do not permit for a visual display of that time and I will leave it entirely up to the honourable member's judgment as to when the 90 seconds are up. However, an electronic device has been acquired which is capable of determining the 90-second period. The Clerk will advise when the honourable member's time is up and I will then formally advise the honourable member of that fact.

I indicate the tradition in all debates is to give the call to the opposition. However, because this is the first time this matter is being called, and without wishing to set a precedent and with the concurrence and agreement of the honourable member for Monbulk, I will give the first call today and today only to the Leader of the House.

Introduction

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — Today history is being made in the Victorian Parliament, this being the first day of a new parliamentary process. The new vehicle of statements by members will allow individual members to make short, sharp statements on matters of interest to them. Its introduction demonstrates the desire of the Bracks Labor government to improve the performance and outcome of Parliament. It is an example of the Bracks Labor government delivering on open and accountable government — and it is important to the government that Parliament achieves that objective. Statements by members are but one part of the process of achieving it.

I hope all those who participate in the new parliamentary process will use it wisely, constructively and in the best interests of the community. In launching the new process, may I wish all members who use it well.

ALP: Nunawading Province re-election

Mr LEIGH (Mordialloc) — The matter I raise concerns what in 1985 was one of the most evil acts perpetrated on our democracy. During the course of the Nunawading Province re-election scandal, the then secretary of the Victorian ALP sought to cheat the people of Nunawading of their right to vote so that the ALP could gain control — —

The SPEAKER — Order! Stop the clock. I remind the honourable member for Mordialloc that he should propose a substantive motion if he wants to canvass issues such as the one he is now raising.

Mr LEIGH — That evil act was perpetrated by the then secretary of the Victorian ALP, who sought to make a vote for an Independent candidate a vote for the ALP so that he could participate in gaining control of the Legislative Council. For that act — —

The SPEAKER — Order! Stop the clock. The honourable member for Mordialloc is canvassing issues that the Chair believes should be done by substantive motion. The opportunity to make a 90-second statement does not give him the right to raise the issue he is raising. I ask him to desist, or I will cease to hear him.

Mr LEIGH — He was rewarded in the end by being made Leader of the House and adviser to the Premier. Unfortunately our democracy is being ruined by this character.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Mordialloc has persistently defied the direction of the Chair. If he continues to do so, I will sit him down forthwith.

Mr LEIGH — It now seems that the 90-second statements are designed to be about what the government wants to hear. The fact is that that shining example in this chamber, the honourable member for Thomastown, now the Leader of the House, cannot make up his mind on whether he is Peter Batchelor, minister, or Peter Batchelor, private person.

The SPEAKER — Order! I will no longer hear the honourable member for Mordialloc.

Robert Clarke

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — I congratulate Moonee Ponds resident Mr Robert Clarke on being named the 1999 electrical apprentice of the year. Last month Mr Clarke was also named the best fourth-year apprentice at the Victec Electrical and Electronic Skills Centre. Mr Clarke, who is 21, comes from Edenhope in north-western Victoria, where his family still lives.

All the finalists were interviewed by a six-member panel. In giving Mr Clarke his award the panel took into consideration his performance both on the job and at trade school. Mr Clarke hopes to work as an avionics technician with the RAAF. When giving the award, Mr Maurice Graham, the chief executive officer of Victec, said Mr Clarke's initiative, along with the fact that he had come from the country and thrown himself

into his trade, had helped him secure the award. He said also:

What impressed us was his willingness to move around different parts of the trade and the fact that he worked on weekends to gather knowledge in different areas of his trade.

I join with the Essendon and Moonee Ponds communities in congratulating Mr Clarke on winning this excellent award and wish him well in the future.

Drugs: safe injecting facilities

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — It is urgent that the government clarify whether local councils will be allowed to control the location of heroin shooting galleries in their municipalities. In a recent edition of the *Herald Sun* the Deputy Premier confirmed that the location of such shooting galleries would be decided by the government and that councils would have no power of veto. That is in contrast to the Premier's comments when he was the Leader of the Opposition. On 6 September he told Neil Mitchell on 3AW that the councils would need to approve the location of such shooting galleries and that if the councils did not give their approval the galleries would not go ahead.

There is a clear contradiction between what the Premier and the Deputy Premier have said on the issue. It is urgent that the community and this house know who is right and who is wrong and whether local councils will have power to control activities in their own municipalities. Under this government will councils be able to control whether heroin shooting galleries are placed in their municipalities?

Loddon–Mallee Women's Health Service

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) — I direct to the attention of the house the fact that this weekend the Loddon–Mallee Women's Health Service, which covers the whole Loddon–Mallee region, will be celebrating the 10th anniversary of its establishment in Bendigo. It is a significant event in the life of health services in Bendigo. Ten years ago, when federal and state Labor governments were in office, the service was opened by the then state Labor Minister for Health, Caroline Hogg.

It has survived 10 turbulent years, operating from three different sites, starting in a small house in Wills Street. Now it has grown to become a strong service that operates from a good location in Queen Street in the centre of Bendigo, with another site in Ouyen providing outreach services. It offers wide-ranging health services in the area between Bendigo and Mildura through what

is called the 'Girls on the Go' bus — in other words, the so-called girls get in the bus and take health services to the women in the regions, where they are needed.

I recognise the work of the first manager of the service, Deb Wardle, who will be cutting the cake this Saturday. I congratulate the current manager, Wendy Mason, and the staff and committee of Loddon–Mallee Women's Health Service on reaching a great milestone. I look forward to working with them to make sure the service develops and grows in the next 10 years.

South Australian Department of Human Services

Mr LUPTON (Knox) — I raise an important matter for the attention of the Minister for Community Services. I have just been given a letter from the South Australian Department of Human Services, and I do not want the sort of thing to which the letter refers to happen in Victoria. Officers of the department picked out of the telephone book the names of a number of people they believed could be the father of a child, whose name I will not mention. The letter received by those people states:

The department is currently searching for one ... who may be the father of the above child. If you are please contact me on [the above telephone number].

I raise the matter because it is unprofessional of the department to send innocent people letters saying that they may be the father of a particular child. In this case five people received the same letter, which in two instances their wives opened. Honourable members can imagine the sorts of problems they had. I hope the unprofessional behaviour being perpetrated by the Department of Human Services in South Australia does not occur in Victoria.

Werribee: election result

Ms GILLETT (Werribee) — I thank the constituents of Werribee for demonstrating their full and complete understanding of the failings of the Kennett government by returning me to Parliament as part of a Labor government with the highest winning swing in Victoria! Because the Kennett government failed to understand one monosyllabic word, no, it lost a seat it could have won — Labor's most marginal seat.

Werribee now has a voice in government. The Bracks Labor government will do for Werribee the fundamental things that needed to be done but were never done by the Liberal government, which wanted to turn the seat toxic!

Knox hospital

Mr WELLS (Wantirna) — I highlight the serious concerns held by the people of Wantirna about the recent announcement that the Knox public hospital project will not proceed. The new tertiary hospital at Knox would have provided 300 additional beds in an area in which there is growing and unmet demand for acute health services. The proposed upgrade of the Maroondah Hospital and the Angliss Health Services that the government has announced will provide only 96 additional beds, thereby creating a potential net loss of approximately 200 beds in the outer east.

What does the government propose to do to meet that shortfall in expected bed numbers and the resultant negative effects on waiting lists, and how will it tackle the increasing demand in the outer east for acute health services, which would have been met by the establishment of a major tertiary health facility at Knox?

Counihan art gallery

Mr CARLI (Coburg) — I congratulate the City of Moreland on the recent opening of the Counihan art gallery. The gallery, which is located in Sydney Road, Brunswick, will be a major venue for art in the northern suburbs. I acknowledge its being named after Noel Counihan, a major artist who was not only one of Victoria's own but possibly Australia's major social realist artist. He was also a well-known left-wing activist in the Brunswick area. His family is pleased his important part in Brunswick's political folklore has been recognised.

In the 1930s he was a key figure in the free-speech movement during a period in which members of the Unemployed Workers Movement were arrested by the police. At one stage he allowed himself to be hoisted over Sydney Road in a welded cage to give a speech to thousands of Brunswick people. Because he was in the cage the police could not stop him, and his actions helped secure free speech not only in Brunswick but throughout Victoria.

Frankston Hospital

Ms McCALL (Frankston) — I refer to the commitment the minority Labor government has made to upgrade Frankston Hospital. I am interested to find out how the government intends to deliver all its promises. I understand that it takes about three years to complete the required planning, tendering and building process before one hospital bed can be opened. The Labor government has promised the hospital an extra

64 beds, for which it has allocated a paltry \$12 million, compared with the \$30 million the former coalition government gave to the hospital. In order to increase the number of beds by 64 the government will have to provide a further \$16 million a year in recurrent funding.

The minority Labor government has promised \$84 million in gross funding over four years from whatever funds it gets for the whole of Victoria as well as under the Australian health care agreement. Given that the Peninsula Health Care Network has been advertising for nursing and medical staff for some months, who will staff the beds? Victoria is experiencing the effects of an international shortage of nurses, so I hope the minority Labor government will not allow people to lie on new beds with wheels for hours on end because it failed to address the issue of support staff.

Victoria University of Technology

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — I congratulate the staff of the civil engineering faculty at the St Albans campus of the Victoria University of Technology on supplying through its final year students practical solutions to community problems. When the previous Labor government starting planning the Western Ring Road, the civil engineering faculty looked at not only the social impact of the proposal but the structure of the ring road.

This time the director of the civil engineering course, Mr Greg Evans, has encouraged his final year students to do a study on the St Albans railway line and to present a report on the issue to the people of St Albans.

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

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed from 3 November; motion of Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) for adoption of address-in-reply.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling the honourable member for Bulleen, I remind the house of the precedent that inaugural speeches shall be heard in silence.

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — I am honoured to have been given the opportunity to be the first opposition speaker to express my appreciation of His

Excellency the Governor and to thank him for his opening address. I also congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Speaker. I am sure you will be a fair and impartial Speaker of this place.

I am aware of the honour that has been bestowed on me by the people of the Bulleen electorate, who have entrusted me to be their representative in the Victorian Legislative Assembly.

ΘΑ ΗΘΕΛΑ ΝΑ ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΙΣΩ ΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΠΑΡΟΙΚΙΑ ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΥΠΟΣΤΗΡΙΞΗ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΒΟΗΘΕΙΑ ΠΟΥ ΜΟΥ ΕΔΩΞΑΝ ΟΛΑ ΑΥΤΑ ΤΑ ΧΡΟΝΙΑ.

It would be remiss of me not to mention my family, to whom I owe thanks for their constant support. I thank my wife, Angela, for her encouragement, assistance, strength and support. I also thank my children for their support, especially over the past six months. I express my gratitude to my parents, who often went without the bare necessities just so they could give their children opportunities they did not have.

It is 35 years since I arrived at Station Pier with my family. We lived with two other families in a three-bedroom house in an inner suburb of Melbourne. Growing up in a new country, including attending school in Fitzroy and Thornbury, was difficult. Nevertheless, I was encouraged to study hard and make my parents proud.

My wife, Angela, and I both have parents who began their working lives in factories and who later ran small businesses. Through their example we came to understand the value of individual enterprise. Through hard work and commitment we have been able to make our way in a state and a country that have offered us real opportunities. When we completed our university degrees we were both lucky enough to gain employment straightaway; but in the late 1980s I became concerned that after years of schooling our young people could no longer expect to get a job, let alone a career in their chosen fields of endeavour.

As a teacher, I realised that the education system was to blame for stressing the lowest common denominator as being good enough. I realised that Labor was to blame for teaching our young people only about rights and privileges, not responsibilities. They were some of the reasons that attracted me to the Liberal Party, given that education is our most crucial investment. By contrast, I see the value in academic excellence as a solid foundation for careers and the encouragement of aspirations. We must provide the highest possible standards of education to create a highly skilled and motivated society. I have visited a number of schools in

Bulleen, and I have to say I have been impressed with the enthusiasm, the professionalism and the hard work shown by the principals and staff.

Templestowe College, for example, is an excellent educational establishment that provides an education that is determined by the character, abilities and desires of the individual. The school encourages all students to build on their strengths and to achieve their full potential. The school council is energetic and active, and it is looking forward to the future with new ideas and vision.

Bulleen Heights Special School is also situated in my electorate. Bulleen Heights is a dual-mode school that currently provides educational programs for approximately 120 students between the ages of 5 and 18 years who have an intellectual disability and/or autism. Classes vary in size, with staffing reflecting student needs. The school provides excellent teaching programs and learning experiences designed to develop the particular skills and strengths of each student. I hope the new Minister for Education will respect the independence of Bulleen Heights and continue to provide resources and funding to ensure that the school continues to operate as a first-class school for students with special needs.

Education, however, extends beyond the classroom, and it is now a personal and professional requirement for most Victorians. Increasing emphasis on industry-relevant vocational education and training must, therefore, be a major priority in the future. As my own career has developed and I have gone from being a classroom teacher to working as chief of staff to the former Minister for Tertiary Education and Training I have developed a passion for promoting a training culture in our community. Much of my work has involved encouraging greater dialogue between industry associations, the technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, apprenticeship centres and government to enhance the entry-level training opportunities for young people.

I must say that under the former government Victoria's training system was the most efficient and the most highly regarded by employers in Australia. Emphasis was on diversity, choice and access for all students. We must thank the former Minister for Tertiary Education and Training, the honourable member for Warrandyte, for ensuring a first-class training system.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has informed us that the young generation of today can participate in four or five major career changes during their working lives. We must equip our young people, therefore, with

specialised skills that are balanced by fundamental values as building blocks to ensure a smoother transition from one job to another. Tertiary education and training is now very much about lifelong learning — from the cradle to the grave. That trend also requires government to provide reskilling and multiskilling opportunities to our mature-age work force at both TAFE and university levels — their learning needs cannot be ignored. Nor should we overlook the increasing expectations of retirees for the learning opportunities available through the University of the Third Age initiative.

I know the Manningham University of the Third Age is doing a wonderful job in my electorate looking after the learning opportunities of older persons. I hope the government continues to support the University of the Third Age. Ensuring the personal needs of individuals within the entire community is very much in the spirit of inclusiveness that will ensure any government's social contract with the people of Victoria can stand the test of time.

Of equal priority to our community's expectation of access to enhanced educational opportunities is the value people place on the environment. We have come a long way from the Do the Right Thing advertising campaign to reduce street litter that was around during my youth. We are all vitally concerned about protecting and enhancing the environment in which we work and play. In that regard the Bulleen electorate is a special place with a great amenity and diversity of lifestyle choice. As an established area with many professional couples and small business people living there, Bulleen is a well-informed community with a strong desire to preserve its environmental character. Living in Templestowe has enabled my children to discover the delights of the Yarra River and the adjacent parks, such as Westerfolds Park.

Through being an energetic and effective local representative I am determined to ensure that not only my children but also future generations will continue to experience the wonderful lifestyle we enjoy. Under the former government the people of Bulleen achieved much. The Museum of Modern Art at Heide has been allocated \$3 million to restore John and Sunday Reed's original house and to build a new gallery to tell the story of modern art in Australia. I was pleased to hear the Premier say that his minority Labor government would honour the commitment given by the former government. I hope this government will also provide further funding for this excellent museum.

At this stage I think it appropriate for me to pay tribute to the late Albert Tucker, who was a well-respected

artist, for his kind donation of a major part of his collection to the Heide museum. The Albert Tucker Gallery is included in the proposed redevelopment.

The Eastern Freeway extension to Springvale Road is another example — it is a \$250 million project. Although it is not physically in my electorate, it has eased traffic congestion on local roads, which had been used as short cuts. Funding has also been made available to upgrade existing arterial roads in Bulleen, including a \$4.7 million upgrade and duplication of Bulleen Road and a \$4.7 million duplication of Williamsons Road. However, more needs to be done.

As the new member for Bulleen I pledge that I will work hard to advance the needs and interests of the people in my electorate. I will endeavour to serve each and every member of my electorate, regardless of their political persuasions, to the best of my ability. As parliamentarians we must listen to all viewpoints before we make informed decisions. As a member of Parliament I will listen to the opinions of my community. I believe in community involvement, and I will encourage the people of Bulleen to participate in discussions on the issues that concern them.

During the 1980s Labor governments left our community in the worst shape since the 1930s. They shattered people's confidence and sense of security and left many with little hope of obtaining a job. Investment began to bypass Victoria for the growth economies, and the Victorian economy declined to become an inefficient, high-cost location for business. In 1992 Victoria had reached the crossroads at which some fundamental decisions needed to be made. In seven years the coalition government repositioned Victoria for a competitive and rewarding future. The former government gave Victoria a fresh start in the race for investment, productivity, markets and employment growth.

I must, therefore, pay tribute to the former Premier, who has been instrumental, through his leadership, strength and determination, in ensuring that Victoria is a shining example to other states. Jeff Kennett was a strong leader; he was an inspirational leader; and he was a consistent leader. The coalition government during its last two terms worked towards reducing Victoria's crippling debt of more than \$34 billion inherited from the Cain-Kirner governments to less than \$6 billion today.

The former Premier's strong leadership in the area of multicultural affairs should also be commended. Under the leadership of the former Premier multicultural affairs joined the mainstream. He was the driving force

behind the Immigration Museum and Hellenic Antiquities Museum and was indeed proud of Victoria's multicultural character.

Jeff Kennett took a leadership role in responding to and explaining to the wider community the economic and social benefits of a multicultural society. He also elevated to high priority on the national agenda the need for a population and immigration growth policy by advocating a long-term strategy to increase Australia's population.

I wish to read three responses from students who participated in the postcard campaign organised by the Victorian Multicultural Commission to find out what it means to our young people to be Australian:

Being an Australian means living in a wonderful nation, participating in cultural activities, being broad-minded, living in unity with a common goal and aspiring to more peace in the future.

Being Australian means you love this country, you love our culture of many cultures.

Being Australian means enjoying the many different cultures within our country. We can learn about many different races and cultures without travelling the world.

Responses like these show that our young people today have a unique opportunity to lay the foundations for a bright and secure future. Cooperation and understanding among members of our community is one of the cornerstones of community harmony.

We have begun to reap the benefits of our multilingual policies. The former Premier was a key factor in our success in this area. Because of him our cultural diversity will continue to be an integral and central part of Victoria's cosmopolitan nature.

The electorate of Bulleen will be a beneficiary of Jeff Kennett's strong leadership in this area. Bulleen is a diverse electorate with over 28 per cent of its people coming from a language background other than English. Its cosmopolitan make-up adds to its rich culture. On behalf of the people of Bulleen I thank the former Premier for his commitment to multicultural Victoria.

At this stage I must also thank my entire campaign team and the people who helped staff the booths on election day. Their dedication and commitment is very much appreciated.

I pay tribute to the previous member for Bulleen, Mr David Perrin. I place on record the appreciation of all branch members of the work undertaken by David

during his term as a local member. I wish him well in the future.

I express my gratitude to the former Premier and the honourable member for Warrandyte, the Honourable Phil Honeywood, for their support, encouragement, advice and guidance over the years. I am truly indebted to both of them.

I thank the executive and staff of the Liberal Party for the professional assistance and support offered to me during the campaign. I hope I will be worthy of that trust, and I look forward to working with honourable members of this house for the prosperity of our state and, of course, my electorate of Bulleen.

Mr LENDERS (Dandenong North) — As one of the Class of 99 it gives me great pleasure to make my first speech in this Assembly. I take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your elevation to that high office.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate the Premier, particularly on the stunning result of achieving 50.4 per cent of the two-party preferred vote at the state election. This is a government with legitimacy.

My journey to represent the electors of Dandenong North has been a long one, rich with satisfaction but not without challenges for me and my family. Delighted and proud though I am to stand before you, I am under no illusion that I was elected because my name is John Lenders, private citizen; it is rather because the initials 'ALP' were next to my name on the ballot paper.

Today I thank the great Australian Labor Party for placing its trust in me as its state secretary and campaign director for the past five years and for endorsing me as its candidate for the Dandenong North electorate. It was a privilege to work for the Labor Party and to work with the professional staff with whom I shared so many experiences, first at Drummond Street, Carlton, and more recently at King Street, West Melbourne.

Like all members in this place today, my values and beliefs and my visions for the future are a product of my background and experiences. I am the youngest son of hardworking Dutch immigrants who came to Australia three years before I was born. Helen and Jeff Lenders, my parents, left the Netherlands having endured the Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War. They came in the hope of a better life for their children in Australia — a fairly common tale in this place.

I was brought up on a dairy farm in West Gippsland where my parents were sharefarmers. We were shown and taught that hard work was essential to our welfare as a family. Despite all the hardships that went with dairying in the 1960s and 1970s my siblings and I knew we were lucky to be kids on an Australian farm. We put in countless hours of hard work and hard physical labour, but we also spent many hours working alongside our parents. I know it is through this we came to appreciate our mum and our dad far more than did many of our contemporaries.

I can recall discussing the farm, politics, the church and the world so often that debating contemporary issues was one of the things I assumed all families did at mealtime on a daily basis. When travelling together from home to the local township we would often have competitions — naming countries, flags, national leaders and so on. Bizarre as it may seem, it was great training for public life and provided me with a deep-seated interest in the world and how it should be run.

Like so many people in the Dandenong North electorate, my parents made sacrifices to give their children a chance for a better life, and for that as well as a happy and interesting childhood I sincerely thank them. I hope the achievements of my brother Hein and my sister Pat and I have made them feel their efforts were worthwhile.

I hope that likewise my contribution to this place will help make Victoria a better place for my children Rachel, Tim and Simon and their contemporaries. Without their support, and in particular the support, patience and encouragement of my wife Elisabeth and her parents Lois and Eric Ford I could not have completed my journey to this place.

I was fortunate in my introduction to the Labor Party to have met Clyde Holding. Not only did Clyde represent Richmond in this place for fourteen years but he went on to be a member of the House of Representatives for a further 21 years. Among so many other contributions to the community he served as Leader of the Opposition in this Parliament, spent seven years as a federal minister and served as state president of the great Labor Party. Clyde was and continues to be my friend and mentor. His rich knowledge of life, government, the Parliament and human nature in general was and is a great resource for me. He also has that wonderful capacity to focus on how the decisions of government affect local communities.

Upon being appointed as the Labor Party state secretary and campaign director in 1994 I was privileged to work

in different capacities with each and every Labor member of this Parliament. I know their patience, endurance, passion and magnificent efforts which resulted in Labor's election and the fact that it polled more than half the two-party preferred vote on 18 September. In particular, I acknowledge the efforts of the Premier and the Minister for Finance.

The three figures in the Labor Party who have been of great support and encouragement to me outside this Parliament are ALP national secretary, Gary Gray, Senator Steve Conroy, and Labor luminary Greg Sword. Gary's friendship, coupled with his sheer professionalism and enthusiasm for the Labor cause, enabled me to hold on in the very dark years leading up to and following our defeat in 1996. Steve Conroy's passion and determination to see Labor re-elected were coupled with his ability to achieve outcomes within the Labor Party. Without them, our journey to government would have been so much more difficult. Greg Sword's broad experience in the Labor movement and his wide and varied contacts across all spectrums of Australian society, and in particular his ability to maintain the focus on achieving long-term objectives, made him a key contributor to Labor's revival.

I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor in the Dandenong North electorate, Jan Wilson. In Jan and her husband Eric, Dandenong North was fortunate to effectively have two members in the years 1985 to 1999. Both served on the Dandenong council and shared the view that their role was to work with their local community to make life better for the many individuals who crossed their paths. During my campaign I was amazed at the number of individuals who recalled instances of how Jan had touched their lives and their appreciation of her concern for them and their community.

Before Jan's election as the inaugural member for Dandenong North, Rob Jolly represented much of her electorate. Rob is a thoroughly decent human being and a friend of mine. He suffered grievously for his efforts in and commitment to this place. I sincerely hope that in the years to come he will be recognised for his integrity, hard work, humility and tenacity. Rob and Christine called to congratulate me on the morning after the election, and I know that they are as delighted at the events of 18 September as any member on this side of the chamber could possibly be.

My great hope for this 54th Parliament is that we can eloquently discuss the great issues of the day with passion and conviction without descending to the brutal tactics which have hurt a number of former members.

I now turn to another organisation that has assisted me in my road to this place.

The contribution of the Williamson Community Leadership Program to leadership in this state is significant and continues to grow. For honourable members who are not aware of its activities, each year the Williamson program gathers together 32 Victorians from all sectors of the community for an intensive insight into life and leadership in Victoria. I was privileged to join the program in 1997. It brings together individuals from industry, law, commerce, government and non-profit sector agencies and from regional, rural and urban Victoria.

Being a Williamson fellow exposed me to a rich variety of community leaders from all walks of life, including the CEOs of most of our major companies and other leaders across government, the welfare sector and the arts. These opportunities, plus the time I spent with 31 other future-focused young achievers, was of considerable assistance in preparing me for the duties, challenges and opportunities I now face in this place.

The electorate of Dandenong North is diverse. It is composed of a series of communities and individuals from a wide range of backgrounds. In that it is probably no different from any other electorate in Victoria. However, it is a uniquely residential electorate in that its core comprises the residential areas adjacent to Dandenong, Noble Park, Springvale and Waverley.

The unique residential status means that although there are nine strip shopping centres in Dandenong North, Mulgrave, Noble Park North and Springvale North, residents need to leave the electorate to use basic services like a railway station, a police station or, dare I say it, even a pub. That affects the way people conduct their lives as it necessitates a great deal more reliance on transport than is required in most other areas of metropolitan Melbourne.

Forty-three per cent of people in the Dandenong North electorate were born overseas, which is the sixth highest percentage in Victoria. The major source countries are the British Isles, Italy, Greece, Vietnam and Lebanon.

Recently, I had reason to read the report on social disadvantage from Jesuit Social Services. It indicated the areas of greatest disadvantage in Victoria and highlighted their concentration in the City of Greater Dandenong. I am distressed at how much government neglect has harmed the Dandenong North electorate. Solutions to these problems are part of my obligation as its representative in the house.

It seems such a long time ago, but during my election campaign I knocked on more than 6000 doors in Dandenong North. The message I received from voters was that they had four great concerns about the direction of the state government. They were angry about what was happening to the police force, the health system, the education system and democracy in Victoria.

I am proud to be a member of the Bracks Labor government — which received more than 50 per cent of the two-party preferred vote — and I am completely confident that we have the conviction, the policies and the capacity for hard work that will allow us to address those four key issues during this term.

As has been seen during the past few days, the Victorian Parliament is a place rich in Westminster tradition. While I cherish and wish to defend to the utmost the good things of the Westminster system, such as freedom of speech and the rule of law, I am concerned at some of the other trappings and traditions of this place. It is undoubtedly good theatre, but some of the parliamentary rituals would bewilder many of my constituents even more than they have bewildered me. I suspect that some of the victims of micro-economic reform in my electorate would have some expectation of that reform being applied to this place as well as to them.

In addition to its traditions the Parliament must also be a place which looks to the future and which is central to the great issues that face us as we enter the new millennium just over a year from now. In macro terms they can be described as what, if any, role remains for state government in a society where economic power has drifted to the commonwealth and responsibility for service delivery has increasingly passed to the private and municipal sectors.

Throughout human history, and in particular since the industrial revolution, there has been debate as to the role of government in society. With accelerated stresses on social organisation arising from advancing technology and increased longevity on our crowded and polluted planet, the years ahead will see this debate intensify.

Increased economic efficiency makes it probable that if we were ruthless enough our society could feed, clothe and shelter all its members with only 1 in 10 people working. The balance of our population would then be dependent for sustenance on the overworked minority. It is a disturbing scenario and a trend that we see approaching day by day; a trend that we must be extremely vigilant to stop in its tracks. As we know all

too well from viewing the devastation so often left in the wake of unfettered economic rationalism, that type of society would not provide the balance so important to a flourishing and functioning community. There would be no life balance.

Our choices will be increasingly between government claiming a new role in regulating social behaviour to suit our entire society and the planet we live on or government opting out in favour of other powerful stakeholders. A pertinent illustration is the Hawke government's decision to make superannuation mandatory for the entire work force, which partially addressed the issue of income support in the rapidly ageing society we are becoming. The alternative of voluntary superannuation would have made dysfunctional within decades either the taxation system or the income levels of our elderly citizens. It was a choice made by government that was correct for its time and for the future — our future, now.

If we wish to live in a society that is socially and economically sustainable, the role of government in the years and decades ahead must be to set social and economic goals and to assert itself to achieve them. This can and should be done by government in partnership with the private sector, and, as was noted in the Governor's speech, it will be a priority for the Bracks Labor government, particularly in the areas of community safety, health and education.

I look forward to the challenges ahead and to representing the electors of Dandenong North well. I also look forward to my duties as Parliamentary Secretary for Treasury and Finance.

I know that a proactive state government can do so much to make Victoria a better place. I hope that as an outcomes-orientated local member I can also make a difference in the Dandenong North electorate.

An idea of particular personal interest to me is the coordination of municipal, school and other community assets into more accessible and better resourced libraries, halls and sportsgrounds. During the election campaign, and since, I have been amazed and disappointed at the number of great local projects that have not got off the ground because schools, councils, churches and other community organisations were not communicating effectively.

I have committed myself to working to value-add to local projects. Rather than a local school and municipality both trying to operate facilities such as libraries, halls and sporting fields, they could cooperate to pool their resources to provide joint facilities that can

be better and more accessible than some of the existing duplicated and fund-starved public assets.

I believe there is a large role in such projects for local members to play. Whether it is in these community projects or in the key areas of community safety, health and education already identified in the government program, the future is in our hands. The people of Victoria have put their future in the hands of every member in this place, and it is a responsibility I willingly accept.

I am extremely appreciative of the support of my wife, Elisabeth, my extended family, and Labor Party members for helping me in these tasks. I hope the Class of 99, of which I am proud to be a member, will be remembered for bringing a new sense of direction to this place and a new hope for Victoria.

In summary, Mr Speaker, I am a product of Australia's post-war immigration dream, which hopes to build a better Australia for the 21st century. I am proudly republican and a social democrat. I stand for a multicultural, egalitarian society with equal opportunity for its citizens. I stand firmly against intolerance, elitism and the waste of human and government resources.

Mr Speaker, these are my words, but I hope it is by my deeds that I will be judged in this place.

Debate interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

The SPEAKER — Order! I welcome to the gallery the Honourable Senator Stephen Conroy.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed.

Mr BAILLIEU (Hawthorn) — I am delighted to respond to the Governor's address and speak in Parliament for the first time. In doing so, Mr Speaker, I also congratulate you on your appointment and wish you well in your stewardship.

I am proud to be an Australian. I am proud to be a Victorian. And I am particularly proud to represent the electorate of Hawthorn. And I thank the electors of Hawthorn for the trust they have placed in me. The district of Hawthorn was established more than

110 years ago. Today it is a compact electorate resting naturally east of the Yarra River and Gardiners Creek.

In Melbourne's infancy Hawthorn was a 'just right place to live' — not too close to the city, and not too far either. It still is. It is also a seat of great diversity, with an ethnic population reflecting Victoria's rich multicultural character. But Hawthorn's icons remain Swinburne university, its schools, Rocket Park, strip shopping on Burke, Auburn and Glenferrie roads, Camberwell market, the timeless Glenferrie oval, the Grace Park sporting complex and, of course, the trains.

It was the arrival of the railway that gave life to the area. Everything in Hawthorn is either north or south of the line. But the classic is the Alamein line — a remnant of the old Outer Circle line that was long ago and quickly discarded as a commercial failure. However, the Alamein line survives and remains a transport treasure of great intimacy and convenience.

There is every reason to believe Hawthorn will continue to develop its intellectual, educational and social base. I look forward to the continuing growth and upgrading of the electorate's commercial and retail centres. I am also confident that the residential character of the electorate will be both protected and enhanced. The electorate's reputation as a place of learning and living will long be justified.

I am also proud to be a Liberal — committed to a fair go, a fair cop and a fair reward. The Liberal Party is a crucible of enterprise and compassion, with an unsurpassed record of achievement at state and national levels. Liberals led the great periods of growth and infrastructure development. Liberals led the great periods of social reform.

In my many roles in the Victorian division of the Liberal Party I am proud to have worked closely with the highly committed and professional team at 104 led by Dr Peter Poggioli. I sincerely thank them for their support. We Liberals in Victoria now have some ground to win back. My commitment to the task is unwavering. I know there is enormous support in the community and I am confident the work will be done.

This is a special space. To stand in this crowded chamber is to feel the weight of its theatre and the hot breath of history; it is to sense the triumph of active governments and the tragedy of the inert. This is also a magnificent space. It was begun at the height of the gold rush and at about the time the first bridge across the Yarra to Hawthorn replaced Palmer's punt. It was a time of prosperity and growth, a time when Victoria

was shaping its future with a vigour and an enthusiasm seldom repeated.

But sadly, the bulk of the complex was never finished. Honourable members and staff know too well the limitations of so much of the working parts of the building. In the meantime, these extraordinary chambers remain among the most beautiful parliamentary spaces in the world. They stand as a tribute to the vision of the architects. But they also stand as a signpost — of greatness declined, of unfinished business and of vision laid aside. Above all of the challenge to get on with the job.

I believe those who enter this place do so in good faith, with goodwill and the best of intentions. All of us bring to this place our own lives, our own backgrounds, our own attributes and our own shortcomings. But whatever our disposition the bottom line is that the electorate does the judging. And, by definition, the electors are never wrong. We ignore them at our peril.

For government is not a game. Government is not about the pursuit of authority, power, position or privilege. It cannot be. It is and must be about the pursuit of responsibility. And now we find ourselves in a finely balanced forum that will be a challenge for us all. The outcomes will be a measure of how we regard ourselves as Victorians. Will we be content to be average? Or will we continue to pursue an aspirational agenda and stay 'on the move'? There is a lot at stake. Victoria cannot afford to mark time, let alone take a backward step.

For the first time in decades Victorians have shared a vision. Over the past seven years Victorians have climbed out of the gloom. We've established a firm footing in our world. Victoria leads the way in investment, jobs, infrastructure, business costs, construction, delivery of health and educational services, social change and, above all, confidence. It was no accident.

I do not believe the recent election has dulled Victorians' desire to uphold that vision. Honourable members should remember the ALP received fewer votes and won fewer seats than the coalition. While the interpretations of the recent election will vary, the fact remains: to bring down the vision now is to risk the future.

Victoria is a long way from the rest of the world. We are small in size and population and we are ageing. We have larger and wealthier neighbours and we are still burdened with substantial debt. It will simply not be enough to tread water. There is unfinished business in Victoria.

It must be our collective ambition to create a greater society founded on the pillars of knowledge, incentive, economic growth and social compassion.

Great societies lead. Great societies provide and above all great societies influence. However, to do so requires strength — economic, financial, educational, intellectual and social. We must continue to rebuild our capacity to provide and we must covet the strength to influence.

I want to be part of a strong Victoria. A Victoria that unleashes its talent. A Victoria with a shared vision of the future. That means driving down debt further. It means making it easy for investment. It means sweeping away the obstacles to growth and development. It means upgrading airports, roads, railways, bridges, ports and utilities; exploiting educational opportunities; and expanding medical facilities. It means a full barrow for a brickie, a new ute for a farmer and a smaller bill on the kitchen table.

We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We have it because of our state's remarkable recovery of economic potential and reputation. We just have to use it. If we do not then the ambition of every Victorian that we provide services to, our own, the equal of any in the world, will simply wither and the unfulfilled potential of this building will merely reflect a more significant failing and the ineptitude of another dead-handed government.

Architecture is a visionary profession. Its best elevate and animate our lives. Architects plan. They untangle. They explore. They search for openings and they exploit opportunities. Above all, they want to build.

Victoria enjoys the services of some of Australia's greatest architects. We would be wise to nurture them. I hope one day good design by architects will be rewarded with more than compliments and certificates. When we do a motivated design industry will benefit all of us.

But I do pay tribute here to a friend and former employer, the late David McGlashan. He was an inventive, spirited and award-winning architect. The Heide gallery, though now altered, is still a masterpiece. McGlashan and Everist's educational work also broke new ground. It put a new focus on the strategic planning of school campuses and on a new age-based design approach for school facilities. In the process David always spoke for the students. They had the greatest interest but the least leverage. For me, the privilege of working closely on so many schools with him locked in my interest in education.

I graduated from Melbourne University and later from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. I have worked as an architect at Marcus Oldham College and at Deakin University, and I have assisted at the Victorian College of the Arts. The burgeoning Swinburne University is in the heart of my seat and community groups in Hawthorn are embracing the University of the Third Age with enthusiasm. I am therefore particularly pleased to have responsibility on this side of the house for advancing the interests of tertiary education and training. There is no more important front door to the future.

Love of sport is a Victorian thing — part of our identity. Some put it down to our Olympic history and others to our foundation of the national game. It is a great thing; I share it and want to fan the passion. Indeed, I hope the current leadership on both sides of the house will accelerate an early premiership for the Pivotonians.

I also have a long association with the Melbourne Rugby Union Football Club. It is one of the two oldest in Australia. It is to be hoped a Victorian team will soon attract sufficient support to join the Super 12 competition — the best league in the world and the breeding ground for Australia's recent World Cup success. I take this moment, Mr Speaker, to invite the house to congratulate the Wallabies on their history-making triumph in Cardiff.

As the elected representative for Hawthorn it is an honour to follow so many distinguished contributors. I thank Phil Gude and his wife Carol, and their family. Phil Gude was a member of this house for 19 years — first as the member for Geelong East and then as the member for Hawthorn. He served as Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party from 1991 and held several ministerial portfolios, including Industry and Employment, and Education. He made a huge contribution to the wellbeing of Victoria, not least in his leadership role in government. He dramatically improved business conditions and established the breakthrough self-governing schools initiative.

I also thank my supporters in Hawthorn. Barry Jackett and his team of branch members and friends embraced me as their candidate. I am delighted to say we were rewarded with a positive result. I particularly thank Tony Staley, Dame Margaret Guilfoyle and Petro Georgiou, who gave me so much personal encouragement and assistance.

John Mayne has been my friend for 35 years. For many of those years he has been the intuitive cog at Mayne and Baillieu Architects — the one who made it happen.

He has tolerated all the vagaries of my political activity without missing a beat. I could not have asked for better support. To John, Brendan and all at our garrulous garret — thank you.

But I am here today with one profound regret: knowing I will have never spent a day in this Parliament with Jeff Kennett. There cannot have been a more energetic, more vital, more positive or more Victorian member of Parliament or Premier. He leaves this place with a record of achievement second to none. He has been an inspiration to many and I am proud to count myself among them. He, Felicity and their family have my warmest best wishes and thanks. As he so often whistled his own goodbyes: Jeffrey, 'Go with God'.

My grandparents' families made their own contributions to community life in this state. They have done so in many parts of Victoria and in a range of fields including agriculture, business, the services, sport, heritage protection, the arts, and public life. I am proud of their achievements and I value the benefits of family above all. I know their enthusiasm lives on among my siblings — each of them has achieved in their own right and, in the process, inspired me. But I do regret that I cannot share this experience with my late father, Darren, or my late brother, Jim, who took me to my first public meetings.

However, I am delighted to say that my mother, Diana, is here today. Her father, Captain William Johnstone Knox, gave his life in France in the Great War. He left behind a little girl, an only child, in western Victoria. She has spent a lifetime, no doubt under his watchful eye, looking after children — hanging on the every breath of her 7, and then 10 grandchildren to follow. And always remaining ever involved with others. I thank her for her remarkable spirit, her unpretentious ways and her enthusiasm for public affairs, not to mention her love and encouragement. On the eve of the eve of Remembrance Day I give thanks once more to all those who made such wrenching sacrifices.

Cuddling your own children is a very special pleasure. Contemplating their future is a fundamental motivation. In this change of occupation, as in everything else, I enjoy the most wonderful love and support of my wife Robyn, her family and our children Martha, Eleanor and Robert. They have my deepest love and affection. And they will always be my first priority.

I look forward to working with each and every one of this multitude of counsellors. Above all, I look forward to the engagement of principle, the contest of ideas and the cultivation of a vision. I will be doing my best to

forcefully represent the people of Hawthorn and to advance the cause of all Victorians.

Mr WYNNE (Richmond) — I am delighted to have the opportunity to address the chamber today. Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your election to your high office. It is a great personal achievement. It is also an acknowledgment of your significant contribution to parliamentary life and a measure of your support in the house.

I come to Parliament as the recently elected member for Richmond with a sense of optimism and hope for the future of Victoria. I am interested in re-establishing the building blocks of a civil society by supporting a government that acknowledges the importance of community and the maintenance of our social infrastructure — an administration that respects open and accountable government and encourages diversity of argument and thought.

The Victorian community values and demands: a hospital system in which the focus is squarely on caring for patients not creating bureaucratic structures for high-paid executives; an education system dedicated to giving our children the best possible start in life through ensuring schools are properly staffed and resourced; an industrial relations and workers compensation system that values and rewards the efforts of working people, recognising their rights to bargain collectively and providing just and adequate compensation through the common law for those injured on the job; a system of government in which the rights of Victorians to be informed and have a say is respected and protected by an independent watchdog, the Auditor-General, unfettered by political interference or legislative or bureaucratic impediment; a public service motivated not by fear but by a sense of duty to the people it is employed to serve; a safe environment in which people can be confident that the police and other emergency services will be available whenever they are needed; and a community service sector that is not divided and constantly chasing the next competitive tender, but is thinking about how to deliver services more effectively and cohesively.

The Victorian community wants those things. That is why I am so proud to be a member of the Steve Bracks team in this Parliament — because the community has entrusted the Labor Party with its hopes and aspirations. His victory in the recent election was more than anything else a victory for the democratic process. It demonstrated once again the basic decency of ordinary Victorians and their commitment to a fair go, a commitment I share. I come to Parliament having served a long apprenticeship in community affairs and

government — and with even longer experience of the challenges faced by people living in the inner suburbs of Melbourne.

I was born, educated and have lived all my life in the heart of this city. My father was the sole income earner for a family of nine children. For most of his life he was a labourer on Melbourne's waterfront. It was a tough and sometimes brutal environment. Work was intermittent and industrial turmoil was commonplace as workers and their unions fought battle after battle to achieve the most basic rights.

My parents valued education as the gateway to further opportunity. I was taught at local Catholic schools, completing my higher school certificate at St Joseph's Christian Brothers College in North Melbourne — also the alma mater of the distinguished Labor leader, Arthur Calwell. I pursued my tertiary studies in youth work at Coburg State College and later obtained degrees in social work and criminology from Melbourne University.

My working life has primarily been directed at assisting low-income and public-housing residents in the inner city, first on the public housing estates at Kensington and Flemington and then for an extended period as a social worker at the Flemington Community Health Centre. There I worked closely with the former member for Melbourne, Neil Cole, who since his retirement from Parliament has become a leading activist of mental health issues, and a successful playwright to boot.

Meanwhile the Honourable Barry Pullen, the recently retired member for Melbourne Province, invited me to join his staff, initially as an electorate officer. I am sure many honourable members will recall Barry Pullen's work on behalf of the community, and in particular his efforts, along with my predecessor, Demetri Dollis, in lobbying for the undergrounding of the Richmond-to-Brunswick power line. They helped achieve a significant win for the environment and the community of Richmond.

Barry Pullen's record as an advocate on public housing, social justice and environmental issues stretches back three decades. Along with the former Deputy Prime Minister, the Honourable Brian Howe, and other community activists, he stood up against the worst excesses of slum reclamation in the 1960s. Together these far-sighted men and women saved the inner suburbs from what might have been complete destruction. We have much to thank them for.

I have been involved in the Labor Party for 17 years. In that time I have had many opportunities to serve in public life. I have had the privilege of working with three great Labor ministers: advising the Honourable Barry Pullen on housing in the late 1980s, the Honourable Andrew McCutcheon on planning in the early 1990s, and in the federal sphere, the Honourable Brian Howe on housing and local government for three years to 1996. More recently I have worked with Lindsay Tanner, the federal member for Melbourne and the shadow Minister for Finance.

My own first experience of public office came when I was elected to the Melbourne City Council in the mid-1980s. I went on to serve as a councillor for six years, including a turn as Lord Mayor in 1990–91. Each of my experiences as a political adviser and elected representative has shaped and expanded my thinking on the role of government in the lives of people and the importance of maintaining a strong and accountable public sector. I have been fortunate to work with some of the best thinkers and community activists that Labor has produced in the past 20 years. I am grateful for the experience and insights that each has shared with me. Their example will guide my work for the people of Richmond in the years ahead.

The Richmond electorate has a rich history. Established in 1856, it has been held by the Labor Party since 1908, except for a brief period between 1955 and 1958 when it fell to the Democratic Labor Party in the aftermath of the acrimonious Labor Party split of 1955. In her seminal social and political history of Richmond, *Struggletown*, Dr Janet McCalman sheds light on the political ferment so much a part of life in Richmond:

Politics were to be more important in Richmond during the 20th century than in most Australian suburban communities, and the focus of the political energy was overwhelmingly parochial rather than parliamentary and national. Not that Richmond's parliamentary representatives were of no great significance in national affairs. On the contrary, of its four federal members between 1901 and 1965 one was the Prime Minister, one later a deputy prime minister, one a leader of the federal opposition, and one, had he not led the 1955 splitters into the Democratic Labor Party, was believed destined by ALP power brokers for the prime ministership.

Richmond has also produced its share of distinguished parliamentarians in the state arena, including the Honourable Clyde Holding, the former leader of the Victorian Labor Party, whom I am delighted is in the chamber today, and Theo Sidiropoulos and Demetri Dollis, two men of Greek origin who have helped to break down the barriers confronting people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Each in his own way made an important contribution to political and community life.

Richmond today is a different place to the historic *Struggletown* so eloquently evoked by Dr McCalman. The grinding poverty, slum housing, unemployment and social deprivation of earlier times has been replaced by a new set of issues and challenges.

One such challenge is public housing. The slum reclamation programs of the 1950s and 1960s saw decaying tenements and dwellings being replaced by large public housing estates consisting mainly of high-rise and walk-up flats.

The seat of Richmond hosts a large proportion of the tower blocks located in Collingwood, Fitzroy and Richmond. Over the decades they have been home to local people displaced by the slum clearance program and to waves of migrants who have made Australia their home, either by choice or to escape political turmoil and economic hardship in their countries of birth.

Public housing has played a pivotal role in providing secure and affordable tenure for those with limited housing options. It is a stepping stone to home ownership or rental in the private sector. The Labor Party maintains its strong commitment to the public housing sector. It will not privatise or sell off Melbourne's inner-city estates. It recognises that public housing tenants in the inner city enjoy ready access to education, health, public transport and employment opportunities and will not rob them of those advantages.

Melbourne's public housing stock is one of its most valuable social assets, which the government must maintain and replenish. I look forward to working closely with the Minister for Housing to explore ways in which the stock of public housing in the inner city can be adequately preserved and expanded.

Another issue of special concern to Richmond is drug abuse. Illicit drugs are a cause of suffering both to those who use them and to the community that bears the brunt of drug activity. Honourable members will be aware that my electorate is already grappling with the consequences of drug dealing and drug abuse. As a community, we can no longer stand by as the death toll from drug abuse escalates to a level that may well rival the road toll.

Drug addiction is as much a health issue as a law enforcement issue. With that in mind, the Bracks government has developed a comprehensive response to illicit drug use which strikes a balance between law enforcement, prevention, rehabilitation and harm

minimisation and which includes the piloting of safe injecting facilities.

I am working closely with traders, senior police, drug agencies and the City of Yarra — I am delighted that the mayor of the City of Yarra, Cr Steve Watson, is in the chamber today — to develop a consultation program. I expect that the consultation will be broad and that the government's response will be informed by community input. That will take time. Safe injecting facilities will be piloted as part of the government's package with the support of the City of Yarra and the community.

In the interim, I will continue to be an advocate for a strong police presence in the electorate. I am pleased to advise that the response from the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and senior operational police has been supportive of the community's demand for the maintenance of an operational police presence at the Collingwood station as part of a broader review of the accommodation needs of police in my electorate.

A third issue of concern in Richmond is health. A study published by the Department of Human Services entitled *The Victorian burden of disease study: mortality* found that the life expectancy of the residents of the City of Yarra is lower than the state average — one year lower in the case of women and four years lower in the case of men.

In a related but unpublished study females in the City of Yarra were found to have higher levels of cardiovascular disease, cancers of the lung, chronic bronchitis and emphysema; and males were found to have higher levels of infectious disease, notably HIV and hepatitis, alcohol and drug problems, heart disease, chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

They are disturbing statistics that point to an alarming trend in the general standard of public health. Community health and welfare organisations are struggling to reverse that trend, yet just when their core services are under greater stress than ever before they have been forced to cope with regionalisation, funding cuts and compulsory competitive tendering. Inevitably education and preventative care programs have suffered.

Given the high incidence of respiratory illness in the area, it is not surprising that the people of Richmond and South Burnley have campaigned for seven years to get answers on the likely health effects of the emissions from the City Link vent stacks along the Burnley Tunnel. They are rightly concerned that the untreated

emissions from the stacks will adversely affect their health.

I am working closely with the City of Yarra to ensure that the monitoring of atmospheric conditions in the area commences before the Burnley Tunnel opens to establish a benchmark against which the impact of the vent stacks can be assessed and any necessary remedial action determined.

Labor is committed to more stringent air quality standards. The Environment Protection Authority has a pivotal role to play as the regulatory agency responsible for seeing that those standards are met. I look forward to liaising with the EPA to ensure that the deep concerns of the community I was elected to represent are understood and addressed openly and transparently.

The final issue of concern in Richmond that I will touch on involves local government and the planning process. A strong and vibrant local government sector is a fundamental component of any democratic system. Over the past seven years I have witnessed a gradual erosion in the resilience and independent spirit that once characterised local government in Victoria. Those who spoke out risked being publicly humiliated, or worse, threatened with the sack.

The Bracks government will respect the autonomy of local government. Already the Minister for Planning has signalled his intention to review the state's performance-based planning codes and to give local government the freedom to express the views and aspirations of local communities within a broader planning framework. That policy shift has been roundly welcomed and applauded in the planning and local government sectors.

I conclude by thanking those people who supported me in my candidacy for the seat of Richmond. In particular, I publicly thank my colleagues in Lindsay Tanner's office, who worked tirelessly to put together a campaign under difficult circumstances; the rank and file members of the Labor Party who warmly welcomed and supported me; and my many colleagues in the union movement who showed faith in my candidature.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of my current and former electorate staff — Glen Brandum, Marilyn Dawson, Tanya McIntyre, Susanna de Pedro and Jack Burns, a volunteer in the office who is about to celebrate his 45th consecutive year as a member of the Labor Party. All have worked with loyalty and dedication in the most trying of conditions.

I owe a great debt of thanks to my wife, Svetlana Karovich, and my mother-in-law, both of whom have provided unstinting support, particularly over the past 12 months. Public office provides great opportunities but also places great strains on family life. I am blessed with having a strong and supportive family that has encouraged me to pursue that career.

Finally, and most importantly, I thank the people of Richmond for choosing me as their representative in the Legislative Assembly. I am conscious of the honour they have bestowed upon me and the responsibility with which they have charged me. I will not let them down.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I call the honourable member for Bennettswood. I remind honourable members that this is the honourable member's inaugural speech, and I ask them to extend him the usual courtesy.

Mr WILSON (Bennettswood) — I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the address-in-reply debate, and I congratulate Mr Speaker on his elevation to the office of Speaker. His position is of paramount importance to our parliamentary system, and I wish him well in his deliberations.

At the outset I pay tribute to the former member for Bennettswood, the Honourable Geoff Coleman, who represented his community in this place for over 20 years.

He was an outstanding member of Parliament, who represented the seats of Syndal and Bennettswood in this place, having first been elected in 1976. Having known Geoff Coleman as far back as 1981 — I first met him through our close association with the Monash University Liberal Club and our co-membership of the Sir Robert Menzies Lecture Trust — I have a great appreciation of how widely he is respected throughout Victoria and by members of Parliament on both sides of the house. As well as his service as a diligent and enthusiastic local member, Geoff served as Minister for Natural Resources between 1992 and 1996 and left this place with an enviable record in good policy making, particularly in the areas of conservation, natural resources, water reform and the disposal of hazardous waste.

Geoff's generosity and selfless approach to politics were most recently displayed when he offered to serve as campaign director for the seat of Bennettswood at the state election.

I pay special tribute to Geoff's wife, Marcia, who worked tirelessly as a member of Parliament's spouse,

and at the same time made a significant personal contribution to Liberal Party politics.

I also wish to pay tribute to my two colleagues in the other place, the Honourable Maree Luckins and the Honourable Andrew Brideson, for their hard work and dedication as the members for Waverley Province, which encompasses the seat of Bennettswood.

In coming to Parliament I am conscious that it has not been my first attempt. As far back as 1982 I stood as the Liberal candidate for the seat of Mildura. It was no surprise at the time that the National Party's Milton Whiting won the election, but the experience and challenge remain a happy memory. Mildura has been in the news recently. Few Melburnians realise that Mildura and Wodonga are the two fastest growing regional areas in Victoria. It is a tribute to the enterprise of those who live in our sunniest locality that Mildura keeps attracting new residents and industry.

My parents, Ron, Sr, and Jean, married in England in 1945. At that time my father was serving in the Royal Australian Air Force and my mother was serving in the Royal Air Force. Jean then came to Australia as a war bride. After a few years living in Melbourne my parents moved to Mildura, where I was born. As a Mildura boy I have the best possible Victorian appreciation of Professor Geoffrey Blainey's oft-quoted remarks about the 'tyranny of distance'.

My secondary education was at St Patrick's College in Ballarat, as was the Premier's, and at Mazenod College in Mulgrave, which is not far from Bennettswood. I wish to place on record my thanks to the three religious orders that gave me a first-class education and opened a world of opportunities — the Sisters of Mercy, the Christian Brothers and the Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate. I pay tribute to those women and men who selflessly gave of their lives and time to educate young people.

I remember in 1972 when a federal Labor government was elected that my passion for politics emerged, and I was quickly attracted to the philosophy of the Liberal Party. It is a philosophy that seeks to create a society that strives for excellence and innovation, a society that places faith in the ability and endeavour of the individual and keeps a strong focus on the wellbeing of the family.

Politics for me is about public duty. How one approaches that duty is governed by one's personal philosophy. A print hanging in my office and presented to me by the women's section of the Victorian Liberal Party asks the question, 'What is a conservative?'

Although the language may be of the previous century, as is the print, the thoughts are worth quoting.

The true conservative is one who, faithful to God and his country, seeks to do his duty in that state of life to which it hath pleased God to call him. A conservative will not purchase a real advantage at the cost of injustice. He knows his rights as a member of a free state. Integrity is the true and only path to safety, honour and success. The poor and the helpless are a sacred charge, to be especially protected and cherished. The conservative requires proof that proposed changes are desirable, practical and safe.

During my 20 years of being actively involved in such important political organisations as the Young Liberal Movement, the Sir Robert Menzies Lecture Trust and the Liberal Party itself, I have been privileged to see many great Liberals apply those principles in the federal and state parliaments of Australia. The liberal-conservative tradition has delivered good government for the majority of the years since Federation both in Victoria and in Australia, and it is a privilege to be part of that tradition.

The Liberal Party's philosophy has two essential ingredients. The first is that to succeed as a society we have to encourage innovation and excellence. To paraphrase Sir Robert Menzies, the founder of the modern Liberal Party, the basic freedoms to speak, choose, worship and think have to be complemented by a culture that encourages our community members to be industrious, to seek due rewards and to continually acquire new skills in the lifelong process of learning.

It is now 105 years since Sir Robert Menzies was born in Jeparit. He served in this Parliament for six years from 1928 to 1934. The Prime Minister, John Howard, in his 1996 Menzies lecture made the following observation about Menzies' stewardship:

Menzies valued a broad-based political philosophy because he knew that it was from such a philosophy that liberalism derived its enduring values — values such as individual freedom, choice, diversity, opportunity and the importance of strong families and communities as bulwarks against the intrusive power of the state. Menzies always championed individual freedom and spirit over collective action based on a corporate state, and he did so not to promote narrow and selfish outcomes but for the purpose of enabling every Australian to fulfil their hopes and aspirations.

I am exceedingly proud to be part of a political party that espouses such goals and aspirations.

The second essential ingredient to which I referred earlier is the belief that diversity, tolerance and compassion must be encouraged and that we seek to improve the quality of life for all who live in our society. The Liberal tradition I espouse rejects all elements of racism and prejudice.

Bennettswood is rich in diversity, and the residents within its 19 square kilometres come from more than 30 nations, including the United Kingdom, Greece, Italy, Malaysia, China, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and New Zealand. About 22 per cent of the Bennettswood community was born in non-English-speaking countries. In many respects Bennettswood is an urban microcosm of modern Australia and reflects Australia's richness of diversity.

It has been a delight since my election to undertake a robust program of visiting Bennettswood's educational facilities. The former member for Bennettswood often remarked that the most satisfying achievement of his period of representation was the growth and improvement in the schools of Bennettswood. Geoff would often use the example of Mount Waverley Secondary College, and I concur that that school is an outstanding educational institution. Around 45 per cent of Bennettswood's secondary students attend a non-government school, such as Avila College, with its very talented principal, Filomena Salvatore — it was recently listed in the *Age* Good Schools Guide as a leading independent school in the five main criteria — or the Gandel campus of Mount Scopus College, a leading achiever if ever there was one, and also listed in the *Age* Good Schools Guide.

I am very impressed by the dedication of our teachers and pupils at primary level, who share my commitment to excellence in education. I have been overwhelmed by the tireless efforts of the wonderful educators such as those of the Burwood East Special Developmental School, who teach students with severe disabilities. Similarly, the teachers at Essex Heights Primary School combine the pursuit and attainment of educational excellence with a great commitment to assisting our young people with disabilities. Mount Waverley, Mount Waverley North, Orchard Grove and Roberts McCubbin primary schools excel in areas as diverse as the arts and languages other than English.

Catholic primary schools such as St Luke the Evangelist, Holy Family and St Scholastica's stand out not just in academic rigour but in their sense of community.

At the Burwood campus of the Victorian Institute for the Blind there are world-renowned services, including a reverse integration program with St Scholastica's. Blackburn English Language School and St Andrews Christian College cater for students well beyond the boundaries of Bennettswood and add to the richness of academic excellence.

Deakin University has recently received official recognition as 'university of the year'. Its expanding Burwood campus is a vital part of this centre of academic excellence. Its bright new entrance signs are symbolic of a vibrant centre of achievement that has a great future. Like my alma mater, Monash University, not far from Bennettswood, Deakin is interacting with our industries of the future to ensure graduates are conceptual thinkers ready to engage in an economy striving to find its place in the global village.

Bennettswood does not have a plethora of major shopping centres within its boundaries. Yet, as I watch a new supermarket under construction at Mount Waverley village I am reminded of the recent comments by local business people about how high retail sales and a good employment outlook are giving our young people a good start and, hopefully, a bright long-term future.

The people of Melbourne's eastern suburbs recently showed much confidence in the Liberal Party representing their interests in this Parliament. Between the September 1996 and June 1999 quarters, unemployment in the Box Hill part of the City of Whitehorse fell from 7.5 per cent to 7 per cent. The size of the labour force rose in that part of Whitehorse by about 1000 to 25 197. In the Waverley West section of the City of Monash the labour force expanded from 30 717 in the September 1997 quarter to 32 000 in the June 1999 quarter.

Giving people the opportunity to have a job is the greatest contribution that can be made to our individual and collective welfare.

Having worked as a senior adviser and, later, chief of staff to the Honourable Rob Knowles, who served this state with distinction in the portfolios of Housing, Health and Aged Care at various stages between 1992 and 1999, it would be remiss of me not to pay a special tribute to him in my maiden speech. His loss at the recent election has left Victoria the poorer. As the member for Ballarat Province between 1976 and 1999, including the last seven years as a senior minister, Rob Knowles displayed an unequalled knowledge of his portfolios. He applied himself to complex public policy issues with compassion, fairness and commonsense. His contribution to public life in Victoria will long be remembered and respected by both sides of the political debate.

My friend Rob Knowles would agree with me that Victoria has an outstanding health system. Our excellence in medical research and innovation has been recognised by other governments around Australia and

internationally. Our patient throughput has improved while high standards of care have been maintained. Almost 300 000 more patients a year are being treated than was the case in 1992. As the coalition left office in September 1999 an unprecedented number of new hospitals or major hospital redevelopments were either completed or under way across Victoria. Last year the hospitals budget expanded by an unequaled 10 per cent.

Monash Medical Centre, Box Hill Hospital and Waverley Private Hospital may be just outside the Bennettswood electorate, but, along with the Bellbird Private Hospital, which is within the boundaries, they all share a commitment to health excellence.

Australian medical scientists lead the world in many areas of medical research, and Victoria's pre-eminence in this field is a cause for great pride for this state. Over the past three years I have had the privilege of closely monitoring the outstanding developments of the Australian Centre for Blood Diseases at Box Hill Hospital, just outside Bennettswood. Under the leadership of Dr Shaun Jackson and Professor Hatem Salem, this centre of medical excellence has recently developed anti-clotting drugs that could be on the market within five years. That great development could reduce the incidence of heart attacks and strokes throughout Australia and the world and has the potential to earn significant export income for Australia.

Already we spend approximately \$15 million a day on health care. The challenge is to become continually more efficient — a task that would be easier if previous federal governments had not been so determined to marginalise private health insurance.

Local developments like the new ambulance station in Burwood are essential to further reduce response times. The Peter James Centre is on the doorstep of Bennettswood and typifies the diversity and excellence our health system has developed.

Looking after the special needs of groups such as women is most important. The recent increase in funding for breast cancer research and support is a most welcome development in our comprehensive health system. Indeed, I urge the new government to take a close look at and embrace the important initiatives proposed in the women's health plan released in August 1999.

Similarly I urge the government to further the progress of the suicide prevention strategy in the hope of reducing the incidence of this tragic feature of modern

society. We also face a significant challenge in responding to the gradual ageing of the population — a matter of special relevance to the electorate of Bennettswood.

It is important to note that our high standards of health and education have been achieved without a budget blow-out. That is one of the enduring legacies of former Premier Kennett's two terms in government. Victoria's debt was reduced from \$32 billion to \$6 billion during that period, while at the same time essential state services were improved and expanded. The former Premier, Jeff Kennett, made me proud to be a Liberal and very proud to be a Victorian.

It is important that I acknowledge the role of my family and friends in making it possible for me to stand for Parliament. The love of my wife, Jo, is a constant in my life and has produced two effervescent and charming daughters, Jessica and Sarah. All three are here today.

My mother, Jean, and my late father, Ron, gave me a set of values that I hope to pass on to my children; values including hard work, the importance of family and community spirit and my faith. As I mentioned earlier, my parents met and married while in the armed services during World War II. At the same time, my paternal grandfather was a prisoner of war of the Japanese and my brother-in-law served in Vietnam. That spirit has been instilled in me, and my family experience is typical of the great Australian tradition of public duty.

My parents-in-law, Ken and Beverley Dawborn, have been a tower of strength and love to my family.

I also record my thanks to my sisters Lyn and Carol, their husbands Fred and Jim and my very special friends, John Baring, Mark Scott, Yvonne Thompson, the honourable members for Doncaster and Malvern and the Honourable Mark Birrell in the other place, for their constant support and encouragement.

Finally, I pay tribute to and reflect upon my association with the Liberal Party and in particular its youth wings, the Young Liberal Movement and Liberal students. Having joined this great party in 1978 I have been actively involved in its operations through many good years in government and too many frustrating years in opposition.

My political pedigree is cemented in the traditions of the Young Liberal Movement and Liberal students, in particular the Monash University Liberal Club. Having served as club president in 1981–82 and as a club life member, I pay special tribute to the past and present Liberal students at Monash and other universities who

have kept the Liberal presence and tradition alive on campus.

Having served as state president of the Young Liberal Movement in 1984–85, I pay tribute to an organisation that has played a very important role in the training and political development of many people on this side of politics, and to that large number of Young Liberals who have served or are currently serving in the federal and state parliaments. Of the 47 Victorian state presidents since the movement's formation in 1945, 15 have served in state or federal parliaments. It is an impressive statistic that six former Victorian Young Liberal presidents serve in the current Victorian Parliament — that is, the honourable members for Brighton, Doncaster and me in this place, and the Honourables Mark Birrell, Bruce Atkinson and Andrew Olexander, who represent East Yarra, Koonung and Silvan provinces respectively, in the other place.

Many other Liberal members have had a strong association with the movement, including the Leader of the Opposition. Of course, our Prime Minister is also a former state president of the New South Wales division of the Young Liberal Movement. In the current federal Parliament, I am aware of seven former Young Liberal divisional presidents representing the Liberal Party in either the House of Representatives or the Senate.

My association with the Liberal Party has been an overwhelmingly positive experience since I first joined it over 20 years ago. The strength of the Liberal Party is its membership, and I pay tribute to the countless number of volunteers in the Liberal Party, past and present, who have made it the great institution it is today. My own Glen Waverley branch president, Anton Vucic, president of the branch for the past eight years, typifies the selfless spirit of the volunteers in the Liberal Party, as do so many Liberal Party members in the electorate of Bennettswood.

I hope I will be worthy of the trust my family, my friends, my party and the electors of Bennettswood have placed in me. I look forward to working with other honourable members to create a safer, wealthier, healthier, better educated and more tolerant society.

Mr VINEY (Frankston East) — I commence my contribution by joining honourable members in congratulating the Speaker on his appointment. He has joined a long tradition of fine Speakers. Mr Speaker's migrant background, which he acknowledged in his opening remarks, will richly add to that history. I also congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your appointment and wish you and the Speaker well in your positions.

I was unable to contribute to the condolence motion for the former honourable member for Frankston East, and I would now like to extend my condolences to his family. As were other honourable members, I was shocked and saddened by the sudden passing of Peter McLellan. Peter served the community for seven years with courage and commitment to his principles.

I am honoured to have been elected by the community of Frankston East to be its parliamentary representative. My election campaign was an unusual and extended one, and I will always remember it not simply for the outcome but for the support and encouragement I received from family, colleagues and the local community. To be elected was an exhilarating and humbling experience. The intensity of the extended campaign provided an opportunity for me to focus the attention of the broader community, the media and the political decision-makers of the state on the issues I identified over the previous two years. I was able to ensure that the issues of particular concern to the community were well understood, thereby increasing the chances of their being addressed.

The focus on the electorate in the supplementary election allowed me to draw attention to the serious decline that had occurred at Frankston Hospital and to the effect of the lack of police numbers on community safety. The attention on Frankston East drew the focus of all to the closure of a local kindergarten that was very important to a struggling low-income area in the electorate. The success of my campaign in drawing attention to these issues was such that during the supplementary election all 15 of my opponents agreed with me on the issues of concern to our community.

As I stated a moment ago, Madam Deputy Speaker, the experience was humbling because so many people from the local community and the Labor movement involved themselves in the campaign. On election night I understood the trust the local community had just placed in me as its representative in this house.

I wish to place firmly on the record my thanks to the community of Frankston East for that trust and record my intention to work tirelessly to honour that trust. I thank the Frankston East community for keeping its focus on the important public issues that my campaign pursued rather than being distracted by irrelevant campaign tactics used by others.

I thank the Frankston East community for rejecting the type of politics that had become all too common in Victoria over the past seven years — the politics of personal abuse and silencing critics rather than dealing with the clear concerns of health, education and

community safety that were expressed by the local people.

I also thank the Australian Labor Party and the broader Labor movement for their support. My election in Frankston East was a great victory for Labor, and I am proud to have been part of the election of a Bracks Labor government in Victoria.

I congratulate you, Mr Premier, and your ministers, and wish you well for the future. I look forward to being part of a team that will deliver on the commitments outlined in the Governor's address. The view of the Bracks government that a decent start to education is critical for the full growth and potential of all young Victorians is a commitment that I strongly support. Class sizes in government schools must be reduced.

The Governor also outlined Labor's commitment to health. As I mentioned earlier, the issues at the Frankston Hospital were prominent in the Frankston East supplementary election. The commitment of the Bracks Labor government to decent public health is something I will also be proud to be part of. I am pleased to be able to say in the house that one of the first actions of the Bracks government has been to start the process to provide an additional 64 beds at the Frankston Hospital.

The Governor also outlined the government's commitment to open and accountable government, including the restoration of the Auditor-General's powers. The cutting of those powers was symbolic of the approach taken by the former government in Victoria. It was not good government to cut the authority of an independent auditor to check the financial and operational performance of a government. It was not good government to treat the Parliament as a rubber stamp of executive decisions.

My election to the seat of Frankston East was confirmation that Victorians want decent, open and accountable government, as offered by a Bracks-led Labor Party. It was also confirmation that Victorians want a commitment to the vital services that are important for community life: schools, hospitals, and a reasonable level of policing for community safety.

The seat of Frankston East was created in 1992, and I am only the second person to represent the electorate under that name. It is an electorate of some 40 000 people that is in many ways typical of outer suburban Melbourne. It is a very attractive electorate that is literally a stone's throw from Port Phillip Bay.

Frankston East is not geographically large, but it is diverse. It includes a shopping mall, a number of strip

shopping centres and a large light-industrial area. It extends well into the Mornington Peninsula, going as far south as Baxter. Approximately 10 per cent of the land mass of Frankston East is devoted to golf. There are two country clubs — Long Island and Peninsula — as well as the Frankston private and public golf courses. Those facilities attract many people from Melbourne and the peninsula.

I hope that as these valued visitors to Frankston East drive along Frankston–Dandenong Road, the Peninsula Freeway, Skye Road or other major access points they reflect on the needs and concerns of the Frankston East community as well as its physical attributes. Those concerns are very often personal, and during the past two years my understanding of those issues has been increased by the extensive doorknocking, community involvement, shopping centre visits and telephone calls in which I have taken part.

A mother who talked to me about her child being unable to get appropriate individual attention at a local primary school because of government cuts to teacher numbers and special support programs raised one such concern. The many older workers in the community who have been retrenched under economic rationalist ideology raised another. Concern about the crisis at the Frankston Hospital was expressed to me by countless people. One woman spoke of her 82-year-old mother's cancer surgery, which was cancelled not once but three times during a two-month period. These are the concerns that drove my commitment to the Frankston East community during the unusually extended election period.

Too often in a modern political campaign we must focus on the quick political point, the press release or the 10-second grab, but every now and then we get a reminder of why we seek to become members of Parliament. For me, that occurred with the previous government's closure of the Pines Forest Kindergarten. That one political act of the former government reminded me of why I sought a place in this house. The Pines community is a proud one which is strongly bonded by an appreciation of common needs and aspirations.

As with many communities, those bonds are held together by important local institutions and symbols — the schools, a community centre, the footy and soccer clubs, and the local kinder. The previous government could never understand that because its focus was based on the concept of individualism. That focus led the coalition government to massively increase kinder fees, which directly resulted in a drop in enrolments. The only solution for the kinder was to subsidise the

four-year-old program with a full-fee-paying three-year-old program.

I know many kinder communities had to do that, but in the Pines it was a struggle for parents to raise the \$600–\$700 required to send a three-year-old to kinder for only one day a week. As a consequence, the numbers continued to decline and, despite an assurance from the then Minister for Youth and Community Services that its funding would be continued, the kinder was forced to close its doors at the beginning of the second term this year.

It was the subtle pressure applied by the former government that forced the hand of the kinder committee. The committee was advised of a major long-service liability to give the appearance of a substantial debt. The reality was that most of the liability was arguably the debt of the Department of Human Services rather than the parents committee. Parents on the committee were told that they would be individually and personally liable for any further debts incurred if the committee attempted to keep the services running to the end of the year.

The end result of the pressure was inevitable: community confidence in the future of the kinder collapsed. Several parents rushed their children off to the few other kinders with remaining vacancies. The committee made the reluctant and unavoidable decision to close its doors. The final day at the kinder was an emotional and sad one, and when I visited my resolve to represent the needs and aspirations of the people of Frankston East was increased.

I have spent much time on this issue because it illustrates the difference between our side of politics and the honourable members opposite. I believe much of the political debate in Australia this century has been based on the competing view of community versus individualism. The Labor view is that the role of government is to support and strengthen community institutions, services and structures, so that individual community members can grow, develop their potential and prosper. I am passionately committed to that view.

I reject the more narrow view that governments should create an environment where individuals compete and only the strongest can survive and prosper, a view that says if you extend your hand to those being left behind you will get dragged back down. The former government was perhaps the most extreme example of that narrow political view we have had in Australia this century. It is a view that ultimately contributed to its downfall.

In my time in the house I hope to contribute to the strengthening of our community and to deliver good government for the people of Frankston East and Victoria so that they may grow and develop their enormous potential and may prosper in all ways.

Like all honourable members, I come to this place with my values formed and developed by my experiences. My earliest political memory is attending with my father a public meeting held by Australia's longest-serving Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies. Before honourable members get too excited about my political allegiance, I point out that it was the 1960 election and I was a five-year-old sitting on my father's shoulders. We were with the hecklers at the back of the Oakleigh town hall!

My view of politics from the social perspective of community came from my parents. My father, the late Bill Viney, was a substantial influence on my values. He served for 16 years as a municipal councillor and was the first person elected to the former Oakleigh council on an ALP ticket. In the late 1950s and early 1960s he started many community-service programs in Oakleigh that subsequently became standard practice in Victoria and set Australia-wide trends. Those programs included Meals on Wheels, home help, welfare services, youth support services and, later, an aged care hostel.

My father's commitment to the community was both enormous and deeply held. It extended to our home, where the door was never locked. I do not recall ever having a key or knowing where one was. Local people came to and went from our house in a constant stream. Our home was full of local political action and debate.

My mother, Eleanor Viney, was the constant in a house of political interest. She was brought up in poor conditions in the West Australian wheat belt. She suffered an extremely serious illness as a result of which she lost one lung and most of her teenage years. She was, and remains, devoted to her family and continues to run an open house at her farm in Gippsland.

My youth was deeply influenced by a war in Vietnam that I did not support. My family had been involved in the peace movement, and as a child I met Paul Robeson during his visit to Australia to promote world peace. My opposition to the Vietnam War was supported fully by my grandfather, Frank Viney, who was a First World War veteran who fought in France, and my father, who was a veteran of the Second World War. He served in the navy from 1942 to 1945, seeing active duty in the Pacific and Indian oceans.

Like the Minister for Finance, I recall on one occasion wagging school on a Friday afternoon to attend a Vietnam moratorium. That weekend my mates rang to say the headmaster had called the roll and my name was one of three that were missing. The two other students demonstrated no political commitment; they went to the beach!

I recall I asked my father for a note to say he had approved my going to the moratorium. He asked whether I had sought his approval or the approval of anyone else in advance. When I confessed that I had not he said, 'Son, I am very proud of your political commitment, but I am afraid you have to learn that sometimes when you take a stand on things there are consequences'. At that school students were caned for breaches of school rules. By good management rather than good behaviour I had previously avoided that fate. That was a great lesson for me, one I will always remember.

My commitment to a community view of politics continued through many years of work in community development and social planning. It also continued in my business life when I established my consulting and research business 10 years ago. I was pleased to create employment opportunities in the electorate I now represent. I have now sold that company to concentrate on the new venture I have begun in this place. I suspect I am one of the few members of this house to proudly be a member of both the Institute of Company Directors and the National Union of Workers.

I put on the record my deep thanks to and appreciation of the management of the company I sold and all the staff who worked with me during those 10 years. Together we achieved great things as a business, growing from nothing but a good idea to a successful company that was a market leader in its field.

Good government and successful businesses providing jobs for Victorians will create a strong and vibrant community and give people the opportunity to reach their individual goals and potential.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife and children for their enormous support during my campaign. They proved to be a source of great strength during what was an unusually intense election.

Mr McIntosh (Kew) — It is a great honour to address the house in supporting the motion for the adoption of the address-in-reply to the speech of His Excellency the Governor. His Excellency and Lady Gobbo lived in Kew for many years and there brought

up their family, one of whom is a professional colleague and friend from the Victorian bar.

On behalf of the constituents of Kew I acknowledge the distinguished career of Sir James as barrister, Justice of the Supreme Court, leading member of the Italian community and, now, Governor. I also express our appreciation of the way in which Sir James and Lady Gobbo have discharged their public duties.

I congratulate Mr Speaker on his election to the ancient and high office of Speaker. I also congratulate you, Deputy Speaker, on your appointment.

The people of Kew have bestowed on me a privilege in electing me to represent them in the 54th Parliament. They have done me great honour and I shall provide them with the representation they deserve to the very best of my abilities. I hope that at some future time they will readily agree that I have been able to contribute in some way to making the electorate a better place to live.

The seat of Kew was created in 1927. I am the sixth member for Kew, which was brought home to me by the previous member, Mrs Wade, when she handed me the gold pass. The little badge is a cogent reminder of my lineage and an example of the representation to which I now aspire. Its face value is far less than its extrinsic worth as a symbol of the men and women who variously retain possession of it with the consent of the people of Kew, such entitlement being renewed at each election.

Sir Wilfred Kent Hughes — Rhodes scholar, Olympian, army officer who saw distinguished service in two world wars and former deputy premier — won the seat in 1927 and held it until he became the federal member for Chisholm in 1949. He continued his ministerial career in various governments formed by the great Sir Robert Menzies. It is perhaps of contemporary interest that Sir Wilfred first entered Parliament as an opposition backbencher when another minority government was in office, but that is perhaps where the similarity ends. Sir Wilfred was also chairman of the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games organising committee. The Melbourne Olympics remain the benchmark for international sporting events conducted in the spirit of the Olympics.

Following Sir Wilfred's 22 years in Parliament, the seat of Kew was held by Sir Arthur Rylah for another 22 years. He became Deputy Premier and Chief Secretary for a record 17 years. Following a leadership spill in December 1951, at which Melbourne-based accountant L. G. Norman was elected leader of the

parliamentary Liberal Party, Sir Arthur Rylah secured the greatest number of votes for the position of deputy leader. However, he was prevailed upon to step aside because the conventional wisdom of the day required the deputy leader to be somebody from the country. The country member selected was Sir Henry Bolte. The indomitable and at times volatile political partnership between Sir Henry and Sir Arthur was then born and is now a part of this place.

Sir Rupert Hamer, initially elected to the Legislative Council in 1958, followed Sir Arthur as the member for Kew in 1971, and Sir Henry as Premier in 1972. He had seen service during the Second World War in Tobruk, El Alamein, New Guinea and Europe. Sir Rupert practised for many years as a solicitor and was a member of the state executive of the Liberal Party during the tumultuous period of the early 1950s. Of particular interest to me is the fact that he married April MacKintosh in March 1944. So far as I am aware we are not related. Sir Rupert will be long remembered as a great Premier — a man of vision, talent, compassion and dignity, who nearly 20 years after his retirement still undertakes an enormous workload in the service of his community.

Prue Sibree became the member for Kew in 1981. Shortly thereafter I became a member of a local branch in Kew. As a party member I worked for Prue on her campaigns. I now have the opportunity to pay tribute to her great support for the institutions of Kew and her public life, initially as a member of the former Kew City Council and then as the member for Kew.

Jan Wade became the member for Kew at a by-election in 1988. She came to this place following a distinguished career as a public servant. She had been a parliamentary counsel, head of the ever burgeoning Office of Corporate Affairs and finally the well-respected and highly regarded President of the Equal Opportunity Commission. Renowned for hard work, dedication and application to any task that confronted her, she made a significant contribution to the people of Kew while holding the important portfolios of Attorney-General, Minister for Fair Trading and Minister for Women's Affairs. She was Victoria's longest-serving Attorney-General this century. However, it is perhaps to the women's portfolio that she was most dedicated. There are many women in Victoria, of all political persuasions, who owe a deep debt of gratitude to her as a member of Parliament, a mentor, a role model and a champion.

She remains a friend, a fellow Liberal, a person who contributed a great deal to Victoria and was rewarded with a list of major achievements. I have had the

privilege of working with and knowing a great Victorian.

It is a brave man who stands in this house and acknowledges with pride that he is a lawyer. I cannot ignore that the law has been an important part of my life. I have been a student, solicitor, judge's associate, and for the past 14 years a practising member of the Victorian bar. I have spent half of my life studying or practising law. Now my involvement with the law has dramatically changed.

We, the law-makers of Parliament, chosen by the people of Victoria, will continue the daunting task of searching for solutions to the momentous problems of our times. The primary role of any law-maker is to oversee a system of laws that regulates an increasingly complex community. It is the cornerstone of our democracy that all persons, whether they be individuals, governments, powerful corporations or privileged minorities, are subject without exception to the same laws and regulations. That is the rule of law.

It is also an important responsibility of law-makers to provide some mechanism to enforce the criminal law and to enable citizens to resolve disputes between themselves. The mechanisms of enforcement or dispute resolution must be effective, efficient and above all generally accepted as providing a credible outcome. The ability of the state to enforce the laws and for citizens to resolve their disputes peacefully goes to the way we as law-makers help to maintain the tenuous bonds of community, state and nation.

When the mechanisms for enforcing the law or resolving disputes fail, we, the law-makers, have an obligation to intervene, alter, change, adapt or completely replace those mechanisms.

I have observed the phenomenal change in the way criminal law is practised and litigation is undertaken in this state. The invention of the fax and the photocopier, the burgeoning use of electronic storage and retrieval of information, real-time transcripts and the increasing use of electronic communications around the world have led to an increased amount of information that is able to be brought to bear on a particular issue in a court.

The process of change has led to a dramatic increase in the time taken for cases to be presented and the consequent cost. Of course, there are those who are wealthy enough to access information and are rewarded by an enhanced opportunity for success before the courts. However, those who cannot afford or are ill equipped to harness such information are severely

handicapped in their ability to present their cases to a court.

Over the past decade I have observed a number of inquiries into the judicial and legal profession. The previous government oversaw the passage of the Legal Practice Act. The legal profession and, most importantly, the community have benefited from genuine — rather than cosmetic — reform. Nevertheless we, the law-makers, must continue to address the ongoing problems of law enforcement and dispute resolution. While the process of change inexorably accelerates, it creates problems and challenges that cannot be ignored. We must find solutions. If we fail, the bonds of community will begin to fray: poorly resourced litigants and a community disillusioned with the courts are the harbingers of a breakdown in the community.

Because of the shortness of available time or perhaps the flagging interest of my fellow members I am unable to provide or canvass possible solutions, but we must find a way to reduce the cost of litigation. We must reduce the time it takes to get to a decision in the courts. We must limit the time it takes to present or try a case. We must encourage judges, members of the legal profession and litigants themselves to distil the essence of a dispute in simpler terms. In short, we must continue to search for solutions to provide credible access to the mechanisms of law enforcement and dispute resolution.

Identifying the problem is easy. The tortuous task will be to undertake the long and exhausting process of developing the partnership between users of the mechanisms of law enforcement or dispute resolution and members of the legal profession — who would welcome any genuine attempt to improve these mechanisms. It is in the hands of the government of the day to continue the strong tradition commenced by other governments, particularly the previous government, to meet this challenge.

In my experience the overwhelming majority of men and women who practise as barristers and solicitors in the state are hard-working, dedicated, principled professionals. In the main they accept strident regulation and are bound by an incredibly strict ethical code reflecting the crucial task and responsibility that they assume. Most of them comprehend that a slip in those standards or ethics can lead to great detriment to the innocent and, understandably, resonate throughout the whole community.

I have had the great privilege of working with or associating with many judges, magistrates and tribunal

members. With the rest of the community, I celebrated their elevation to the bench and I regard them highly. They have assisted my development within the profession.

These men and women of the legal profession and the judiciary — far too many to mention or acknowledge individually — are responsible for helping to shape my belief in the fundamental right of all individuals before the law; for nurturing a passion to improve a system that enables individuals to vindicate their rights in the face of powerful interests; and for inspiring me to seek elected office inculcated with a sense of public duty.

These men and women of the legal profession remain very dear to me. They are among the finest people one could wish to meet. I place on record my sincere gratitude to them.

I also thank the local Liberals who assisted me so well over the course of the preselection and election campaigns. Aply led by David Smart, and assisted by Bronwyn Thelander, they did a fantastic job for me and the people of Kew.

I also acknowledge my parliamentary colleagues, particularly the Honourables Mark Birrell and David Davis in the other place and the federal member Petro Georgiou, for their assistance during the election campaign. I acknowledge the great support given by the state secretariat and Peter Poggioli and Joy Howley.

My mum and dad both live in Kew. Their garage became an extra storage space. They assisted me during the campaign in many ways. I am truly grateful for their efforts over the past year but particularly over the past 44 years. My wife, Annette, and son, Robert, could not be here today because unfortunately there was another momentous event in the McIntosh household today. It is Robert's first day at kinder. My wife said she has heard my speech some 30 or 40 times and could not stand to hear it again! They have been a source of great support and inspiration. What I do will be of great assistance to Robert.

Finally, I thank all members of the house for the courtesy they have extended me both today and on previous occasions.

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — I am honoured to be elected as the representative of the people of Ballarat East. I take this opportunity to congratulate Mr Speaker on his elevation to his high office and I trust my remarks can be passed on to him. I look forward to working in this house, under the guidance of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker and various acting

Speaker's. I congratulate the Premier and the members of the Labor cabinet for their elevation to their positions and I look forward to serving with them to improve the opportunities for the people of Ballarat East.

I also take this opportunity to express my good wishes to my predecessor Barry Traynor, as he returns to a lifestyle beyond politics. He was a committed member who worked honestly to make his contribution to the people of Ballarat East. He was particularly passionate about law and order issues, driven by his previous experience in the police force. That experience also lead the former member to put much energy into supporting action to help address the serious issue of drug abuse, which has so tragically destroyed the lives of too many of our younger community members and their families.

I also acknowledge that despite the pressures placed upon him, Barry only spoke out publicly on issues in which he believed. He chose not to speak out in defence of the government when he believed those actions to be indefensible. He called a spade a spade and, to use his own words, although he was not a mover or shaker, he was a contributor who maintained his honesty and integrity throughout his term as the member for Ballarat East.

I thank the residents of Ballarat East for expressing their support for me. I will work to demonstrate the soundness of their judgment. I also thank the many people who supported my campaign in so many ways. I acknowledge the love and support offered to me by my family and friends. Without the nurturing offered by my parents and the ongoing reliable emotional and physical support provided so generously by family members and friends over many years, I would not be standing before the house today.

Honourable members will learn much about Ballarat and its environs over the coming years if they do not know much about them already. The honourable member for Ballarat West and I will ensure that honourable members are fully informed about the great history of Ballarat and its environs and the opportunities for the future of the people of our region. The house will be aware that Ballarat was the birthplace of Eureka. That event, which took place almost 150 years ago, is of historic significance to all Australians. Our ancestors fought against a government which was out of touch. They fought to defend the rights of all and to stand together with their fellow miners. I believe the spirit of Eureka lives on in my electorate, as was demonstrated in September. One of the leaders of the 1854 Eureka uprising, Peter Lalor,

was a former member for Ballarat East and a former Speaker of this house.

Ballarat East does not just include the urban areas of Ballarat, but also the towns of Daylesford, Ballan, Meredith, Elaine, Gordon, Korweinguboora, Porcupine Ridge, Drummond, Dunnstown and Anakie to mention just a few. I recognise the efforts of Mr Frank Sheehan, a resident of Dunnstown who was the member for Ballarat South from 1982 to 1992. Mr Sheehan was always a very approachable local member who worked hard to assist his constituents with their specific concerns as well as working tirelessly to advance many major projects which have provided great, ongoing benefit to the electorate. I also record my thanks to Mr Sheehan for his advice and support offered over many years. I hope I can follow his example of always being accessible and approachable to my constituents, while maintaining my focus on the big issues for the people of my electorate and all Victorians. I trust that, with the support of my electorate officers and staff, I will be able to support the more personal issues of concern raised by my constituents.

Ballarat is famous for another reason — that is, as the birthplace of the Premier. During the recent election campaign many members of the Ballarat community expressed their goodwill towards him. They have developed a high regard for Premier Bracks and his family, whom they have known and respected for many years. The Premier's father and uncle were small businessmen in the city. As both gentlemen had physiques similar to the Premier's, any reference to them as small is obviously a reference to the nature of their business rather than their physiques. The two gentlemen are well remembered for running a number of businesses selling groceries and clothing in Ballarat over a number of years.

I convey to the Premier the good wishes of many of my constituents, who are confident that in leading the state he will continue to be aware of the issues affecting his home town as well as addressing other issues across the state.

Ballarat has much going for it. The city of Ballarat and the communities in the numerous towns surrounding it have a broad economic base, including quality agricultural produce, a sound industry base, a large service sector and a huge tourism base. We also have wonderful people and an outstanding lifestyle, with clean air, relatively minor traffic problems and a magnificent natural environment. The people of my electorate seek the support of government at the local, state and federal levels so we can work together to build on our attributes to provide better opportunities now

and to ensure a positive outlook for the future generations of our city and its environs.

I raise the question of why I or anybody else in the chamber might stand for public office, which I have had to consider seriously over a number of years. As honourable members know, at times it can be a thankless and extremely time-consuming task — and in living in the public domain one is open to criticism. At times it would be tempting to pursue a more relaxed lifestyle. Why did I make the decision to stand in the firing line and become a member of the house? In answering that I will relate some of my life experiences.

My major work experience has been as a teacher in secondary schools. I taught the majority of my more than 18 teaching years in the state education system, with some time in the Catholic education system. I have greatly enjoyed the experience of working with young people, seeing them come to school at the age of 12, growing through to the age of 18 and going on beyond school, feeling that I have been able to contribute to and assist in their growth, development and education. Working with those young people has been a truly exhilarating and challenging experience.

I am proud of having been educated in state government schools at the primary and secondary levels. All students who attend state schools should be able to say they are proud to have attended state schools in their neighbourhood. Parents should feel confident that if they send their children to the local state school they will get a quality education. Parents should be satisfied that they are doing the right thing in sending them to their neighbourhood school. Along with the honourable member for Bulleen I believe education is a matter of high priority for this and any other government.

As a teacher over recent years I have seen at first hand the effects the massive funding cuts have had on our education system. I saw how the removal of 9000 teachers across the state seriously affected staff morale and the learning opportunities of the young people in our schools. I saw class sizes rise and valuable programs cut. In my school, which was a disadvantaged school, I saw valuable programs such as the home reading and camps programs cut out and removed. The camps program offered young people great opportunities to have holidays they otherwise would not have; but more importantly, it offered them opportunities to share with other young people and adults the social development available in a camping program. Many such programs were removed from state schools across my city and the state as a result of the cuts in government spending.

I strongly believed that we needed a government that would give education a much higher priority and consult with and support teachers who are committed to providing the best learning opportunities for their students. My teaching experience led me to the firm view that state schools should be collaborative and cooperative in working with other state schools and should not be required to compete against each other. We need to know that all our schools are provided with resources that acknowledge the additional difficulties that may be faced by a particular school, including the challenges posed by being a disadvantaged school.

My experiences as a teacher in recent years raised two other significant issues of distress. One relates to the education maintenance allowance that has been paid to parents who experience challenges in putting their children through the education system. Recently the government told those parents it did not trust them to spend their money as they chose. Half that allowance was no longer provided to them directly but was instead given to the schools. That sent a cruel message to struggling but devoted parents.

The other issue, which has already been raised today, concerns the short-term contracts that have been introduced in our schools over recent years. They have mostly affected our young teachers, who do not know whether they will still be employed from term to term or after the next school holidays. Those teachers have had a difficult time planning for the future in education in general, committing themselves to particular schools and being able to get loans from banks to buy a house.

Another major concern that has arisen in my work with young people and others in the community is unemployment. Our young people need to feel more positive about their futures. Recent figures for my electorate show that in Ballarat Central the unemployment level is 12 per cent; in Ballarat South it is 10.3 per cent; and in Hepburn East, which is in the Daylesford area, it is 13.7 per cent. The youth unemployment level is more than double that — it is more than 40 per cent in my region — which is simply not satisfactory.

Unemployment is arguably the most important issue for the government to address. It is a human issue that causes great distress to those without work, including young people looking for their first jobs or the many older people whose jobs have been restructured in downsizing exercises, efficiency drives or government cost cutting. They are real people with families to support who are looking to make their contributions to and feel valued in society.

Another associated issue which affects the young people I have been working with and which is also saddening is the sense of hopelessness that causes too many of them to turn to alcohol and drug abuse. Last year one of my former young Ballarat students took his life through a heroin overdose. I do not want to see any more people in my city or in other regions across this state die in similar circumstances. He was a bright young man who had a great future ahead of him, but he lost his way. Unfortunately he was not cared for when he was using heroin so he is no longer alive. As a result his family is understandably devastated.

I have also had experience in local government. Ten years ago I was persuaded to stand for election to the local council. I decided that it would be a good opportunity to become more in touch with my community. I have certainly enjoyed the opportunity of working with people in my community as their local government representative. It has allowed me to develop ongoing links with many community groups across my electorate. Over recent years local government also became a frustrating area to work in because many of the decisions that should have been made by local councils were taken out of our hands by the former government.

Other areas I became involved in over recent years include a group called Save Our Services. In 1996 I was asked to be the convenor of a broadly representative group of members of our community, including church leaders from many denominations and others working in health and education. We held many public meetings that brought out huge concerns across the community about the valued services that had been lost.

Welfare groups also became involved. They kept informing me of their concerns about the greater strain being placed on welfare services because of the high unemployment level in Ballarat and the increase in the number of gaming machines in my electorate. That number is astoundingly high, and I will be pleased to address honourable members further on it at a later date.

I also became involved with another group called Priority for People. Members of that group were concerned about many decisions being made — not just by government but by companies — with the dollar as the only criterion. They were also concerned that people were not being considered in those decision-making processes. The group advocated their belief that people are important and that they must be the basis of decision making. The Priority for People group did great work in Ballarat.

I also appreciate and enjoy the natural environment not only across the state but, indeed, everywhere. Ballarat has many environmental issues that need to be addressed, whether they are to do with pest and weed management or with urban issues such as waste recycling, pollution reduction and so on.

Why did I stand for state Parliament? When honourable members hear of my experiences they will know I could decide to do but one thing, and that was to step forward and say, 'I cannot bury my head in the sand. It is no good just criticising in the background. I want to be part of the state government of Victoria and part of the decision-making process'.

Honourable members will remember Dr Martin Luther King, a great man who so powerfully shared with his country his dream for his people. I too have a dream. Recently I had a dream of appearing on stage with Shirley Bassey, but that is not the dream I wish to share with the chamber today! My dream is of a compassionate society in which people across all social sectors develop a greater understanding and appreciation of each other, in which all community members feel included and valued, and in which all can gain access to the support they require.

I dream of a Victoria where people are not labelled and judged accordingly, where people are not just striving for themselves and where they value their involvement with others around them more than they value their material possessions. Most importantly, I want to be part of a community in which all its members can look forward to a positive future.

Such values are familiar to people who live in country towns where community members feel included. Unfortunately, even in those country towns some of those values are being eroded. I want to work to ensure that the government can strengthen that feeling of community and of people enjoying working together so that people are the priority in any decisions about community lifestyle.

I recognise that such a dream cannot be achieved overnight; I know it will require much work. However, I pledge to work with the government to progress that dream for the benefit of the many Victorians whom I have the honour to represent. I trust that by staying in touch with my electorate and continuing to reflect on the reasons why I decided to stand for Parliament and why I am here today I will be able to make a useful contribution to the wellbeing of the people of the state.

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

the honourable member for Polwarth, who will also be making his inaugural speech, I direct the attention of the more seasoned honourable members in particular to standing order 44, which says it is disorderly for members to pass or even duck between the Chair and the honourable member who is speaking. The house is getting a little lax in that regard, and I ask honourable members to take note of the standing order.

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — Deputy Speaker, I congratulate you and the Speaker on your election to your office. I hope you both enjoy your roles in this house. I also thank you for the opportunity to respond to the speech of His Excellency the Governor, Sir James Gobbo.

Sir James recently visited the electorate of Polwarth, and I know the people he met very much appreciated his presence. Sir James visited Colac, Lorne and Apollo Bay and accepted the role of patron of the Apollo Bay Health Foundation. He also addressed several community groups and schools, during which he spoke of his early years in Australia. He said his life is an example of the fact that this country offers any individual from humble beginnings the opportunity to move forward in his or her career, personal development and community service.

On behalf of the Polwarth electorate I thank the Honourable Ian Smith, my predecessor, who was previously the longest-serving member of the house. Ian had a remarkable career spanning nearly 32 years, during which in the 1970s he helped establish three new ministries — social welfare; youth, sport and recreation; and economic development. Ian's eight-year stint as Minister for Agriculture resulted in amazing rural progress, led by his drive and vision. Dairy industry and grain-handling reform were but two of his great achievements.

However, I believe his work as Minister for Finance is his most significant achievement. Working closely with the trade union movement Ian reversed the unsustainable superannuation liabilities in the public sector. A projected \$60-billion liability by the year 2023 will now be reduced to zero thanks to his work. In the electorate of Polwarth Ian Smith was widely respected for his leadership and advocacy and his patience and availability. Nothing was too much trouble for him.

My special thanks go to the people of the Polwarth electorate, who have seen fit to place their trust in me to represent them as their Legislative Assembly member. My family, my wife Sue, my friends and close Liberal

supporters have all been of great assistance to me, and my thanks go to them also.

My wife, Sue, is a dedicated health worker in the Colac district. Throughout my campaign her support was unending, and her influence was driven home to me by a comment from one of the people she visited at home after the election, who said, 'I never thought I would see the day I would be bathed and cared for by a local member's wife!'.
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Although I would much prefer that the coalition were in government, I congratulate the Premier and his party on obtaining government. Upon their shoulders now rests the heavy burden of lifting the morale of some country areas and changing their negative perceptions. I have high expectations of the Labor minority government delivering on its commitments to all country Victoria.

The name of Polwarth can be traced to a place near Berwick-on-Tweed in the north of England. There is a Lord Polwarth, who, when he was in Australia a few years ago, visited the public gallery. Four proclamations gazetted between 1849 and 1881 established the county of Polwarth, which extended over 1225 square miles. The county of Polwarth covered much of the present boundaries of the Polwarth electorate. Hence I presume it was decided to name the electorate I now represent after the county. Other county names, such as Ripon, Lowan, Rodney and, of course, Hampden, the electorate of former Premier Bolte, have been used for electoral districts in this Parliament.

The Polwarth electorate was founded on grazing and then timber. Over the years as the population increased opportunities diversified, and today the population of the electorate is involved in a fascinatingly diverse range of activities, about which I will speak.

I do not think any other electorate could claim the diversity that exists in Polwarth. The coastal area from Point Addis, just east of Anglesea, to the Twelve Apostles — a drive of 2 hours — is the southern boundary of the electorate. Fishing has played and still plays an important role, but with that industry come the complications of sustainability and regulation. It is important that the policies and actions of government enhance natural fisheries rather than diminish them, as has happened in the past. Fishing, apart from providing valuable food and employment, also adds to the attraction of coastline activities.

Tourism in Polwarth has steadily expanded, providing much-needed employment and investment opportunities. The Great Ocean Road now has

2.8 million visitor days, of which 2.6 million become visitor nights, which adds greatly to the value of the industry, an industry that seems to be expanding in Polwarth at the rate of about 15 per cent a year. B & bs, cabins and other forms of accommodation, along with the activities of sightseeing, bushwalking, horse riding, fishing and exploring are all part of a solid growth industry in the electorate. Tourism infrastructure, particularly roads, is important to the continuing growth of the industry, and the need for higher quality, safer roads along the coast is becoming critical.

The Otways, known for their beauty and biodiversity, are also vital to the timber industry. Half of the Otways has been set aside by the Land Conservation Council as forest areas for logging, and the other half for parks and protected areas. Inevitably, there is conflict of opinion on this issue, which is now subject to the process of a regional forest agreement. I strongly support a sustainable timber industry in the Otways, and I believe proper logging practices implemented under the Forest Code of Practice, which has been approved by this Parliament, will have the effect of regenerating vigorous reforestation in a sustainable way and at the same time provide jobs, business opportunities and timber. Australia imports more than \$2 billion worth of timber a year — most from areas where one might question their forest practices. That is one area where we can save import dollars, provide jobs and regenerate timber in a sustainable way. That seems very sensible to me.

Government policies and actions need to continue sound forest practice while allowing the industry to prosper. Some people would rely solely on plantation timber, but the lead time in its establishment and the impact of large-scale plantations on small rural communities lead one to the conclusion that native forest harvesting will be very important for a long time.

Dairying is arguably the most important industry in Polwarth. Farmers concerned about the future of this industry are anxious to understand what the new government has in store for them. Bonlac has recently invested \$80 million in a new plant at Cobden, and two new feed mills stand as a vote of confidence in the future of the industry. Nowhere else in the world is dairying more efficient than in parts of the Polwarth electorate.

The grazing industries — cattle and sheep — have been depressed by world market conditions for 11 years. That has had a serious effect on many farming families and their towns and communities. It is not easy for a state politician to deliver solutions to international market conditions, but it is important for us to ensure

that state government services are available to the people of the small community centres and towns that usually service them. A downward spiral of prices has reduced cash flows in all grazing towns and placed them under increasing pressure.

In its quest to service larger regional centres government must not forget the little towns that struggle to provide services to important export industries. The former government's initiative to establish a fibre institute is a positive idea for encouraging value adding and increased demand. It will be interesting to see whether the new government can continue with that desirable initiative.

Apart from the industries I have mentioned, which form the commercial backbone of the electorate, there are many small industries, such as winemaking, cropping, boutique agricultural operations and service industries that play a vital role in the rich mosaic of diversity in the electorate of Polwarth. I look to the minority Labor government to maintain the momentum the coalition government established in the Polwarth electorate.

In 1978 my wife, Sue, and I started a small business, and prior to my entering Parliament we employed approximately 50 staff and engaged several subcontractors. I also worked as a business management consultant in three states. I note that I am unique in this house, and I do not think that one member of the government has such a diverse business background, particularly in small business. Small business is the biggest employer in Australia — the engine of the nation — yet few politicians understand how hard it is to get started and cope with the day-to-day requirements imposed by government.

The two great lies are: 'there's a cheque in the mail' and 'I'm from the government, and I'm here to help you'. I do not pretend to have all the answers, but almost every piece of legislation that passes through Parliament has in some way a complicating and dampening effect on small businesses and the people who run them. If the government has an interest in the subject, a special all-party committee should be established to report on why so many small businesses fail and what role the government should have in relation to small business, particularly in rural and regional Victoria.

I am not suggesting that we reinvent the VEDC or try to featherbed small business, but I do believe a better understanding of small business and the role of each level of government in relation to small business could lead to better policies and legislation.

My wife, Sue, and I have a particular interest in aged care, and we have addressed many community groups on the subject. While the commonwealth government seemed to stick rigidly to its beds-per-capita ratio, not enough emphasis is given to demographics. Rural mechanisation and market factors have caused a drift of young people to regional centres and to Melbourne, and some country areas are facing the problem of a disproportionately high concentration of older people with an obvious and increasing need for aged care facilities. It is, however, very hard for families to find sufficient aged-care facilities in most country communities. Herding old people out of their communities into major centres is not appropriate to their care and is not the way forward. Old people need to be near their relatives and friends. Community and family separation needs to be addressed as a matter of priority in rural and regional Victoria.

The government, in its haste to reintroduce access to common law into the work force, needs to know that the system of workers compensation introduced by Labor in the 1980s was the single greatest deterrent to employing people in small business. You simply cannot create a gravy train and expect small business to keep funding it. I believe the present system is both fair and responsible.

Country people have great expectations created by the new government, and I look forward to an equitable distribution of government expenditure throughout country electorates. It will be a pleasure to welcome ministers to Polwarth and to arrange deputations and meetings so they can meet the people of the electorate.

Country people make up 28 per cent of the population of Victoria, but in each of the previous years the former coalition government delivered 35 per cent of its budget to country Victoria. Even though country people contribute less than 20 per cent to budget revenues, the government must service our rural industries and their supporting towns properly.

The new government has created a perception in people's minds that the country has lost services as a result of actions of government. Now is the new government's opportunity to put its money where its mouth was prior to the election. I wonder whether country people will get more than the 35 per cent of the budget they got under the coalition. That is a challenge, and I look forward to holding the government to its promises.

The Independents have given the gift of government to the Labor Party. I, along with other members of the opposition, will closely monitor their commitment to all

those who live in rural and regional Victoria, and not just to their own electorates.

In conclusion, Polwarth is in a region that is part of the state that has the strongest economy in Australia. My region has had unemployment rates of 7 per cent, which is 0.5 per cent under the state average. I look to the government to maintain the momentum established under the previous coalition government.

I thank you, Madam Acting Speaker, and I thank honourable members for their interest in my remarks, His Excellency for his address to Parliament, and particularly the people of Polwarth for honouring me with their support and for electing me as their representative in this chamber.

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — I congratulate Mr Speaker on his appointment as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

I am pleased to participate in the address-in-reply debate. It is a great honour for me to be here in the Victorian Parliament on behalf of the communities of East Gippsland. I thank them for their vote of confidence in me and guarantee that every effort will be made to consult with and actively represent the electorate.

Special thanks go to my wife and family, along with my hardworking team, whose incredible faith and encouragement against the odds has been an inspiration.

I acknowledge my predecessor, Mr David Treasure, for his efforts in serving the electorate over the past seven years. I am encouraged also by the support I received from his predecessor, Mr Bruce Evans, who held the seat of Gippsland East for 31 years.

I add a note of gratitude to the honourable member for Benalla, the Honourable Pat McNamara. Had it not been for his words of encouragement when he said, 'You will not achieve anything unless you have a member in government', I would never have nominated to stand.

In preparing for today I read the inaugural speeches of several members. One thing that struck me was the wisdom of the words of my Independent colleagues, both of whom attempted to explain to the coalition that if rural electorates continued to be decimated and ignored no seat would be safe. No-one could have guessed just how profound those words of the honourable members for Mildura and Gippsland West would turn out to be — but it has to be said that country people are hardly surprised.

The shock wave that swept through the city in late September did not begin at the polling booths; it had been shaking regional Victoria for years. It began when rural communities lost their trains, their schools, their banks and their access to local government and it strengthened as health services shrank and suicide statistics shot up. Country people watched in horror as everything being said at the local level was left silent in statewide debates. Rural communities were in a state of chronic erosion, but no-one in Spring Street seemed to care. Country people did not want new exhibition centres or grand prix in their towns; they just wanted their towns.

Those who were spared the suffering in recent times cannot imagine how deeply those who suffered felt or how real the sense of betrayal became. The chasm between the haves and the have-nots was getting too wide with whole communities starting to fall into the gap. For example, small country volunteer organisations have been prevented from undertaking vital fundraising activities. The vanilla slice stalls and the sausage sizzles on which local hall committees, day-care centres and the like rely for fundraising have been placed at risk because of the draconian health regulations issued from Melbourne. Those same regulations have put at risk viable small businesses. The obligations to undertake training and other city-based imperatives, where turnover is high enough to justify the costs, are sending small country town shops to the wall.

In some ways, the massive wave of support for my major platform of restoring the Snowy River became a motif for all other concerns. To allow Australia's most famous river to die of neglect was seen by voters as symbolic of the general lack of nourishment being suffered by our region. The outcome of the election made that point clear.

Decisive action to restore the Snowy River will signal a new readiness by politicians to confront critical problems faced by rural communities. This is the debate we have put off for too long. It is an obligation we must fulfil for the generations to come. We either continue to tolerate the degradation of our land and rivers and the steady march of salinity through our catchments or we agree to collectively bite the bullet and implement sustainable land and water-use practices.

The large majority of us share a concern about the rising cost of salinity. In the Murray Darling Basin alone salinity problems cost over \$600 million a year. Returning a 28 per cent flow to the Snowy River will actually benefit western irrigators by lessening the impact of salinity on the Murray River system. Why

avoid the challenge when so many scientific experts are ringing the alarm bells?

The sale of Telstra and the promise of this money being channelled into the environment suggests that we now have an opportunity to fund strategies which could resolve the supposed conflict between the three key river systems of south-eastern Australia. Why not repair the unnecessary waste in the irrigation systems? What is wrong with putting up a National Heritage Trust bid which genuinely grapples with the water transport issues of the Murray Darling Basin? If there were an appropriate moment for Victorians to raise this issue it is now!

When Gippsland East constituents voted in support of an environmental flow for the Snowy River, their demand was for nothing more than what was being given to every other Australian river. The 28 per cent minimum is a benchmark reached repeatedly by scientific expert panels. After thirty years of having only 1 per cent of the Snowy River's headwaters in the system, anything less than 28 per cent will only slow the process of ecological collapse. East Gippslanders want to know why an adequate environmental flow is such an unreasonable request.

Urban electorates have so far been largely protected from the water debate. As we enter the 21st century, the need to harness water-saving strategies and principles of responsible water usage bring the suburbs into the discussion. There is now scope to embrace a better appreciation of each other's strengths. With a genuine commitment to cooperate, to be brave enough to find answers to the hard questions we are faced with and to work towards a common future, Victorians can be certain that a sustainable society is secured.

We must learn to live off the interest of our natural resources and not continue to spend the capital. Therefore, I make no apology for my electorate's passion for healthy waterways; in fact, it is a great attribute to carry into the next millennium.

In Gippsland East we do not have only the Snowy River on our doorstep, struggling to survive, we also have Australia's largest inland waterway, the Gippsland Lakes, which is one of the state's great tourism assets. Over the past few years the lakes have experienced an unprecedented run of algal blooms. So much of the electorate's economy is reliant on the welfare of our waterways that it is only natural that the region wants action.

Centralisation and economic rationalism must also be called to account. Social capital must be factored into

the ledger books. One regional example illustrates that point: in April this year a timber mill in Swifts Creek was amalgamated without consultation. It was considered more economically rational to centralise the system further down the line. The community relies heavily on this industry's job input as a main strand in the web of the local economy.

The Swifts Creek community insists that locally harvested timber should be locally processed. If the resource input is local, the township argues that it has every right to a social capital return in the form of employment. The timber industry is very active in the region and is integral to many of the local communities. The topics of innovation and sustainability are constant in any discussion.

Several examples of developments in the electorate are future focused and deserving of support. The nationally recognised learning centre, Forestech, is part of the East Gippsland Institute of TAFE. Located between Bairnsdale and Lakes Entrance, it brings together on one campus the disciplines of timber harvesting, furniture design and natural resource management. It is a joint venture between the timber industry, government and TAFE that aims to provide direction and training for the sustainable use of the region's timber and other natural resources.

Our local economic development association, VEDA, has been active in seeding new enterprises, including its auspicing of the internationally renowned Gondwanaland project. The project will house postgraduate RMIT students of marine sciences and water quality and will also be a learning centre for students of all ages. It promises as well to be an exciting tourist attraction with state-of-the-art interactive displays and facilities.

The region is respected for its high quality agriculture, beef, dairy, wool and vegetable growing. Native flower and herb farms are rapidly being established, and with adequate research industries such as aquaculture have a positive future.

Victoria's largest commercial fishing fleet is based at Lakes Entrance and is responsible for supplying a substantial portion of the Melbourne and Sydney fish markets. Offshore there are oil and gas platforms. Our arts community also continues to grow. The number of facilities is increasing, and more renowned international practitioners are moving into the area.

From around the globe local tourism operators are being informed that if the Snowy River had an adequate environmental flow businesses would boom. With

ecotourism running at a rate eight times greater than general tourism, the potential for jobs is huge. The spin-off benefits to the whole region should not be underestimated, including having employment options to offer our youth.

Bringing rural Victoria back into the fold will significantly enrich the state. Country people are known to be resilient, inventive and practical. Traditionally those communities are proud and reluctant to ask for handouts. The rural imagination prefers to find solutions, and if encouraged to participate it can emerge from the wide horizon with a bank of invaluable ideas. Successful initiatives for community development could draw from the vast resources of knowledge and experience stored in the regions. If we recognise rural communities as integral to a just and prosperous Victoria, these regions will feel encouraged to contribute in vital and unique ways. In a healthy state economy everyone can share in the fruits of a fair go.

I thank honourable members for their willingness to listen. Undoubtedly, the period ahead will be one of active democracy, and I fully accept my responsibility in that process.

Although totally committed to maintaining my independence, I will always aim to keep an open mind and take into account what is in the best interests of the state and my electorate. Based on a platform of respect, and with a generous spirit of tolerance, it should be possible for us to move into the next millennium confident that the lives of all Victorians will be enriched.

Sitting suspended 6.27 p.m. until 8.03 p.m.

Ms BEATTIE (Tullamarine) — It is an honour to speak this evening as the first Labor member for Tullamarine. All honourable members will appreciate the extraordinary effort it takes to arrive at this place. I extend my congratulations to the Speaker on being the first migrant to achieve that high office.

I wish to thank many people for their generous and unconditional support on my election to Parliament. Firstly, I thank the residents of the Tullamarine electorate who have entrusted me with their faith and given me the confidence to be an active and approachable local member. I shall endeavour to always represent and act on their concerns and issues. I also thank the many Labor Party branch members and trade union comrades who were a constant source of energy and enthusiasm. It is a privilege to be a member of the Bracks Labor government.

On one of my first visits in the electorate I met with the grade 5 classes at Killara Primary School in Sunbury. I spoke about the duties of a politician and the reasons I stood for public office. One of the children asked me if there was anyone in politics who had inspired me. I shall quote the words of former Labor Prime Minister, John Curtin, that have given me inspiration throughout my life, especially in my political and social outlook:

You can't get from anti-Labor governments great changes in social practice. Their main purpose is to resist innovation, to delay reform, to prop up vested interests and maintain the existing order.

Labor challenges all this. It challenges poverty, it challenges the causes which lead to war. Its purpose is paramountly humanitarian and it seeks to promote the widest possible scope for men and for women so that they can live happily and contentedly.

Curtin's views are timeless. They champion not only fundamental notions of social justice and equity, but remind us to constantly reaffirm the basic values of helping the disadvantaged and providing access to justice and fairness. All honourable members should work towards the goal of ensuring that all members of society have the best social and economic opportunities in life.

My aim is to work to the best of my ability to implement those essential ideals and beliefs throughout my parliamentary life and beyond. I am sure that is the aim of all honourable members on this side of the house.

As a long-time resident in the electorate of Tullamarine I am committed to bringing greater stability and security to people living in the region and ensuring that outer areas are not ignored by government. Just because people do not live in the central business district does not mean they should not share in the benefits of economic growth. My office is accessible to all constituents who need support or assistance. I intend to be Tullamarine's representative in Spring Street, not Spring Street's representative in Tullamarine.

In many ways Tullamarine is unique compared to other metropolitan seats, not only for its size and geography but also its local industries and people. Tullamarine is the home of Melbourne's international airport, a major employer of both local residents and people in other parts of the state. It is the gateway to many of Victoria's regional and rural towns.

In an inaugural speech it is customary to say a few words about one's predecessor. The words that immediately spring to mind in describing the previous member for Tullamarine are courage and generosity.

His courage in speaking out both in the print and electronic media and his critical analysis on the failure of the Kennett government in addressing the needs of the majority of Victorians should be heeded by the opposition. He has been exceedingly generous with his advice!

Much work needs doing in the electorate, particularly in restoring health services, public transport and infrastructure. Local residents are denied services that other areas take for granted. Waiting times for emergency care in Westmeadows, Greenvale and Gladstone Park are far too long, while Sunbury and Bulla still do not have the long-awaited integrated health care facility promised by the former government in 1996. Work started on the connection of Sunbury to the metropolitan water supply only last month. The residents of Sunbury fought long and hard for that project which should have begun much earlier.

As with other parts of the state class sizes in local schools are above average as are school fees. Confidence in Victoria's education system should be restored and funding is desperately needed to end the cycle of parents being both fundraisers and school administrators. I am confident that the Minister for Education will rectify that condition.

No-one should underestimate the impact of City Link tolls on the local community. Some residents will pay an additional \$2500 a year for a road they used to drive on for free. The claim that people will benefit by getting home earlier or leaving a little later does not stand up when one considers how much they will be paying. The Tullamarine Freeway has not been significantly upgraded and local residents will fork out money for a road they have already paid for through their taxes. I welcome any opportunity to ease the financial burden not only on the people of Tullamarine but on all Victorians who use the road as part of their daily routine or the occasional visit to Melbourne.

Two issues that have had a strong impact on me but a much more severe impact on the lives of many Victorians stand out in my mind: common-law rights for injured works and compulsory competitive tendering.

Improving the lives of ordinary working people was not a real priority of the former government. As a trade unionist I was appalled at the way the rights of workers were wiped out by a government that saw nothing wrong with stripping basic entitlements from workers under the guise of workplace efficiencies. How many times does efficiency mean cost cutting and deregulation at the expense of safety and civil rights?

The deregulation of occupational health and safety that started in 1992 had a devastating impact on the lives of many working Victorians. No longer did they have the right or expectation to go to work each day without risking their lives, safety or health. The previous government wasted no time in slashing the compensation and rehabilitation rights of workers. The right to work in a safe environment and have access to fair compensation was all but destroyed. Abolishing common-law rights for injured workers brought an end to the right to sue a negligent employer who causes a severe injury. It also wiped out common-law rights against negligent medical practitioners who treat work-related injuries, manufacturers of faulty equipment on which people might be injured at work and claims made under the Transport Accident Act for those who drive as part of their work.

Unscrupulous employers reaped the rewards from such a system — potential savings of up to \$700 000 per injury under those changes alone. If that is what is meant by efficiency I would hate to see what is meant by cutbacks. The system has been altered in a way that makes people reluctant to lodge claims for fear of losing their jobs or because of uncertainty about how, if they were fortunate enough to be able to return to work, future employers would judge a prospective employee who had had a work-related injury. The Victorian Workcover Authority may boast how claims have been down since the new system was introduced, but is this how we determine the success of Workcover? Hardly! Deterrence of genuine claims may look good for the books but it totally undermines the basis of workers compensation.

The trials and traumas that some claims have to go through is no clearer than the following example. John Hinds worked for the Port of Melbourne Authority for 18 years. In 1992, while working 150 feet above the ground, he had his leg completely crushed by an unstable piece of machinery. He lodged a Workcover claim and received compensation for his injury. He endured endless operations and rehabilitation. Because of the severe damage to his leg he was barely able to walk without suffering immense agony and distress. Eventually it became impossible for him to walk to the shops at the end of his street. In September 1997, John suicided, unable to cope any longer with the emotional and physical pain of his injury, as well as being incapable of doing simple things in life such as playing with his kids.

After John's death Workcover sent a letter to his wife, Joan, informing her the family would no longer receive payments because they were not classed as dependants and John's injury was not work related. How

disgraceful was that for Joan — having to come to terms with the tragic death of her husband and receiving a letter saying she was not a dependant and that John's injury was not caused by his work? Workcover is obliged to pay compensation to a family for four years after the death of a family member who was on Workcover, but in this case tried to wriggle out of its obligation in the most callous way. As Joan Hinds wrote recently:

We send young people to fight for the rights of a foreign country when in this country we have no rights ... I've lost a husband who worked all his life to support his family. I can guarantee that if one of those people dies for the rights of a foreign country they will get a hero's funeral while my husband is forgotten and forgotten because he died on Workcover ... Really people, remember when you kiss your loved one in the morning before work and they are killed because of a work incident don't expect any help or support from the Kennett government ... just expect more pain.

The incident was a tragedy not only for John Hinds but also for his family, who had to deal with the insensitivity of Workcover. Joan Hinds and her daughter are still fighting the system for the right to compensation. The Workcover system as it currently stands needs urgent reform — a complete overhaul.

The system for impairment benefits, where body parts are given a financial weighting, seems to have been plucked from thin air. It cannot be justified and must be revoked. I am thankful that the Labor government has committed itself to overturning such heinous aspects of the Workcover legislation and restoring common-law rights to injured workers. Thirty hazardous-site inspectors will be employed to give Victorian workers access to the fundamentals — a safe workplace and fair compensation.

Deregulation is basically what many governments in western democracies have implemented to absolve themselves from their basic duty as elected representatives servicing the needs of their people. It has been fashionable for a while to talk about and implement small government, streamlining, decentralisation and outsourcing, yet when it comes to occupational health and safety it is really talking about the state shirking its prime responsibility to provide safe workplaces, free from disease and risks of injury. It is the most basic of obligations. It is not just an industrial issue, it is a public health issue. One would hope it was not something that should have to be debated. I worry that as I speak there may be some honourable members who think the system works fine as it is. It does not. In its current state the system is a disgrace and a vicious attack on the rights of working people.

Government Members — Hear, hear!

Ms BEATTIE — I also raise the issue of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT). I look forward to the day when CCT is a distant memory in the local government arena. The contracting out of local government services has had many negative consequences for local businesses, for communities, for emergency services, for the quality and level of council services and for the workers involved. The inflexibility of the contract system has meant that workers often have to accept low wages simply to win a council contract and then potentially forgo wage increases for the life of the contract. Most of the workers affected take home less than \$400 per week and have problems getting home loans because they are on limited contracts. The effects of CCT on rural shires have been more severe than in metropolitan Melbourne. Local roads and other infrastructure have suffered, not to mention the effects on local jobs and small businesses.

Exposing all services to competition, from human services to town planning services, could never have the same impact across all municipalities, especially when one compares rural shires to their city or provincial counterparts. The impact to a town's economy and social structure is much greater when contracts for local council work are granted to tenderers from a company outside the region who either does not employ local workers or employs them at lower wages than was the case under the non-amalgamated council structure.

What has become of the retrenched workers? Between July 1992 and July of this year more than 22 500 retrenchments have occurred in Victorian local government as a result of amalgamations and CCT. In excess of 70 500 permanent state public sector jobs have also been abolished. It is a great relief that the ALP is committed to abolishing CCT and giving local autonomy, independence and accountability back to Victoria's municipalities. Local government has a crucial role to play in developing vibrant and active communities. Vital community services must be accessible to all those who need them and people must be put first in the equation.

I look forward with great anticipation and confidence to the future development of Victoria. I also look forward to working constructively with many of you over the coming years.

Mr VOGELS (Warrnambool) — I congratulate Mr Speaker on his appointment to that high office and I am sure his experience will see him discharge his duty in a manner that is fair to all.

I come to Parliament with a great deal of hands-on experience and understanding of living and working in rural Victoria. My family arrived as Dutch migrants in 1953. Together with my mother, father, four sisters and one brother we settled at Pyramid Hill in northern Victoria. None of us could speak a word of English and no-one in Pyramid Hill where we went to school could speak a word of Dutch. For 12 months my elder sister and I rode our bicycles 8 kilometres to school each day and somehow managed to pick up the Australian language and pass it on to the rest of the family.

The culture shock that must have hit my parents in their first year in Australia must have been horrendous. My father was the 15th in his family and my mother was 1 of 10. They left their homeland, family and friends to make a better life for their children. They saw Australia as the land of hope and dreams. For the next couple of years the family travelled to different parts of Victoria looking for somewhere to settle. We lived at Bunyip in Gippsland for a while and at the foot of Hanging Rock near Woodend. In 1956, the Olympic year, we arrived at Glenormiston in the electorate of Warrnambool.

Like many young men at the time in rural Victoria, I left school at an early age to help on the family farm. I usually managed to get involved in local sporting competitions and joined voluntary organisations such as the Country Fire Authority, Apex, the Lions Club, the surf club and so on.

Apex was to play a major role in my life for the next 20 years. The motto in the young man's service club founded in Geelong was: to make the ideals of service the basis of all enterprise; to develop by example a more intelligent and aggressive citizenship; to provide the means of forming enduring friendship; rendering altruistic service and building better communities; and to promote international understanding and friendship.

I came to realise how important this motto had been to me when I reached the compulsory retiring age of 40 years. In those 20 years I married a local girl, and together we raised a family of two sons. We became involved in parents clubs, hospital boards, farming organisations and hall committees, all of which will stand me in good stead in Parliament.

The electorate of Warrnambool comprises more than 5000 square kilometres. This region in the heart of Victoria's south west is well known as a farming area producing milk, wool, beef, fat lambs and grain. A number of milk processing and stockfeed producing industries are located in the electorate. It is one of the largest dairying regions in the Southern Hemisphere.

The area offers a spectacular coastline for tourists, ranging from the Port Campbell National Park to fine fishing lakes and outstanding volcanic hills and craters. Already more than a million tourists a year travel the Great Ocean Road to the icon of our state, the Twelve Apostles. The challenge is to harness the tourist potential in a manner that encourages employment in the electorate while taking care of the environment. The area recently became a centre for the storage and processing of natural gas with a new plant constructed near Port Campbell. Another is proposed.

The electorate encompasses the City of Warrnambool, the Shire of Moyne and part of the Shire of Corangamite. Approximately half the population lives in the City of Warrnambool, a beautiful city well known throughout the state for a number of reasons, including its May racing carnival, the Melbourne–Warrnambool cycling classic, the nursery for the southern right whale and Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum.

The dairy industry, agriculture and tourism make the city vibrant. Most of the small businesses rely to some extent on the wellbeing of those industries. On the outskirts of the city are three major dairy factories, the Warrnambool cheese and butter factory, Nestlé and Murray–Goulburn.

Many dairy farmers also supply Bonlac, which is situated at Cobden in the electorate of Polwarth held by my colleague the honourable member for Polwarth. Key towns in the Shire of Moyne include Port Fairy, noted for its annual folk festival and tourism, Koroit, with a major dairy factory, and Mortlake, which manufactures its well-known Clarke's pies.

Key centres within Corangamite shire include Terang, with the major educational facility of Glenormiston Agricultural College, Timboon, famous for its cheeses, and the growing tourist townships of Port Campbell and Peterborough.

A strong and vibrant farming community is essential for the ongoing economic development of the electorate. I am pleased that the government has taken up the challenge of \$12 billion worth of food exports by the year 2010, a threefold increase.

Farmers will meet that challenge. No-one has had to adapt more quickly to economic forces than the farming communities. They will need the support of the government to help provide the much-needed infrastructure. Roads, bridges and power supplies are grossly inadequate. The three tiers of government must work responsibly together in that respect.

I turn to dairy deregulation. The United Dairyfarmers of Victoria has been a great advocate for dairy farmers. In the early 1980s when the industry was in crisis I remember walking proudly beside my fellow farmers down Collins Street to get a better deal. Export prices were at rock bottom and dairy farmers saw their salvation in trading manufactured and liquid milk interstate. If that had occurred many farmers in New South Wales, Queensland, and to a lesser extent other states would have gone to the wall. All honourable members know Victoria is the dairy state and produces dairy products much cheaper than other states.

The federal Labor government, with the support of the industry, initiated the domestic market support scheme known as the Kerin plan. Under the plan every dairy farmer in Australia paid a levy based on a percentage of production to help support products being exported. Because Victorian dairy farmers produced most of the products being exported they received the lion's share of the levy and agreed to stay out of the domestic markets of other states.

The Crean plan updated the scheme in the early 1990s. However, with the agreement of the industry, this time the Labor government inserted a sunset clause dated 30 June 2000. On that date complete deregulation will occur with the simultaneous removal of each of the states' market milk legislation.

Following deregulation, Victoria, as the major milk-producing state, will have the capacity to send milk to other markets across the country at cost-effective prices. There is no doubt that that will have a major impact on dairy farmers in other states, hence the federal government's \$1.8 billion package to help cushion the blow mainly for farmers outside Victoria. Nevertheless, some \$700 million will flow into Victoria and give some of our farmers options they would not have had without the benefit of that important package.

I cannot emphasise enough that our Victorian manufacturers are already positioning themselves for deregulation in six months time and that deregulation is already with us. In the next few months, the support of the government will be critical. The Victorian dairy industry produces 63 per cent of Australia's milk production and more than 83 per cent of Australian dairy exports. The Victorian dairy industry contributes approximately \$7.5 billion per annum to the Victorian economy and Victorian dairy exports are valued at more than \$1.5 billion, with production increasing at the rate of 7 per cent per annum.

In considering the future of the dairy industry, deregulation is but one of the issues, and managing change is most important. International market access, the financial structure of our cooperatives, research and development, security of water and the value of the Australian dollar are equally important.

I am a longstanding member of the Timboon Hospital and Community Health Centre board and have seen its transition to a multipurpose service. When my wife developed breast cancer and ultimately passed away after a long battle, I was made even more aware of the importance of having viable and adequately staffed health services in our rural communities.

Apart from a limited volunteer service, there is no ambulance service in our area. In the interests of the safety of the farming communities, not to mention tourism along the Great Ocean Road, an ambulance service should be provided. Each year that isolated area is visited by 1 million tourists. However, when accidents occur — and there are plenty — the nearest ambulance is an hour away. I suggest the ambulance service could be situated at Timboon, where a brand-new, fully staffed \$3 million multipurpose service is being completed. When translated into rural Victoria many of the decisions made in Melbourne about acute health, aged care and community services are not cost effective. I urge the Minister for Health to consult closely with local communities and their local health care boards so that a satisfactory outcome will be achieved.

In my role as a councillor and Mayor of the Corangamite Shire Council, I gained a sound knowledge of local government at the grassroots level, and I appreciate the importance of that tier of governance. Local government is the first port of call for residents on most issues affecting their everyday lives: planning, home and community care services, preschools, sport and recreation, libraries, local roads and footpaths, waste management, parks and gardens — just to name a few. It is my intention to be a strong supporter of local government, especially in the three municipalities in my electorate.

My electorate is also very fortunate in having some fine educational institutions, including Deakin University, Glenormiston Agricultural College, the South West Institute of TAFE, and public and private primary and secondary schools. There is no doubt that many of those facilities urgently require expansion due to the growing population of the Warrnambool electorate. The most important legacy any of us can leave the next generation is a full and well-rounded education that will

equip our youth to meet the challenges of our ever-changing world.

In conclusion, I congratulate the Premier and all the ministers who have been appointed and wish them well in the challenging times ahead.

I acknowledge the major contribution made by my predecessor, Mr John McGrath, during the 14 years he represented the Warrnambool electorate. It was a very fine effort.

I take the opportunity to also thank the very hardworking campaign committee, my chairman Mr Kelvin Grant and his wife Beth, and the many other people too numerous to mention for the support given to me during the whole campaign. Each and every one of them recognises how much I appreciate their individual efforts.

Madam Acting Speaker, I look forward to working with you and all my parliamentary colleagues, to debating issues of importance and, above all, to seeking the advancement of Victoria and all its citizens.

Honourable Members — Hear, hear!

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — Madam Acting Speaker, firstly, I congratulate the Speaker on his appointment to his position and ask that you pass on my congratulations to him. I also congratulate you and the other honourable members appointed to the Deputy Speaker and Acting Speaker positions.

I stand in this, the 54th Parliament, proud in the knowledge that I am here representing both the electorate and community of Geelong and the Australian Labor Party. I am proud of this because when I was growing up, in our home you did two things or you were not fed: you barracked for Geelong and you voted Labor!

Geelong may not have won a premiership since 1963, but in 1999 it has done one better — that is, it has restored the Labor Party to government and in turn restored democracy to Victoria. As the member for Geelong, I know that as the policies of the Bracks Labor government start to take effect all of Geelong will benefit, especially the ordinary people, their families and the community organisations who suffered under the previous government while monuments in central Melbourne flourished. The policies of the Bracks Labor government are built upon a strong foundation of inclusiveness, integrity and a fair go for all. The firm but fair foundation of common good and open government will ensure that in the coming years all Geelong will prosper.

During my term as the member for Geelong, I would like to see implemented numerous initiatives that will benefit my electorate. I realise, as do the people of Geelong, that change will not happen overnight. However, change will happen with input from the entire Geelong community, whether they are Labor or Liberal people, employers or workers, rich or poor. So far as I am concerned the only proviso for implementing something in Geelong is that the people involved are genuine in working for Geelong.

The first priority of the people of Geelong is community safety through the introduction of more police on our streets. On many nights Geelong has only one divvy van covering a population of more than 180 000 and the city is something like 15 police officers down on its registered numbers. It is a disgrace that people in Geelong no longer feel safe in their homes, that elderly people are no longer prepared to come into the city centre for fear of their safety and that the chances of being assaulted on our streets at night — especially if you are young — are very high indeed.

I have had numerous instances described to me by constituents of crimes having been reported but the police never arriving and subsequently the crime not being investigated. Not only the victims of crime suffer under such a situation; the individual members of the police force feel they can no longer deliver the level of service or protection that they have been trained to provide. Because these individuals have a sense of frustration, low morale results and good people often leave the force to the detriment of the Geelong community and themselves. In recent years Geelong has experienced this scenario on too many occasions.

As the member for Geelong I am pleased the government has committed itself to providing 800 new police members. I am sure the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Chief Commissioner of Police will ensure that Geelong is again allocated its rightful number of police officers.

The second area of concern in the Geelong community relates to the public health sector. I refer not only to the Geelong hospital but also to other fine community organisations that have suffered over the past seven years such as the Grace McKellar Centre and the Geelong Hospice Care Association.

Since its inception the Barwon Health Network has been a major concern of mine. I have no concern about the managers of the network, as they are only managing a structure put in place by the previous government. My concern is with the redirection of funding from the provision of in-ward services to management positions.

The introduction of centralisation has meant another layer of management and administration, resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars being redirected from nursing and in-ward services, and the closure of beds.

It is absolutely wrong that because of financial considerations people are forced to endure months or years of pain and frustration before they can be placed in hospital beds. In many cases the lives of people and their families are put on hold until the appropriate treatment is made available. For the elderly it can mean the difference between enjoying the final years of their lives and experiencing pain, loneliness and a fear for the future as a result of their health situation. As a priority, I will be working hard to ensure that newly employed nurses are working in Geelong hospitals as soon as possible.

Another issue of major concern related to health care in Geelong is that of the proposed privatisation of 140 beds for the elderly at the Grace McKellar Centre, which is an elderly citizens home and rehabilitation centre established through a bequest of land by the family of Grace McKellar in the 1950s. The McKellar family donated the land to the people of Geelong to provide, as they put it, 'a retirement home for the less fortunate in our community'.

The people of my electorate do not want these 140 beds privatised. I have had the privilege of working closely with the Friends of Grace McKellar in fighting the planned privatisation. As part of our fight we have collected over 4000 signatures against the proposal on the streets of Geelong.

As a member of the Bracks government, I am working as a priority to ensure these beds do not leave the Grace McKellar Centre because over the past 12 months, in fighting the privatisation, I have come to know and respect the elderly people and their families who will be affected. As those people put it, the centre is not just a place where their beds happen to be; it is their home, where their friends are, where their church is, where their community is. It is their life.

The beds at the Grace McKellar Centre are not a commodity to be sold for a few lousy dollars. They represent people's lives, and I will do my utmost to ensure these beds remain at the centre.

As president of South Geelong Primary School I have felt first hand the effects of the former government's policies whereby the shift towards winners and losers is most keenly felt. Tragically, the losers in this scenario are children and their education.

I will provide the house with two examples, and the first concerns funding for computers. I do not need to convince the house that computers are a basic tool of trade in our education system. The existing \$1 for \$3 funding program ensures that schools that are fortunate enough to have access to good external funding have far better access to computers than children who live in less affluent areas like South Geelong. Under a Bracks Labor government students in Geelong will receive a quality education irrespective of their socioeconomic backgrounds.

Another example of where we see the division of the haves and the have-nots in our schools is the Milk for Schools program introduced by the previous government whereby parents pay approximately \$70 a year for their children to each receive a carton of milk daily. A sole parent battling to make ends meet with perhaps three or four children at school may not be able to afford to pay \$210 per annum, so their children do not receive any milk. It happens at South Geelong Primary School in my daughter's grade. Every day some kids sit at their desks while others enjoy the benefits and tuck into their milk. The children who miss out are the ones who would probably benefit the most. In my term as the member for Geelong I will ensure that such programs are identified and eradicated.

I shall now deal with the drug problem. Geelong is no different to any other city or town in Australia in relation to this problem. Last year Geelong experienced an increase of more than 20 per cent in crimes such as breaking and entering. No doubt this dramatic increase is directly related to the availability of drugs in Geelong. There is no simple answer to this community cancer. The solution traverses many areas of society such as education, jobs and health.

Two practical but important initiatives can be put in place in Geelong in the short term that will contribute significantly to assisting those who are looking for help to break their addiction. These are the reopening of the detoxification beds in Geelong, which were previously closed due to a lack of government funding, and the establishment of a safe house for those looking for support or assistance, especially after hours when other services are closed.

A safe house is a centre where a person, especially a young person, can get shelter, food and help when he or she hits rock bottom, invariably at 3 o'clock in the morning. At the moment, those young people have to wait until 9 o'clock the next morning to find help. Invariably they are sent to a detoxification centre in Melbourne, and although that may sound simple to members of this house, if you are young and

drug-dependent it is not a realistic option. A safe house and access to detoxification beds in Geelong will provide a practical advantage in our battle against drugs for those individuals who desperately seek help.

Roads and traffic management are also major issues to the people of Geelong. The major priority at present is the upgrade of the Melbourne–Geelong road. I am pleased this road will be upgraded by the Bracks government with an injection of \$120 million. A number of traffic flow initiatives need to be seriously addressed by the government. Firstly, the construction of a ring-road around the City of Geelong is urgently required and is one initiative I will be pushing for during my term as the member for Geelong.

The Latrobe Terrace arterial is slowly becoming more blocked on a daily basis. Not only is it not the long-term answer to the traffic flow problems but it also acts as a mini Berlin Wall. It has divided Geelong into two halves — a western bloc and an eastern bloc, with the check point being the traffic lights that seem to take an eternity before they finally decide to let you cross to visit your western or eastern neighbours. A bridge over the breakwater ford is also overdue, and in future a bridge over Point Henry spit connecting the Bellarine Peninsula to the Melbourne Road is not beyond reason.

The government's commitment to reduce the train travel time between Geelong and Melbourne to 45 minutes is another initiative that will greatly benefit the City of Geelong. Thousands of commuters who travel to Melbourne every day will benefit greatly, and tourists who visit the region will be provided with an exceptional alternative mode of transport to road. A faster train trip will also attract new residents to the Geelong area.

As a former employee of the port of Geelong, I appreciate the importance of the port to the surrounding regions. In recent years the port has spent \$4.5 million in upgrading its facilities at Lascelles Wharf and connecting it to the national rail system. This is a major boost for Geelong's industry.

The Geelong electorate is particularly interested in the proposal by the former government and the Greater Geelong City Council to build a rowing course on the Belmont Common. As the honourable member representing Geelong I do not oppose the proposal lightly or oppose it for opposition's sake. I oppose the building of a rowing course on the common for a number of serious and genuine reasons based on three factors: the funding priorities of government, environmental concerns, and the view of the people.

At a time when there is a lack of police on Geelong streets, nurses in our hospitals and teachers in our schools, the government should not spend \$9.5 million on a rowing course. The City of Greater Geelong should spend its allocated \$1.5 million on elderly home-care programs and various community health programs. The funding priorities of the government are not directed towards a rowing course, particularly as there is no guarantee of attracting the events that have been suggested it will attract.

I also oppose the rowing course because I believe we should protect the Barwon River. Already flow problems and upstream fertilisers have made blue-green algae blooms common occurrences. Documentation shows that if the river is diverted for 2.5 kilometres, river-flow problems will be increased and environmental effects such as blue-green algae will multiply.

The communities of East Gippsland have elected an MP based on saving the Snowy River. The residents of northern Victoria and eastern South Australia believe the Murray River is also of great concern. Water and its environment is a major issue facing us now and in the future. I will not agree to digging a 2.5 kilometre rowing course on the Barwon River.

My final reason for not supporting the rowing course relates to democracy. From my day-to-day dealings with the people of Geelong I can safely say that the vast majority of residents do not support the proposal. Unlike the current mayor of Geelong, who has stated publicly that the majority view is irrelevant when it comes to making this decision, I have listened to the people of Geelong and I accept their wishes. The rowing course should not be built and, so far as I am concerned, it will not be built using taxpayers' money. The government's commitment to provide \$12 million for Geelong's central activities area is funding far better spent. Those funds will benefit business, especially smaller retailers, and attract people back into the city, especially its southern area.

Geelong is a great city. It has been my home since I was born. To say that I am passionate about Geelong would be an understatement. Geelong is a tight-knit community of people who show their best when faced with tragedy or adversity. An example of that was on the night of 5 December last year, nearly 12 months ago today, when Geelong lost five of its own fighting bushfires at Linton near Ballarat. The loss of those five young men from Geelong West, which is part of my electorate, was a tragedy that brought Geelong together. The Geelong community has erected a memorial fountain in Geelong West that will be opened on

2 December. An identical dry fountain will be opened at the site of the Linton tragedy three days later marking the first anniversary of the fire.

The memorial service in Geelong will be held on a parliamentary sitting day. I appreciate the fine balance of numbers in the Parliament and I am aware that no agreement has been reached about pairs. However, I believe it would be a sign of the Parliament's maturity and compassion and a sign of respect for those five men if the four members of the house who represent the Geelong area — the honourable members for Bellarine, South Barwon, Geelong North and me — are given the opportunity to pair off and attend that service. Given that there are two government members and two opposition members, the balance will not be affected. Therefore, I call on the leaders in the house to address the suggestion and reach appropriate arrangements.

To be elected as the honourable member for Geelong in the Parliament of Victoria is an honour and I appreciate the responsibility bestowed on me by the electorate. I assure the people of Geelong that my work as their representative will be carried out to the best of my ability. I trust by doing that all within the Geelong community will benefit.

Finally, I wish to recognise my family — my wife, two daughters, my mother and father — for their support, encouragement and daily advice. I also wish to thank the Australian Labor Party, especially those members in Geelong whose names are too numerous to mention for their inspiration and hard work over many years.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order!

Before calling the honourable member for Evelyn to make her inaugural speech, I remind honourable members that it is inappropriate and disorderly to carry on conversations, particularly during an inaugural speech. I am sure honourable members will not do it again.

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I am pleased to rise and give my inaugural speech as the member for Evelyn. I apologise for my voice and I assure the house it will be much louder when the house sits in a fortnight. I thank the people of Evelyn for their confidence in me and I congratulate the Speaker on his elevation to that position.

I may be a little biased when I say, as did my predecessor the Honourable Jim Plowman, former Speaker of the house, when he made his first speech on 25 October 1973, that Evelyn is no doubt the most picturesque electorate in Victoria. The electorate has changed its geographical boundaries since my

predecessor first rose to his feet at the beginning of his highly regarded 23 years in this house. Evelyn is vastly different from when it was first created in 1859. It is now an electorate of just under 2000 square kilometres with approximately 36 800 on the electorate roll.

I came to Evelyn with my Australian-born husband, David, in 1975, eight years after I had migrated to Australia as a '£10 Pom'. That payment of £10 was the best investment I have ever made. My first home in Australia was a Nissen hut at the Nunawading migrant hostel. Our search in the Yarra Valley for a block of land to build our home and plant a vineyard began 137 years after the Rurie brothers had walked from Sydney with a herd of cattle and a bundle of vine cuttings searching for an overland trade route from Sydney to Melbourne. At that stage in our history the first European settlers in Melbourne had not yet found a way through the thick bush that covered the area now known as Box Hill and Ringwood. In 1842 a track was hacked bringing the early settlers from Melbourne. That track is now known as the Maroondah Highway.

Migrants from Britain and the Channel Isles, Europe, the Mediterranean and China soon followed the Rurie brothers. All saw, as we did, the potential of this fertile land. The courage, tenacity and hard physical work of those early settlers laid the foundations for the strong rural diversity we have today. The rural industries in Evelyn range from sheep and cattle to timber getting, cabbages and orchards, vineyards and hydroponically grown flowers, fruit and vegetables.

Evelyn and its neighbouring electorate of Monbulk are the leading growers of cut flowers in Victoria. A booming export industry has now been developed. In Evelyn we export cabbages, brussel sprouts, apples, pears, stone and berry fruits, and wine both interstate and to world markets.

The steady growth in farm-gate sales is proving to be a valuable addition to our tourism attractions. Ever increasing numbers of Melburnians and tourists from interstate and overseas are visiting the region, not only for its natural attractions but for its food and wine. They stay in the many comfortable and attractive bed-and-breakfast establishments, guest houses and motels, or at the Warburton Health Care Centre, with its excellent programs for dealing with stress, smoking, alcohol, weight and drug problems.

The produce of the Yarra Valley is prized for its quality, intensity of flavour and diversity. Buyers from world markets see our produce as pollution free — as 'green and clean'. The publicity attracted to the Yarra Valley and the increasing numbers of tourists have also

increased the demands of people wanting to come to live in the region for its rural beauty and location close to Melbourne. However, as in other parts of Victoria, it brings with it the difficulties of maintaining harmonious relations between lifestyle residents and farmers.

Farming is an industry, often operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. As can all other industries, it can at times be noisy, smelly and disruptive. Crops must be sprayed and harvesters must be allowed to operate at the optimum times for ripeness and marketability of crops. As these industries grow and prosper traffic flows increase, and the requirements for farm buildings grow in both number and size.

When making planning decisions state and local governments must consider not only the points of view of new residents but also those of farmers. For instance, housing subdivisions should not be permitted adjacent to valuable and ever decreasing farmland.

During my time in this place representing the people of Evelyn, I will work not only for them but also for the hardworking agricultural producers of Victoria. I will help develop sensible, realistic solutions that will give farmers the right to farm and local residents the right to enjoy their lifestyles.

Evelyn takes in the Yarra Valley, one of the leading wine-making tourist areas not only of this great state but of Australia. I am proud of the role David and I have played in its development and profile. Many millions of dollars have been invested in the Yarra Valley wine industry during the past few years. Our orchardists, nurserymen and timber mills have invested heavily in infrastructure, research and development. Their confidence to do this has stemmed from a decision by the former Premier, the Honourable Jeffrey Kennett. His foresight, wisdom and vision to lock up the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges regional strategy plan, to preserve the rural land in the Shire of Yarra Ranges against inappropriate development, has given these rural industries confidence to invest safely in long-term planning and research. The Kennett government's decision has given future generations of Melburnians the right, on their doorstep, to enjoy rural vistas and agricultural produce that rival those of any other region in the world. History will look kindly on the legislation and the government that made it possible.

Evelyn is not all paddocks; it has thriving manufacturing, food processing and high-tech industries in the industrial areas of Lilydale, and smaller manufacturing businesses at Woori Yallock and Wandin. There are many enterprising micro-businesses, often home based, supplying interstate and world

markets. At Lilydale we have our first university and TAFE college at the Swinburne campus. Both institutions of further education are in great demand, not only by school leavers but by mature students looking to update their skills and improve their employment opportunities.

The principals and teachers of the 4 state secondary and 23 primary schools in Evelyn have my utmost admiration for their professionalism and dedication not only to their students but also within the local communities. The people of Evelyn are strong and resilient, just like the early settlers. They believe that when something needs doing you get up and do it. This is evidenced by the residents who raised money and physically contributed to the building of the Yarra Centre and who are now working hard raising funds and lobbying for a heated indoor swimming pool.

Following the Ash Wednesday bushfires the residents of Powelltown decided they wanted a town water and fire-fighting system. They got together and made it happen. Men, women and children dug trenches, laid gravel and pipes, put in fire hydrants and water storage tanks. From 1984 to 1992 they fought bureaucracy and endless red tape. Then, when the members of the little community had finished installing the town water system they bought a second-hand fire truck and persuaded a local CFA unit to train them so that they could protect themselves and their properties.

That spirit is also evidenced by the traders, the advancement league and the residents of Warburton, who are beautifying and revitalising their town and attracting visitors to their well-stocked, attractive shops, cafes and restaurants, and by the volunteers who man the Warburton Water Wheel Information Centre, whose enthusiasm and pride in the Upper Yarra is limitless. It is also evidenced by the tireless work of the Warburton Rail Trail Committee, who with friends and volunteers have worked and created what has become a major tourist walking trail that is well used by local residents. The Warburton trail is a strong success symbol of the commitment to regional tourism and the wine industry made by the honourable member for Brighton and the Leader of the National Party, both of whom were previously Minister for Tourism.

The pioneer spirit is also strong in the members of the Lilydale Melba museum committee, who work tirelessly to raise funds and preserve our heritage. All these people make me feel very humble and proud to be elected as their representative.

I have spoken at length about the many good things in Evelyn, including its tourist and agricultural strengths,

which have been achieved by committed individuals and small businesses. I now draw to the attention of the house some of the needs of the people of Evelyn. There are pockets of unemployment, both of youth and mature-aged people, particularly in the Upper Yarra region. In the same region a larger than average percentage of people is living on welfare. Both primary and secondary schools have to devote many hours away from teaching to attend to the welfare needs of their students. The need for school counsellors, which was recognised by the former Minister for Education, is urgent. I urge the Bracks government to honour that commitment.

Our police force is stretched dealing with petty crime and acts of mindless vandalism often caused by bored, unemployed, directionless youth. It is essential that the momentum in business growth and consequential increase in employment achieved by the Kennett government be encouraged and maintained. It has taken a long time for local businesses to recover from the recession we had to have and recommence employing people. It would be a disaster if employment growth slowed again.

Illegal drugs are also an issue in Evelyn. Marijuana usage is causing long-term, and in some cases, permanent psychological damage, not just to teenagers but to adults of all ages. We are now facing the unscrupulous, evil dealers of harder drugs moving their marketing tactics into the region.

Evelyn is a community of families of all combinations. It is a caring community. Illegal drugs and the related crime and suicide have touched all of us in one way or another. We know there is no single solution — in fact, there are probably several different solutions. All I know for sure is that we cannot ignore the issue, whether it is in Evelyn or elsewhere. It is our responsibility — mine and that of all honourable members of this house as well as of the community at large — to search tirelessly and unceasingly for the long-term answers. Quick-fix bandaid solutions are not the answer. I am committed to doing all I can to search for the answers as to why so many are becoming addicted and how we can help them move away from their addiction.

Grave concern has been expressed to me daily by Evelyn residents that the introduction of so-called safe injecting houses will be seen by our very young as condoning or even approving the use of illegal drugs. There is grave concern that the action I referred to is being taken in response to a desire to be seen to be doing something rather than presenting a long-term

solution — that the decision is based on a sense of frustration rather than solid research and fact.

Before I conclude, I thank the Clerks and staff of Parliament and members of Parliament for the courtesy and assistance offered to me. It certainly makes a deal of difference to a newly elected member to be so warmly welcomed and assisted. I thank my electorate chairman, Mrs June Delbridge; my campaign manager, Mr John Ridley, and everyone else who worked tirelessly with me during the election campaign. I am deeply honoured by their friendship, trust and support. I also thank, with all my love, my husband, David, and our children for their support, encouragement, tolerance and humour.

During my term in Parliament I shall endeavour to represent the people of the Evelyn electorate with diligence and to the best of my ability, and to contribute whatever I can to the functioning of Parliament. I am proud to be here, as an Australian and as the member for Evelyn.

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — Mr Acting Speaker, I congratulate Mr Speaker on his appointment and ask you to pass on my congratulations to him.

It is with pleasure that I rise tonight to deliver my inaugural speech. It is with particular pleasure that I take my place on this side of the house as a member of the Bracks Labor government. I am the second member to represent the district of Ballarat West and its first Labor member. I am also the first woman to represent my electorate.

I am honoured and humbled by my election to Parliament, and grateful to the voters of Ballarat West for entrusting me with the responsibility of representing them. It is a privilege to represent an electorate that covers much of the City of Ballarat — the place of my birth and education, the place where I started work and the place where I began my involvement in community affairs. Ballarat West is a relatively small regional electorate comprising only 123 square kilometres. It is largely urban in character and comprises Ballarat city, Ballarat North, Sebastopol, Delacombe, Alfredton, Wendouree, Black Hill and Brown Hill.

As honourable members are no doubt aware, Ballarat is a major industrial, agricultural and commercial centre. Manufacturing and the service sectors of education, health and tourism play an important role in the economic prosperity of my electorate, and contribute to the economic and social prosperity of the state.

Most honourable members will be aware also that Ballarat is the home of the 1854 Eureka uprising.

Despite continuing discussions around the significance of the uprising, there is no doubt that the event contributed to the development of Australian democracy. In respect of the Eureka theme, the City of Ballarat is at present engaging in a campaign to remind all Australians that Ballarat is the birthplace of the Australian spirit.

There is no doubt that the people of Ballarat demonstrated tremendous spirit on 18 September. For the first time, Ballarat returned Labor members in every state seat. While the people of Ballarat punished the previous government for its neglect they also rewarded Labor members who shared their desire for a government that concentrated on the basic issues of jobs, education and health services. Those are the issues that matter to Ballarat and to all regional Victoria. That is why the Premier was so warmly received in Ballarat at the launch of his campaign.

I shall talk a little about my journey to this place and the reason I stand here tonight. My background is dissimilar from those of many other people who have occupied a place in this chamber. I am proud to describe myself as working class. I grew up in a household where issues of equality and social justice were part of regular discussions. It was not unusual for me to wake up and find at the kitchen table a homeless man, a conscientious objector discussing the obscenities of the Vietnam War or a patient from Lakeside Hospital brought home for Sunday lunch by my dad, who was a psychiatric nurse.

From an early age I was encouraged to recognise social injustice and empowered to go about setting things right. I deeply regret that my parents, Charlie and Maureen Brown, passed away too soon to see me in this place, but I know they walk with me.

Like many women on this side of the house, I began my political involvement as a member of a community group battling for more resources for my children's education. I became involved with the ALP following the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor government. I was angry that a government that had done so much for working people, particularly working women, could be dismissed in so undemocratic a fashion. The Whitlam government demonstrated to me what a reforming government could achieve for people at the margins of society. It is my belief in the ability of government to transform our society that brings me to this Parliament.

My formal involvement in the political process began not with a tilt at high office but with grassroots representation at local government level. I had the privilege of serving the people of Sebastopol as

councillor from 1982 until the previous government forced the amalgamation of Sebastopol Borough with the City of Ballarat. Following the end of the inglorious reign of government-appointed commissioners I returned to local government as Sebastopol's sole councillor with the new City of Ballarat.

My service in local government is important to me for a number of reasons. It gave me experience in helping ordinary people with ordinary problems: garbage collection, home help and skate rink maintenance are not important matters of state, but the provision of such services defines the quality of life enjoyed by ordinary people. As the level of government closest to the people, local government is naturally responsive to the demands of its electors. Unfortunately, the previous government demonstrated nothing but contempt for local government and its relationships with the community. Since 1992 local government has been treated as the plaything of the minister, to be controlled and manipulated as the minister saw fit. Councils have been abolished, amalgamated and sacked, and had their budget processes directed from afar.

I am particularly disappointed by the failure of the previous honourable member for Ballarat West to defend local government, both at the time of forced amalgamation and during subsequent attacks on its integrity. The imposition of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) by the previous government had a devastating impact on employment in Ballarat and other regional centres. Together with imposed budget controls, CCT has had an obvious and detrimental impact on the ability of local government to deliver services demanded by the community. One lesson from the election result on 18 September is that jobs and services in regional centres matter — and a government that ignores that message does so at its peril.

I resigned the office of councillor of the City of Ballarat when I was elected to represent Ballarat West. I did so with a heavy heart but with the knowledge that I would need to devote my full attention to my new parliamentary responsibilities.

I record my sincere gratitude to the electors of Sebastopol, who for 16 years elected me at every available opportunity. I am honoured by the trust they demonstrated in me for so long, and I promise to continue to represent their interests within the wider electorate of Ballarat West.

I also thank the many local government staff who assisted me in my duties as councillor and mayor of the Borough of Sebastopol and councillor of the City of Ballarat. I look forward to a productive relationship

with the City of Ballarat, led by the mayor, Cr John Barnes. As someone who cares passionately about the future of local government, I warmly welcome the new government's commitment to giving local councils increased powers and autonomy.

When the previous government reduced the range of basic services it delivered, councils were not the only ones that were left to carry the increased burden. In the past few years we have witnessed an enormous increase in the range of services provided by voluntary agencies. Community and voluntary groups have always served an important function in our community, but they should not have to be relied on to deliver the services governments are elected to provide.

As a welfare worker at a Ballarat agency I witnessed on a daily basis the extraordinary efforts of volunteers and lowly paid agency staff who struggled to fill the void left by the reductions in services made by governments, state and federal. Many Ballarat people have not forgotten the savage cuts to community services imposed by the previous government in its early years. It is simply not acceptable for governments to absolve themselves of their responsibility to provide basic services in the expectation that volunteers will fill the void they leave.

On behalf of the electors of Ballarat West I welcome the program outlined in the Governor's speech to address the urgent needs of regional Victoria. I specifically welcome the creation of the Department of State and Regional Development and the establishment of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, which is designed to revive regional economies. Ballarat embraced the government's plan for our community. I look forward to working towards the full implementation of that policy in this term of Parliament.

I am greatly concerned by the previous government's removal of common-law rights from seriously injured workers. I look forward to the government's restoring those basic rights. I consider it shameful that the previous government saw fit to remove those basic rights from ordinary working people.

I also look forward to the restoration of open and transparent government. I fully endorse the response to the Independents charter agreed to by the Premier on behalf of the parliamentary Labor Party.

It is time the sustained attack on the democratic rights of Victorians came to a halt. It is time for governments to recognise that independent office-holders are entitled to the protection of the Parliament and respect from the

executive. It is time to restore access to information under freedom of information laws.

The people of Ballarat West endorsed the return to open government on 18 September, and I look forward to the impending transformation. While I am keen to see the implementation of the government's program, I recognise that not all problems can be solved by immediate legislative action.

My electorate encompasses two postcode areas identified by a recent Jesuit Social Services report as disadvantaged relative to the rest of the state. The report identifies Sebastopol, Delacombe and Wendouree as suffering relative disadvantage based on indicators including levels of employment and income. As a community we are all diminished by findings that identify significant disadvantage among us.

As the honourable member for Ballarat West I will work with government and with my community to redress any disadvantages in my electorate.

Although I have spoken of the unacceptable burden placed on volunteer groups as a result of governments reducing services, I will now address a positive aspect of community service in my electorate. For many years I have been the chairperson of the Ballarat Begonia Festival. The festival is Ballarat's premier community event and the centrepiece of its tourism calendar. The Begonia Festival provides a showcase in autumn enabling us to display Ballarat's finest gardens, artists and performers. I believe that community participation is the key to the festival's outstanding success.

An indication of the festival's importance to Ballarat's future is the key statistic of visitor numbers. This year's event attracted over 100 000 people to Ballarat from all over Victoria, Australia and the world. The economic boost delivered to our region is of the order of \$5 million a year. Sponsorship by local businesses and volunteer participation are the engines that drive the success of the Ballarat Begonia Festival.

The new government's commitment during the election campaign to the creation of the Victorian Major Events Company and its further commitment to the annual funding of the festival were warmly welcomed by the Ballarat community. The Ballarat Begonia Festival is just one example of an event that demonstrates the tremendous community spirit Ballarat enjoys. There are many more events and projects that capture the spirit of Ballarat, and I look forward to sharing my experience of them with honourable members.

I again thank the electors of Ballarat West for demonstrating their confidence in my capacity to represent them in this place.

I thank my husband, Brian, and my children, Brett and Shae, and their partners, Lisa and Dean, for their support over so many years. Words can truly not express the gratitude I feel. It has been a long battle to get here, and I am sure we are only just realising how much work is yet to come.

As a member of the Australian Labor Party I recognise what an honour it is to represent the party in this place and how rare it is to have the opportunity to serve in government.

I thank the members of my campaign team, in particular Alex Serrurier and Mathew Jose, and the many party members and supporters who have assisted me.

I also pay tribute to Frank Sheehan, who represented Ballarat South from 1982 to 1992 and who was at that time the only Labor member from Ballarat to the border! Frank is much respected, both for his tireless work as a member of Parliament and for his continuing involvement in the Ballarat community.

Even rarer than sitting as a Labor member in government is sitting as a woman Labor member in government. I express my delight at sharing the government benches with so many talented Labor women. I also extend my gratitude to Emily's List for its support of my campaign.

I also extend my congratulations to the Premier and the cabinet. On behalf of the people of Ballarat West I look forward to the implementation of the policies outlined in the Governor's speech. I thank honourable members for their indulgence and express my gratitude for the courtesy I have been shown during my inaugural speech.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Savage) — Order! Before calling the next speaker I remind honourable members that it will be an inaugural speech and should therefore be heard in silence.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Wimmera) — Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for the opportunity to make my first presentation to this house. Firstly, if you would not mind, Mr Acting Speaker, I wish my congratulations to be passed on to the Speaker on his election to that high office.

It is more than 20 years since members of this house have received an overview of the Wimmera electorate.

I therefore present not only an outline of the Wimmera but also my feelings about the people I represent. They are people I admire and respect, and I am greatly honoured by the confidence they have placed in me. They are people whose qualities of innovation and resilience have been tested by changes not only in policy but also in commodity prices and climatic conditions. Their courage and commitment in tackling the opportunities and problems faced by rural Victorians enhances my commitment to provide them with the representation they justly deserve.

I formally record my tribute to my predecessor, the Honourable Bill McGrath. Bill McGrath's 20-plus years of service in this house — with support from his wife, Ivy — for the electorate of Wimmera, formerly Lowan, has been recognised as a superb effort. He wore out many cars not only in representing his people in Melbourne but also in meeting their requirements in the Wimmera. I believe Bill McGrath will be remembered here not only as a good sportsman and teller of jokes but also as a man of passion and persistence, particularly for his advocacy on behalf of those involved in agriculture.

The Wimmera region, its people and their aspirations have had a major influence on my life. Like them, I want to see Wimmera progress and prosper. For those reasons I felt obliged to become involved in community life. The new member for Wimmera comes to the house after having worked as a farmer, having been a councillor in local government and having been involved in the public sector for more than 20 years.

I was born and raised in Murtoa and my early days were spent working on the farm there. I moved to Melbourne to further my education and employment and to pursue my football interests with the Essendon Football Club. Since returning to Horsham 22 years ago I have been involved in various school, community and sporting committees. I became a councillor for the City of Horsham, serving as mayor in 1992–93. During that period I was involved in a diverse range of community activities including development, business and industry promotion, tourism, welfare, sport and youth. It was with much pride that I was involved with the setting up of the council's first youth advisory committee.

I was appointed chairman of commissioners for the Mildura Rural City Council for two years. That council was responsible for implementing major projects including the airport upgrade, the Alfred Deakin centre and the Merbein multipurpose centre. The council also extended and improved services across the largest municipality in the state. In 1997 I was elected to the Horsham Rural City Council and was the inaugural

mayor. I set up a mayors forum in the Wimmera and was involved in the first stage of the relocation of the saleyards and the establishment of a new promotion structure.

As I said, I worked for more than 20 years in the public sector. My last appointment was as rural affairs adviser with the Office of Rural Affairs within the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. There I worked with many government, non-government and community groups in the north-west in the areas of rural and regional development, structural adjustment, rural women and youth, as well as facilitating problem-solving on a range of issues. It was during my time in local government and working with the Office of Rural Affairs that I came to appreciate the many challenges that face rural people, particularly in the Wimmera.

However, there are many opportunities in the Wimmera. As a representative of the Wimmera I will advocate its recognition by government, the public and private sectors, and people in general. The Wimmera is one of Victoria's best kept investment secrets. By 'investment' I mean investment in such things as agriculture, mining, retailing, tourism and, importantly, a good lifestyle.

I congratulate the Premier and all his ministers on their election to their current positions and remind them of the important role they play for all Victorians.

The Wimmera electorate in western Victoria covers 27 308 square kilometres, making it the largest Legislative Assembly electorate in the state. It is 38 square kilometres larger than the electorate of Gippsland East and 2100 times — yes, 2100 times! — larger than the smallest electorate, Prahran. Within the electorate are the regional cities of Horsham, where I live, and Stawell, and many important townships and rural communities. The Wimmera district stretches from the breathtaking Grampians National Park through the fertile Wimmera plains to the unique panorama of the Little Desert. The Wimmera contains many square kilometres of prime agricultural land enriched by the Wimmera River, the largest landlocked waterway system in Victoria.

The University of Ballarat campuses are located in Horsham and Stawell and deliver a range of business and TAFE courses to the region. The University of Melbourne's Longerenong campus offers integrated lifelong training across a spectrum of postgraduate, undergraduate, TAFE and outreach courses using flexible delivery methods.

Economic and employment activity in the Wimmera reflects a strong reliance on the agricultural sector, while the retail and service sectors are significant components of the regional economy. Value-adding agricultural opportunities are becoming increasingly important in positioning the Wimmera for future sustainable economic development and, importantly, jobs.

The Wimmera has long been recognised as Australia's premier producer of wheat — the golden grain. However, today the Wimmera region's production extends far beyond wheat. Primary producers in the region are innovative and adaptable. Wimmera farmers now produce 70 per cent of Victoria's pulses and about 60 per cent of the state's oilseed. Productivity in the grain industry has improved by an average 5 per cent annually during the past 20 years.

The Wimmera is dotted with secondary processing enterprises that recognise the region's advantage in having transport access to national and international markets, research and development activities, a labour force and restructured utilities. The cultivation of native flowers for cutting is another blossoming industry in the Wimmera. Ducks for domestic and international gourmet tables are also supplied from a Wimmera producer. Long-term investment in olive plantations produces high-quality olive oil for both domestic and export markets.

A fledgling agroforestry industry is developing in the south-west of the region. I say these things because the Wimmera has outstanding agricultural research and development facilities thanks to the previous government, and I strongly advocate that it continue. The Victorian Institute of Dryland Agriculture in Horsham is a premier institute for research and development of cereals, pulses and oilseed in Victoria. Again, the Longerenong campus of the University of Melbourne, through its focus on applied agricultural research, successfully combines the training of agriculture students and research into the future needs of the agriculture sector. I trust the government will continue that effort.

The Wimmera climate provides abundant natural advantages. Hot days and cool nights nurture the development of quality wine-producing grapes. The region's climatic advantages for viticulture are further enhanced by the continuing development of new grape varieties. I remind honourable members that the Great Western district is the largest producer of sparkling wine in the Southern Hemisphere.

The Wimmera region has a wealth of untapped mineral deposits. Stawell has the largest goldmine in the state and produces 90 000 ounces of gold a year, equivalent to \$45 million for export. Enterprising producers of turkeys, ducks, Boer goats and pigs have established strong domestic and, in some cases, export markets for their produce.

The Wimmera grows record-breaking quality wool and produces up to 30 per cent of Victoria's wool clip. Superfine wool from the Wimmera recorded the world's highest price when it sold for \$1 million per bale. The world's finest wool is produced at a unique Horsham enterprise, the Wimmera Wool Factory. There are plans to establish other value-adding processes such as production of paper pulp from cereal straw in the Wimmera. I notice that the government has money to assist in that area.

National parks, along with the towns and urban centres, are all significant tourism assets. The region has plenty to offer visitors as a stopover, a short stay or a holiday destination.

The preservation of the Wimmera's heritage, particularly in the agricultural sector, is the focus of a number of local museums and displays. Interpretative and educational centres situated at places such as Halls Gap National Park in the Grampians provide detailed information on Aboriginal history and culture, as well as displaying and promoting tourist activities in the national parks.

The significant tourism potential of the Wimmera's waterways is emerging. The lakes and the Wimmera river system from the upper catchment through the heritage river sections to the terminal lakes are the region's lifeblood, offering a unique environment with recreational fishing and a vast array of water activities.

Environmental projects such as the redevelopment of the wetlands and several important biolink corridor projects present tourism opportunities. New employment reflects increasing diversification, and significant employment growth has occurred in the manufacturing, communications, finance, recreation and service sectors.

There are five municipalities in the Wimmera electorate. Along the Western Highway — the main road linking Melbourne and Adelaide — the first municipality in the Wimmera electorate is the Northern Grampians Shire, some of which is also in the electorate of Ripon. The city of Stawell is the administrative centre of the shire, and its major towns are Great Western, Halls Gap and Marnoo. The focus

of the shire is on agriculture, tourism, manufacturing and mining. The shire is a popular tourist destination based on the natural beauty of the Grampians National Park. The Great Western vineyards are a well-known feature of the shire, and all honourable members are aware that Stawell is the home of the Stawell Easter Gift. I will be working with the government and seeking its support in improving the marketing and promotion of this athletics event, which is known around the world.

The next municipality along the highway is the Rural City of Horsham. Horsham is the regional centre of the Wimmera and is surrounded by many small townships, the largest being Natimuk, which is the main base for many rock climbers who are attracted to the internationally acclaimed Mount Arapiles. The Rural City of Horsham has a broad focus on economic development, particularly in agriculture, which includes broad-acre grain, wool and wheat production in the hinterland. Horsham is widely recognised as a major service, retail, transport and manufacturing centre in western Victoria.

Major attractions include the art gallery — the home of the Mark Jost collection — the Wesley Performing Arts Centre, which was constructed with the support of the former government, and the Wimmera Wool Factory. The council is about to open a new youth resource centre and a new livestock selling centre, which has been relocated from the city. I would like to recognise the support given to the council by farmers, stock agents, the many people in the community and the former government.

I would like to detour up the Henty Highway to the Shire of Yarriambiack, which has its administrative centre in Warracknabeal. The northern sector of the shire is located in the Mildura electorate. Some of the towns in the Wimmera are Brim, Minyip, Rupanyup and the town of my birth, Murtoa. The shire is based on a network of small towns situated in the heart of Victoria's grain belt. It produces about 25 per cent of Victoria's wheat and barley, and has enormous grain-handling facilities at Warracknabeal and Murtoa.

Crossing back to the Western Highway takes us into the Shire of Hindmarsh, which has its administrative centre in Nhill. Other towns include Rainbow, Jeparit and Dimboola. The shire's major focus is on cropping and sheep, and the towns focus on value-adding industries. Nhill is a good town for a case study. It has highly recognised value-adding industries, health and education services, and leadership. I remind the government that housing and employee shortages are limiting the further development of the town. Tourism

attractions in the Little Desert and the various lakes and environment projects are also popular with visitors.

The final municipality before the South Australian border is West Wimmera, which is based on Edenhope and Kaniva. It includes many small towns such as Goroke and Harrow, which is the home of the very popular sound and light show. The focus of West Wimmera is on a diverse mixture of cereal and legume cropping, wool and fat lambs, ground water resources for intensive horticulture and wine production, and a growing agroforestry industry.

Many challenges face the Wimmera electorate. I will touch on a few. One of them concerns water. Not only do we have a shortage in water storages in the Wimmera, but other water issues concerning harvesting, distribution, usage and environmental matters are challenging the minds of the people in the Wimmera and the government. Water is a finite resource, and the current water evaporation and seepage of the open channel system is unacceptable. I will be looking to the government to continue the very successful piping of the Wimmera-Mallee stock and domestic channel system, to complete the stages in the Mildura district agreed to by the former government and to fund a study into the total piping of the system. The whole Wimmera community sees water as its lifeline to the future — its opportunity to survive and expand.

Our road network is essential to the future progress and development of western Victoria. Rural roads need to be adequately maintained for efficient freight and community transport. Our rural roads must be viewed by all levels of government as an asset — an investment in our local agriculture and manufacturing industries — and as a network that joins our rural communities.

Education is vital to the continuing development of the Wimmera. I will be speaking to the Minister for Education and advocating in the house that the government continue to improve the facilities and access to all forms of education and training.

The people of the Wimmera are entitled to top-quality health services in their community, and specialist services should be available to our region. I will be advocating in this house and to the responsible minister that the government continue the improvements in health facilities, medical technology and the attraction of more health professionals to the Wimmera.

Young people are our investment for the future. I will bring to the government's attention the challenges faced

by country youth. I have already established a youth advisory committee to assist me with initiatives in making the Wimmera attractive to young people. I want more of our young people to have the opportunity to remain in or return to the region to build their futures.

I take this opportunity to thank the National Party for the opportunities and support it has given me. I make particular mention of my campaign chairman, Mr Bill Ower. His efforts before and during the election campaign were outstanding. To my campaign committee and all the people who assisted in pre-polling, in the campaign office and on election day at the 45 polling booths, I am very grateful to you all.

I thank my friends and former work colleagues for their support and assistance. I thank my parents, Frank and Kath, and my two brothers and three sisters for their support and love. I thank my family for their continuing support, and my three sons, Jarrod, Christian and Drew, for their love and friendship. I extend my special gratitude to my best friend and wife, Judie, for her love, patience, and unending support and belief in my capabilities.

The Wimmera is experiencing many changes. We in the Wimmera are keen to work with governments and the private sector to capitalise on the benefits of agriculture diversification by developing value-adding opportunities and supporting new and existing industries together with continuing improvements in community services and facilities. I will be advocating in the house that the Wimmera receive its fair share of government resources and appropriate infrastructure. A priority of mine will be to provide the necessary social services such as health care for all people in my electorate.

The preservation of our natural assets is paramount in maintaining a strong and active community in the Wimmera. The environment is fragile. The government must ensure that our waterways are maintained and kept free of pollution. Issues such as salinity, flood management and waterway degradation must be addressed. I will pursue in the house the need for opportunities to be made available in the Wimmera to enable everyone to have increased access to learning and understanding new technologies. Better access to information technology can be facilitated through further advances in education and training. To ensure that investment and job creation are not inhibited I see government as having a role in facilitating development by minimising costs and red tape while providing infrastructure such as roads, schools, hospitals, law and order and the necessary community services. On the farm, in business and in community life the family unit

is the strength of our economic and social structure, and that needs to be reflected in government policy, particularly in the areas of education, health and general services.

I thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for this opportunity. I trust you and other honourable members are now better informed about the Wimmera, and I look forward to further opportunities to represent that magnificent region.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Savage) — Order! Again I remind members that the next speech will be an inaugural speech and should be heard in silence.

Ms DUNCAN (Gisborne) — I would also like to pass on my congratulations to the Speaker on his appointment. It is with a great sense of gratitude and humility that I make my first speech in this house. I sought to come here because I believe in politics as a reform process, and as a means of assisting people in their lives and giving them access to opportunities that give them options and empower them. An old proverb urges those seeking public service to:

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

That is one of the reasons I am here.

Firstly, I thank my friends and family and the party members in my electorate of Gisborne who encouraged and supported me, especially over recent months. I also thank the people of my electorate, who have entrusted me with a great deal, for their optimism and support. I want to be a member for all of them, not just a representative for those who agree with me. To that I add my thanks to my opponents, who put in a great deal of time to ensure that the voters had a genuine choice and who made me check my own words and thoughts.

Many governments around the world were installed or are maintained by non-democratic means. Recent events in East Timor highlight the consequences of the past absence of full democratic structures in Indonesia. It makes me feel humble to be a part of our proud tradition of peaceful democracy, an ideal I hope will always unite us across both sides of this chamber, whatever else might separate us.

I also pay tribute to my predecessor, Tom Reynolds. When Tom's name comes up in conversation around the electorate of Gisborne it is with great warmth and affection. Tom was a good local member and was seen to be so.

I would also like to thank Joan Kirner. Joan first spoke in this Parliament 17 years ago. In her maiden speech she drew attention to the growing number of women members. I am sure Joan is delighted to see the number of women here in 1999, and the record number of eight women in the new cabinet. It really is equality in practice. Joan should be congratulated on her efforts in making it happen; she made a hard road much easier. Finally, I thank the honourable member for Altona for her past and continuing support. I look forward to working with her over the coming years.

Now I must bring greetings from the wonderful electorate of Gisborne. You are all welcome to visit our wonderful wineries, restaurants, forests and parks; to come to see our businesses, farms, schools, cultural and sporting events and museums. Come and see our lives — and our lives are varied and colourful. The electorate of Gisborne is also varied and always colourful. The beautiful gardens in places such as Mount Macedon are now in their full spring splendour. Come and see for yourselves the magnificence of the place.

However, many of the towns in the electorate have been left out of the so-called social dividends claimed by the previous government. It has lost jobs, schools and access to health services. Council amalgamations and compulsive — sorry, compulsory! — competitive tendering have left people in the towns feeling isolated. Massive job losses have resulted from the changes, and few if any have seen any benefits. Instead people have seen a huge loss of services. There is a real sense that the government has abandoned them.

City Link is a good example of government policy that may advantage some but will hurt many others. That people are now tolled to use the Tullamarine Freeway to access the city when it has been paid for by past generations typifies the disadvantage people in my electorate feel. Casual users of City Link will pay much more to use the freeway. Day passes are very expensive and it is presumed that everybody entering Melbourne from the freeway is travelling to Dandenong. An impromptu trip to the Queen Victoria Market on a Sunday morning could cost someone who forgets to inform Transurban of the journey \$108. Consideration is also not given to off-peak users of the system. Many people are angry about the situation. The government will do what it can to alleviate some of the disadvantage.

On Melbourne Cup eve I had the pleasure of attending a ball in Bacchus Marsh. It was attended by over 1000 people and is but one activity that forms part of a four-day event called Cup Day in the Park. The

festivities take part under a huge circus tent. Over the four days there is something for everyone: a Halloween disco for the under 12s on the Saturday night, bands on the Sunday for teenagers, and of course the Baby Boomers Cup Eve Ball on the Monday night, which I attended, being a baby boomer myself.

Cup day is a family day, and more than 25 000 people went through the Mattingley Park gates. I mention the event because for me it is an example of the great things that can be achieved when communities work together. Virtually every community group in Bacchus Marsh is involved in the event. They do it all themselves and money raised is shared equally between the local schools. They do it not only because they want to but also because there is a need. While Melbourne has its major events sponsored and supported by government, people in towns such as Bacchus Marsh rely on themselves. It is hard. Individuals take enormous risks in organising such events and give up plenty to do so. The cup day event is a tribute to the people of Bacchus Marsh, and I am enormously proud of them.

Many towns hold large community events that showcase their talents, produce and heritage. The Macedon Ranges Budburst wine festival and the Kyneton music festival are further examples, and there are many others. However, their continued success requires some support and recognition by government. They do not ask for much, just a lightening of the load for the most part. I look forward to working with such incredibly hard-working and innovative people. The government's policy of changing the focus from Melbourne major events to Victorian major events will help support and encourage such fantastic and varied regional events.

The Gisborne electorate enjoys a unique natural environment. I especially mention its forests, which are truly the lifeblood of the electorate. There is the awesome Lerderberg Gorge, the Wombat and Cobaw forests and the Mount Macedon Regional Park. They generously provide recreation destinations, workplaces, renewable resources, water catchments for lakes and reservoirs, wildlife reserves, visual splendour and a living reminder of Victoria's natural heritage.

Our forests were protected by native guardians for centuries. In recent history, under European guardianship, the forests have suffered. But they are resilient, and just as the forests are the centrepiece of the electorate their preservation and proper management will be a priority for me over the coming years.

During the recent campaign I listened to the forests issues raised by my opponents and concerned citizens. There is a great passion in my electorate about the future of our forests. I admire the vigour shown on the issues by all those who wish the forests to be protected and managed to provide for the needs of all people, now and in the future. That includes of course those who derive their living from the forests — men and women who know better than most the need for good planning and good policy. I thank the forest workers for their help in bringing to light the need for responsible forest management.

No-one with a sensible view of the future should ever think of our forests as a short-term resource. At this time, when the nation's future is very much in our minds, we should remember that the environment is the key to a sustainable future for us all. There is little point securing our political sovereignty by spending millions to consider changes to our constitution, timely though they may have been, if the relentless twin onslaughts of salinity and soil erosion threaten to remove in a relatively short time frame the environment that underpins our economic sovereignty. Care of forests has always been the key to controlling water and soil resources. We threaten the natural environment at our peril.

I look forward to seeing the forthcoming legislative program pass. As I said in my opening words, I sought to come here because I believe in politics as a reform process. I reject the concept that change necessarily means reform. Over recent years I have seen far too many changes that were backward steps, increasing inequality, removing opportunity and reducing freedom. Change certainly, but not reform.

Many during the election campaign communicated to me their deep disquiet at changes that materially hurt their families and their perceptions of the operations of the democratic institutions. For them change and reform were not synonymous, nor should they be. Few see it as a reform to close a school, a hospital, a police or ambulance station or a railway service.

I look forward to casting my first vote in this house as I support wholeheartedly a legislative program that will bring great benefits to the people of my electorate.

The handing back of independence to the Auditor-General will bring transparency to government, an end to secrecy and a return to accountability. Of all the actions the new government will take, this one most clearly symbolises the difference between the two sides of this house.

The SPEAKER — Order! The time being 10 o'clock, under sessional orders I must interrupt the business of the house.

Sitting continued on motion of Mr BRUMBY (Minister for State and Regional Development).

Ms DUNCAN (Gisborne) — Legislation to return to a full Freedom of Information Act will bring access to information and a foundation for true participatory democracy for all, not just the rich and privileged insiders.

The reintroduction of the common-law right for workers to sue negligent employers for serious injury returns to the people a basic right that should never have been denied them.

The need for a bold policy initiative like the regional infrastructure development fund was shown clearly by the rural disaffection that gave us our victory. Rural Victoria is far too important to be treated as a poor relation of Melbourne. I look forward to seeing that initiative, and others that will follow in the years ahead, begin the process of rebuilding the vast proportion of the state that lies outside our major urban centres.

These legislative initiatives are, however, but building blocks, the foundation stones upon which our task of rebuilding rural Victoria will stand. The hard work is ahead.

I will be spending a great deal of time over the next four years travelling around my electorate to see how our policy initiatives can best assist our communities, businesses and interest groups to rebuild their part of our great state. I know that every time a service is removed from a community there is a sense of loss. A school teacher or police officer removed also means a member of the tennis club removed, a scout leader removed, a football club committee member removed or a State Emergency Service or Country Fire Authority volunteer removed. I want every one of those myriad groups making up our community to feel a new wind of opportunity and hope.

That is where I will be on every occasion there is time away from this house. I will be visiting the bigger towns like Kyneton, Bacchus Marsh, Woodend and Gisborne, and smaller places many of you may never have heard of: Taradale, with its wonderful old railway bridge; Lancefield, with its beautiful old buildings, wineries and tree-lined avenues; Bullengarook, a small hamlet that lies amidst wonderful, old tree-lined roads and lanes; and Metcalfe, Newham, Cherokee, Tylden, Sutton Grange, Redesdale, Monegetta, Romsey, Darraweit Guim, Clarkefield and Kerrie — to name but

a few! So many places, each one with its own identity and community, and its own vision and plans to develop its part of our wider community. That's where I'll be over the coming years.

My background is in education, and education should play a core role in any government. It is what gives people choices and improves their lives. It must be of quality and be accessible to all. I pay tribute to the people with whom I shared my working life in education. To all those people who shaped my life and who, in turn, helped me shape the lives of our students, I say thank you.

As a member of the profession I feel a great sadness at the losses our schools have suffered. Schools have been closed and teacher numbers slashed, and class sizes are increasing. Worst of all, retention rates are falling. I am proud that the Bracks Labor government sees education as a priority and is committed to rebuilding what has been knocked down.

Among the wonderful sights in my electorate are the beautiful old state schools. Many are red brick and bluestone and are well over 100 years old. They were funded and planned by men and women of this state who had foresight and diligence and a will to build for the future by meeting the needs for our children. These people set aside in our electorates great forests and parks, put down railway lines and roads, built courthouses, libraries and hospitals and established businesses and agricultural endeavours. That the folk who did these things are long gone does not in any way diminish the worth of their endeavours nor the desire within me and many others in my electorate to build for the future with comparable vision and diligence.

That brings me to my final point. One of the recurring themes I have found, living in and travelling around my electorate in recent years, has been the disconnection of the role of the state from the people whose state it is. People thought the state was becoming more a business than our collective home.

Most voters admire the concept of good stewardship. As Steve Bracks has made clear, good stewardship is central to the economic policies of our new Labor government, but few would rather be thought of as customers than as citizens. Customers have business relationships, whereas citizens have rights and responsibilities. I fully acknowledge that central to those responsibilities is good stewardship of Victorians' heritage, natural and man-made resources and talents. That is part of what I offer to my electorate and it is what the Labor government is committed to.

But being a good representative, a good local member, and providing good government is about more than offering a good deal. It is about commitment and loyalty, and about empowerment, not disempowerment. It is about listening and supporting, and about being committed and loyal. I will listen to the people of my electorate and will support them by speaking out on their behalf. I will be accountable and accessible. As their representative I am committed to being of service to them. That is what I offer my electorate and it is what the government will deliver — a partnership, not a dictatorship.

My election, which is just a small part of the great Labor victory, is but the first step on the road to restoring some of what has been lost and providing a government that is loyal and committed. I look forward to that task.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr DIXON (Dromana).

Debate adjourned until next day.

Remaining business postponed on motion of Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport).

ADJOURNMENT

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Schools: Portland

Dr NAPTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — I seek from the Minister for Education an assurance of the provision of capital funding to two schools in my electorate, the Portland North Primary School and the Portland Secondary College.

The Portland North Primary School is on the outskirts of Portland and provides an excellent range of education opportunities to schoolchildren in the area. Its curriculum involves agriculture and a range of other activities that ensure it is both varied and interesting to the children. The primary school has had a problem over a number of years with inadequate facilities and has been working with the regional office of the Department of Education to develop a master plan and development strategy for capital works to bring its facilities up to the standard required.

The previous government provided funding for the planning stages of the master plan, which the school received this year. The coalition also promised, if returned to government, to provide \$675 000 for capital

works in the next budget. It is very important for the school to receive the funding so that it can continue with its planning project and implementation of the master plan. It has portable facilities on the site which are archaic, to say the least. The students require adequate facilities. Many schools in my electorate have already been upgraded, and the Portland North Primary School is certainly one that requires upgrading.

The other school about which I seek reassurance with regard to capital funding is the Portland Secondary College. The school was formed by a voluntary amalgamation of the Portland High School and the Portland Technical School under the previous Labor government. The previous coalition government funded the first two stages of its redevelopment to provide facilities for students. In 2000 it is expected to have a record enrolment of 810 students, and \$1.9 million has been allocated for a stage 3 redevelopment comprising a state-of-the-art science, home economics and art facility.

It is important for the school councils to be given some reassurance about the proposed capital works funding so that school managers can get on with the necessary planning stages of the development. The capital works are important to meet the educational needs of students of Portland North Primary School and Portland Secondary College. They represent the ongoing need — —

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

Kydaco Painting

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Attorney-General, who represents the Minister for Consumer Affairs in another place. The issue involves a blatant and disgraceful rip-off being perpetrated by a very dodgy company. I seek an assurance from the Attorney-General that a tougher government response to such rip-offs will be in evidence in the future.

The case I bring to the attention of the house involves a company of dubious repute called Kydaco Painting, which is involved in painting and associated services. It is fair to say that the company is a real fly-by-night operation that has spread misery far more readily than it has spread paint.

The company's principals are David and Kylie Lancaster. The pattern of deceit involves the hiring of workers and the purchase of supplies, but in almost every case there is non-payment for the services and the labour. The Master Painters Association of Victoria has

indicated that there has been a rash of complaints about this company over many months, and the sums involved run to many tens of thousands of dollars.

I seek a tougher approach from the minister, and I also seek the Attorney-General's assistance. I raised my concern in Parliament back in April, and the former Attorney-General advised me that she would be more than happy to look into the matter. I handed over documents to her in the library but four months passed and there was no response from her. I do not know whether she was in the library on that day studying other things.

I do not believe the response has been adequate. That type of inaction sends precisely the wrong message to the operators. Although some investigations are now proceeding through the federal office of workplace services, I believe too much latitude has been given to the principals of this company, one of whom has been described by someone in the trade as a swine. It is probably an appropriate description.

Currently the people involved are concealing their identities from investigators and are changing their names. I seek a strong assurance from the Attorney-General that inaction will no longer be tolerated.

Queenscliff harbour

Mr SPRY (Bellarine) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Environment and Conservation a matter concerning the future of the Queenscliff harbour and the cloud that now hangs over the coastal action plan process as a result of the change of government.

Most honourable members with an interest in Port Phillip Bay would be aware that under the former government's Bringing the Bay to Life initiative a degraded Queenscliff harbour precinct was targeted for a major \$3 million upgrade and renewal program. The mechanism for achieving an outcome satisfactory to all stakeholders, including and especially the local community, was being guided by the Central Regional Coastal Board in cooperation with the Borough of Queenscliffe and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. The public consultation process was thorough, with over 500 submissions commenting on a draft plan developed by a representative steering committee comprising councillors and community and departmental representatives.

Part of the proposed plan involved the relocation of the world-renowned Marine and Freshwater Resources Institute to the narrows of Swan Bay at Queenscliff. It also involved the relocation of the popular education

facility, the Marine Discovery Centre, because of its funding ties with MAFRI. The relocation is ready to commence, with all planning and environment studies finally completed and approved.

On behalf of an anxious Queenscliff community I seek an assurance from the minister that the coastal action planning process will continue to its logical conclusion and that, as a result, the institute will be relocated to within the Borough of Queenscliffe and Queenscliff's urgently needed harbour upgrade will proceed without delay.

Metropolitan Women's Correctional Centre

Ms GILLETT (Werribee) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Corrections. I know the minister shares my concerns about the circumstances at the Metropolitan Women's Correctional Centre. I ask the minister to investigate the operations of the prison with a view to providing a safe environment for both prison officers and inmates at the prison, ensuring that prison management honours the conditions of its contract.

Over the past few months I have made several visits to the prison to see a constituent of mine. We have spent a number of hours together each visit, and on each occasion we have spoken at length on a broad range of matters of concern to her and to a great number of other prison inmates. I will not go into any details regarding her name, her circumstances or the other specifics of the issues she has raised because of the delicate nature of those matters, but I wish to make the house very much aware that all is desperately unwell inside the women's prison. I ask the minister to investigate and to ensure that the contracts are being honoured in all their provisions, and specifically those that deal with the health and medical treatment of prisoners at the correctional centre.

A measure of the fairness and justice of a society is how it deals with its most vulnerable members. The women in the Metropolitan Women's Correctional Centre and the prison officers who deal with them on a daily basis I consider to be most vulnerable and, indeed, at real risk. I know the minister shares my concerns and is active in these matters. I simply ask that he take the appropriate steps necessary to ensure justice, equity and commonsense is brought back to the administration of the Metropolitan Women's Correctional Centre.

Berwick hospital

Dr DEAN (Berwick) — I raise with the Minister for Health what it is hoped will be the Berwick public

hospital. My constituents are becoming increasingly concerned about and upset at their treatment in this matter. Certain facts are undeniable. The first is that the City of Casey, made up of my own electorate and that of Cranbourne, is the fastest growing area in Victoria. Every 5 hours one family arrives in the City of Casey. It is either the first or second-fastest growing area in Australia. By the end of its growth it will be about the size of Canberra.

A Government Member — All it needs is a decent member.

Dr DEAN — That's not something you would know much about. The minister's own department would have advised him there is a desperate need for a public hospital in the south-east and that its construction cannot be delayed. My constituents, the local council and the other honourable members representing the area fought and won a good fight to have a public hospital built in the electorate.

Nine companies bid for the tender. That number was whittled down to five and then two — Ramsay and Mercy — and the successful tenderer was Ramsay. Before the election the hospital contract was all but signed; final negotiations were taking place and work was to begin in December. During the election I had a public debate with my opponent, the Labor Party candidate Phil Reed.

Honourable members interjecting.

Dr DEAN — It just shows how wrong you were! During that debate I asked him if the public hospital would be built, but he avoided the question. Journalists from the local papers took up the issue and asked if the hospital would be built. The then shadow Minister for Health then published in the *Age* his promise to build the hospital and the honourable member for Dandenong also said in the local papers that the hospital would be built. However, Ramsay says the matter is now on hold. I ask the minister to advise the house whether the hospital will be built.

City Link: tolls

Mr CARLI (Coburg) — I refer the Minister for Transport to City Link and in particular to the tollway on the Tullamarine Freeway between Bell Street and Flemington Road. I urge the minister to seek a discount from City Link for both off-peak travel and the cost of a day pass, which is currently set at \$7.

The areas of West Brunswick, West Coburg and Pascoe Vale South on the western side of my electorate are badly affected by the tollway. An existing road was

taken away. Research done by the local council verified that historically the road was used for short trips in the off-peak periods.

Congestion in suburban streets is also a concern. The Transurban prospectus estimates that 23 per cent of traffic will leave the road and enter suburban streets in those suburbs. I ask the minister to negotiate with Transurban some form of alleviation of those problems. Transurban's propaganda is based on time saving, and there is little incentive for people to use the tollway in off-peak periods if no discount exists. The Royal Automobile Club of Victoria supports a better deal for motorists and residents.

I urge the minister to seek a discount and protect the interests of those residents who will be badly affected by the decision of the former government to toll an existing road.

Knox: aquatic centre

Mr ASHLEY (Bayswater) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Gaming, who is the representative in this place of the Minister for Sport and Recreation, the future of the better pools and aquatic centre funding program. That program was a recent initiative of the former Kennett government and demonstrated the government's support to local communities and local government authorities in the provision of quality sport and recreation facilities.

With the support of the Community Support Fund, over a four-year period the initiative was to provide through Sport and Recreation Victoria a total of \$20 million to the better pools and aquatic facilities funding program. It was to have been for both new facilities and for the major redevelopment of existing centres in need of more than a lick and a promise. The eligibility was to have been for those that were successful with their applications to receive up to 25 per cent of the total project value on a \$1-for-\$3 basis, with a maximum grant of \$2.5 million.

Firstly, I seek an assurance from the Minister for Sport and Recreation that the program will continue, and secondly, assuming that it will, I seek to represent the interests of the City of Knox in its efforts to achieve a major redevelopment of the Knox Leisure Works pool in Boronia. The City of Knox has completed an aquatic facility structure study that has delineated the need to refurbish the existing facilities, construct a new free-form swimming area, extend the aerobics and gym areas with modification of the entrance, new dry change rooms and kiosk and public areas.

The estimated total cost for the project is \$5.5 million. On the one-for-three basis the City of Knox will submit its application at the first opportunity, as soon as it becomes available.

Goulburn Valley Highway: Shepparton bypass

Mr KILGOUR (Shepparton) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Planning the duplication of the Goulburn Valley Highway around the city of Shepparton. It is a federally funded highway. The Vicroads strategy released in the early 1990s provided for a dual carriageway from Seymour that would bypass Shepparton to avoid the vast and ever-increasing amount of traffic passing through the town.

Currently the duplication work extends from the Seymour turn-off towards Nagambie. Planning has been in progress for some four years on the route of the Shepparton bypass. The planning has been completed and a number of issues have been raised by the City of Greater Shepparton, local industry and Vicroads. A couple of months ago the previous government announced that the bypass should go to the west of Shepparton, between Mooroopna and Ardmona. Vicroads, the city and local industry supported that proposal for the future economic benefit of the area.

Around the time of the recent election the Department of Infrastructure was preparing information for Vicroads so the final destination of the route could be provided for and to take into account the issues raised by the planning panel. For a long time people have been waiting to know what is going to happen, whether they can sell their land and what will be the final route of the bypass.

I ask the minister to look into the issue and obtain a final agreement on the bypass route so that people can get on with their lives and determine what they can do with their orchards and packing sheds, whether they can build houses, or whether they should put up their properties for sale.

I should be pleased if the minister would look into the issue with a view to obtaining a result as soon as possible.

Housing: Richmond estate

Mr WYNNE (Richmond) — I direct the attention of the Minister for Housing to the condition of the walk-up housing estate in Elizabeth Street, Richmond. As the minister will be aware, the walk-up housing blocks were built in the 1960s, and it would be fair to say that they have not stood the test of time as regards structural integrity or appropriate family

accommodation. In contrast, it would be generally recognised that the high-rise public housing tower blocks are structurally secure and have been an appropriate form of housing.

The walk-up estate is in extremely poor condition. Many families with young children are forced to walk up four flights of stairs with heavy loads of shopping. The lack of security is also a significant problem. In some cases the communal laundries are tacked onto the sides of the blocks, requiring people to walk down to the ground floor. It is an inappropriate form of housing for the 1990s.

Some of the Richmond walk-up estate was intensively redeveloped by the previous Labor government, but the former coalition government neglected it over the past seven years. The estate is severely run down and the structural integrity of the building is at best questionable. It is clear to the naked eye that the building has subsided and requires urgent attention. I urge the minister to give the matter her attention, and I would welcome the opportunity to show her over the estate at her earliest convenience.

VJC House of Linen

Mr LENDERS (Dandenong North) — I direct to the attention of the Attorney-General, who represents the Minister for Consumer Affairs in another place, unscrupulous trading which has been going on across several states and which has affected many of my constituents. The company concerned is VJC House of Linen, which has been advertising goods on the Bert Newton show on Channel 10. A number of constituents have forwarded credit card details to the company which has greedily, readily and excitedly banked the proceeds and abrogated all responsibility for delivering the goods.

I have made five telephone calls to the company on behalf of my constituents to find out what has happened to their money. I have heard nothing but voice mail and other forms of unhelpful communication. Eight weeks after the first payment was made the company was still saying it could not forward the goods because there was a shortfall in the imports from the United States of America.

After one of the current affairs programs embarrassed the company it offered a full refund on some Sheridan sheets. Following that the company said that people should be patient but it could not give a delivery date. Following my representations I was told that refunds would be provided in 180 days because the company

was going broke and would have to trade out of its difficulties.

I urge the Attorney-General to examine this company's shameless exploitation of consumers. Its only defence is that it is trading across international and state boundaries. That is not a fair and reasonable excuse for holding on to consumers money.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Bendigo East has 2 minutes.

Ovine Johne's disease

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Agriculture. Last night I attended a meeting in my electorate of the Bendigo Regional Pastoral Group, at which people spoke to me about a number of important issues, the main one being ovine Johne's disease. That important issue for farming constituents was raised during question time today.

I ask the minister to make a journey up the Calder Highway — I hope before we have to pay tolls — to Bendigo to meet that group because they want to express their concerns to him. As the house will be aware, each group has its own problems with the disease. It has a devastating impact on every farming family, but each region suffers different shades of impact. I ask the minister to make the journey and meet those people. They are seeking details about compensation and about Labor's plans for eradicating ovine Johne's disease and protecting farmers against its horrible effects. I ask the minister to respond.

The SPEAKER — Order! The time for raising matters has expired.

Responses

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — The honourable member for Coburg raised with me the long-running and ongoing issue of the impact tolls will have on his and many other electorates. It is interesting to note that as the completion of the southern link comes closer there is a deafening silence from members of Parliament representing the southern suburbs. However, members representing the northern suburbs have been raising the issue for a long time now — in fact for many years. The issue is coming into even sharper focus because of the possible introduction of tolls.

The tolls will have a number of deleterious effects on people living near and using the Tullamarine Freeway. It is interesting to reflect on the fact that the Tullamarine Freeway is a piece of public roadway that

was built many years ago, paid for by the taxpayers of Victoria. Although the widened section of the freeway has been incorporated into City Link, much of it was paid for by the taxpayers. Part of that payment went in the contribution the previous government made to the City Link project — that is, some of the \$300 million spent on monuments to the former Premier's ego — and as I said, part of it paid for some of the widening of the Tullamarine Freeway.

The people of the northern suburbs have every right to feel aggrieved. The Tullamarine Freeway truly was their road — they built it and paid for it — and Victorian taxpayers have paid for the bulk of the widening of the freeway that has been incorporated into City Link. When tolls are introduced they will impact greatly on those local residents who use the freeway. For many people it is part of the Melbourne freeway network and an important approach road to the airport, but for the people living in the northern suburbs it is part of the local road network they use to make trips to their friends to the north and south of Bell Street. They will be particularly hard hit by the e-tags and the cost of the tolls, and they will be increasingly disadvantaged by the day-pass system.

The honourable member for Coburg rightly pointed out that there are two problems, for which he is seeking some redress from Transurban. It is not possible for the incoming government, as it will not be possible for the next 10 governments, to change the terms and conditions of the contract that was entered into. Those contracts are set in concrete — they are protected by the legislation. The terms and conditions can be changed only if both parties to the contract — the state and Transurban — agree. It is the restrictive nature of the contract that will place restraints on this government and future governments in looking after the interests of residents in the northern and south-eastern suburbs.

The issue of off-peak fares for local use must be taken up by Transurban because the philosophy that underpins this private toll road is that market forces should determine these matters. Those who live by the market may die by the market. Ironically, Transurban's greatest threat is the availability of alternative roads in off-peak periods. People will not be prepared to pay tolls, and the economic imperative will discourage them from using the tollway at night. Transurban will be forced to reduce the tolls during off-peak times to maximise its revenue. Nevertheless, the introduction of tolls will have an impact on local residents who, as we speak, are using the freeway as a local road.

As the honourable member for Coburg points out, in Transurban's own estimates up to 23 per cent of the

large number of motorists who use City Link, particularly in peak-hour traffic, will divert when tolling starts. They will not stop driving but will filter into the suburban side streets and cause traffic congestion.

The sensible suggestions of the honourable member for Coburg will be put to Transurban to determine whether the management understands its commercial and social responsibilities, can produce more responsive day-pass and off-peak systems and can start protecting the interests of motorists and, more importantly from its point of view, looking after its customers. Transurban needs every customer it can get, and it will need to change its attitude or suffer strong consumer rejection if the tolling system ever begins working.

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Planning) — I address the issue raised by the honourable member for Shepparton, who appears to have disappeared — —

The SPEAKER — The minister should answer, anyway.

Mr THWAITES — I will, Mr Speaker. The honourable member for Shepparton raised the issue of the planning process for the Shepparton bypass. A planning panel considered the Shepparton bypass proposal. That followed an environment effects statement (EES) process, during which a panel examined three alignment options for the Goulburn Valley Highway. I understand Vicroads held the view that the preferred option was a western route that would pass to the west of Mooroopna. The EES attracted about 250 submissions — there was a lot of interest in it — with a slight majority opposing the western route and a significant minority opposing the eastern route. Clearly, there was a level of dispute about the appropriate route. The one thing everyone agreed on was that it should not go through the middle.

A panel heard the matter in Shepparton this year and submitted its report at the end of April. It gave qualified support for the eastern route, which had attracted a fair amount of opposition, following in large part the existing truck route. The report recommended the dismissal of the central and western routes on environmental grounds. The panel report was not released, a practice that was fairly common under the previous government.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr THWAITES — The honourable member for Mordialloc says the government should release it. That probably will be done because this government's policy

is to release reports. I am sure the honourable member for Shepparton will be interested to see that report.

In August this year the former Premier announced that the government had rejected the eastern route because of the importance of agricultural production to the regional economy and indicated that further consideration was being given to the western and central routes. The current government will try to grapple with this difficult issue, and that will be done in consultation with the community, which will include the honourable member for Shepparton.

The honourable member for Shepparton was good enough to speak with me about this issue prior to his raising it in the house, and for that reason I will ensure he is fully informed so that he can continue to represent his constituents. He is clearly someone who has been able to get support from Labor members in his area of recent times! One might say he owes his position in this place to members of the Labor Party. In achieving that he seems to have played Labor Party politics better than many people on this side of the house. They obviously do things differently in Shepparton and people there know how to operate the system!

This is obviously a major issue and I do not think there will be an easy answer. Judging from the number of submissions that were made, obviously there will be a lot of objection to whatever final decision is made. The government will try to come to a balanced decision based upon proper consultation and will release the various reports in consultation with the honourable member for Shepparton.

The honourable member for Berwick referred to the alleged delay in the development of the privatised hospital in Berwick. I am a little surprised that the honourable member for Berwick would raise the matter, especially in the way he has tonight. He has a hide to come in here and talk about delays. It is interesting that he has shown more concern about so-called delays in the three weeks this government has been in office than he did in the 364 weeks his party was in office!

I agree with the honourable member for Berwick: there is no time for delay. The population in his electorate is growing, which is why this side of the house has always supported and continues to support the hospital for Berwick. The honourable member for Berwick should take note of the facts. When I took over as minister I asked for a briefing on the matter. Perhaps the honourable member for Berwick was not told the truth because he said the hospital is so important it cannot be delayed. I agree with him.

The 1996 document issued by the former government, *A Healthier Future — A Plan for Metropolitan Health Care Services*, states that the Berwick hospital was to commence in mid-1998 and be completed in mid-1999. That is some months ago. It is clear the hospital was meant to be finished when the honourable member's party was in office, but the former government failed to do it.

Dr Dean interjected.

Mr THWAITES — As the honourable member for Berwick raised the matter — and he is interjecting about Ramsay — I am happy to give full details if he wishes to listen. The document states the hospital was to be commenced and to be completed by the middle of this year — that is, during the time of the former Kennett government. I have received further briefings from the department. It told me the original timetable was delayed because of privatisation and it was then intended that the preferred bidder would be chosen in December 1998. Did that occur? No, it is another failure. The preferred bidder was not chosen until April this year, a four-month delay. There is more. At the time of the announcement the honourable member for Berwick — —

Dr Dean — Why did you put them on hold?

Mr THWAITES — I will come to that. The honourable member should listen. The honourable member for Berwick made a public announcement and was shown in photographs — it was probably the same photograph at the same site every year; there was long grass everywhere except for this one spot where they all stood on the grass, killing it. The honourable member for Berwick said in April that a new private operator, the Ramsay Health Care group, would run the hospital. The local people were convinced they were about to get a hospital, but they lost again. There were further delays.

I have asked the department why if the preferred bidder was chosen in April it was not able to sign the contract by the time of the election in September. The department said it was because of delays caused by disputes between the departments resulting from privatisation. It was because Treasury and Finance could not reach agreement with Human Services about what sort of building to build. So it was privatisation that caused the delays.

In about 1996, when in opposition, Labor said the government should build a public hospital on the site. The Southern Health Care Network was prepared to do it then, and the Berwick Bush Nursing Hospital was

prepared to do it. But no, because the former government was so ideologically committed to privatisation it would not let the public system do it. It said we had to wait. The honourable member for Berwick stopped it; he said the tender process had to be gone through.

The delay was caused because the honourable member for Berwick said that you cannot build a public hospital, that Berwick Bush Nursing Hospital and the Southern Health Care Network must not be involved, that you must go through a tender process. The then government went through the tender process and, in so doing, delayed the process.

Dr Dean interjected.

Mr THWAITES — No, the Labor government would build a public hospital. It believes the public ought to be responsible for hospital services.

Dr Dean interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Berwick has been interjecting incessantly. I ask him to cease.

Mr THWAITES — No wonder the honourable member for Berwick is agitated — he must be embarrassed. I am disappointed because this issue has taken away a good question without notice.

Mr Richardson interjected.

Mr THWAITES — The honourable member for Forest Hill has got it right. The Labor Party has been in government for 3 weeks but the coalition was in government for 364 weeks — yet it did nothing. The Labor Party has supported the building of a public hospital as soon as possible. It made it clear before the election. It believes because the privatisation process had gone so far down the track the privatised hospital should be built in Berwick. Although the Labor Party is philosophically opposed to the privatisation of the hospital system, it is more important to get the hospital built in Berwick. I made a public statement to that effect.

Dr Dean interjected.

Mr THWAITES — The honourable member for Berwick says by interjection, ‘Why put them on hold?’. We did not. During the caretaker period the Labor Party wrote to the government indicating it should continue with the negotiations and not hold up the project. The honourable member for Berwick has misled the house and ought to apologise. The Labor Party, during the

caretaker period, wrote to the former government and told it to get on with the job, but the honourable member says the Ramsay Consulting Group was put on hold. I can only presume that the former government tore up the letter. It did not communicate with the troops. That letter went through the shredder.

I make it perfectly clear that the Labor Party supported the project when in opposition. One of the first things I did when the Labor Party took office was to give instructions to the department to proceed with the project. I gave clear instructions to write to Ramsay and advise it that the project was continuing. I asked it to extend the deadline date because time had run out — Ramsay’s bid was about to run out. On that point, because there were so many delays when the former Kennett government was in office the Ramsay group has put in a claim for multimillion dollar damages.

I make it absolutely clear that the Labor government has indicated to Ramsay that it will continue with the project. The government wants the bidding process extended because the former Kennett government had failed. The Labor government will try to fix up the mess the honourable member for Berwick has left it.

Mr HAMILTON (Minister for Agriculture) — The honourable member for Bendigo East has raised with me concerns which were conveyed to her during a meeting with some pastoralists in her electorate.

I congratulate the honourable member for Bendigo East, a newly elected member and the youngest member of the house, for listening to and then speaking on behalf of her constituents. She has set a fine example for all newly elected members.

In passing, I congratulate all the newly elected members who have thus far made their inaugural speeches. Perhaps the house can maintain the decorum and operate properly as a Parliament. Perhaps there could be decent, fair and honest debate in this place with members from both sides showing courtesy and respect for each other, and treating Parliament with respect. Honourable members who have been in Parliament for a long time should show better leadership. Newly elected members should be encouraged to participate in and enjoy the process, while at the same time doing the job for which they were elected — that is, to represent their constituents. I expect the government will treat the matters raised from either side of the house with sincerity and the respect they deserve.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr HAMILTON — Some people still have not learnt to listen, but I am glad the honourable member for Bendigo East has learnt early in her career. Some honourable members should take note of that.

Ovine Johne's disease is a significant concern for all sheep farmers in Victoria. It has created a great deal of trauma and concern for every sheep farmer as the disease is far more complex and difficult to diagnose with certainty than was at first expected. I know the Leader of the Opposition, in his previous profession, would be probably more aware than any other honourable member of the difficulties associated with Johne's disease, be it in sheep or cattle.

The government was faced with a number of difficult choices in dealing with this problem because it is serious not only for the industry but also for the families who have been affected, one way or another, by it. Traumatic cases have been identified and reported to me and, no doubt, to my predecessor in this portfolio.

During the election campaign the former government made a commitment and Premier Bracks has told the house and Victorians that the commitments made during the election campaign will be honoured. The government has commenced the first stages of honouring those commitments. The first step was to institute an urgent scientific inquiry led by CSIRO — the leading scientific organisation in Australia. I hope that inquiry will include expert consultation with scientific experts in other countries, particularly New Zealand where a similar problem has been encountered. That inquiry has been organised and is due for completion by 30 January next. The government hopes the information gained during the inquiry will lead it to be far better informed than it now is on this serious problem in the sheep industry.

I have met with a large number of groups, including the Victorian Farmers Federation pastoral council, and I have listened to what they have had to say. A number of those groups have expressed their concerns about the impact of the disease.

As with most issues in our community, there are separate — and often disparate — views about the way the problems should be attacked. I do not intend to make cheap political mileage out of the actions taken by the previous government. I believe they were taken in good faith based on the best evidence available at the time. As was said in question time today, that evidence has proved to be unsatisfactory, which has some fairly serious implications for sheep farmers, the sheep industry and the Department of Treasury and Finance.

We can all be wise in hindsight. The government has decided to suspend the slaughter and compensation program while a parliamentary inquiry is conducted. The government believes — —

Mr Leigh — You haven't got any committees!

Mr HAMILTON — The interjection is puerile and not helpful.

The SPEAKER — Order! Objections are disorderly.

Mr HAMILTON — If the opposition intends behaving in that manner about a matter of such seriousness for every part of the rural sector, it is doing a grave disservice to every constituent in country Victoria. I trust the Leader of the Opposition, who has given a commitment to sensible government, will negotiate with the government in the proper manner to ensure that those committees are established and can get on with their jobs.

The honourable member for Mordialloc does the opposition a great disservice. One would think that all members of Parliament who represent country electorates — be they Labor, Liberal, National or Independent — would be concerned about an issue of great importance to farmers. To make a joke out of it by making puerile interjections is beneath contempt.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr HAMILTON — In continuing to interject the honourable member shows his lack of concern for Victorians. His inability to listen and learn and his continuous and puerile interjection do the opposition no service at all.

Mr Leigh — You've got no facts!

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the honourable member for Mordialloc that if I invoked sessional order 10 he would be removed from the chamber for an hour and a half — and that would continue tomorrow. The Chair has had just about enough of him today.

Mr HAMILTON — The honourable member for Mordialloc may learn that taking his interjections to the limit may cause him some serious problems now that we have a new Speaker and new rules.

The government has decided to refer the problem to an all-party committee for a complete review. I am pleased to say that the pastoral council subcommittee has come up with terms of reference for the all-party review and

that those terms of reference have been accepted by the government.

I am sure the government will have the cooperation of the opposition. I am sure it will, because I know the Leader of the Opposition understands the seriousness of the matter. If cooperation is forthcoming, the all-party committee will be the proper body to deal with this extremely important issue. It has already cost many farmers a great deal of money and, more tragically, a great deal of social hurt. The Labor government will address that. Given the spirit in which all-party committees of Parliament have worked over the past 11 years I have been a member of the house, I am confident that that will be a good solution. The industry will be provided with some comfort at least knowing that the government is attempting to address a very serious problem.

Ms PIKE (Minister for Housing) — The honourable member for Richmond has drawn to my attention the dilapidated state of some public housing in Elizabeth Street, Richmond. I thank the honourable member for Richmond for inviting me to visit the site. I welcome the invitation because it will be good to speak to people in their own homes about some of the problems they have had to put up with. I am familiar with the facility and I know of its condition. The housing does not measure up to the Labor government's view of an appropriate and normal community standard.

Honourable members will know that the existing public and community housing stock is subject to a constant maintenance program, redevelopment, sale and purchase. However, over and above that, some properties have clearly been totally neglected during the past few years. The property to which the honourable member for Richmond refers is in that category. It is one of a cluster of walk-up public housing blocks that have been allowed to fall into gross disrepair.

That has been going on for a long time. What did the previous government envisage? How did it intend dealing with the fact that many people were living in substandard housing? The solution of the previous government was to sell off the houses and privatise them. It wanted to get rid of them and move the residents away from their traditional links, their educational supports, public transport, good health services and the communities they had grown to love.

The Labor government totally rejects that policy. Its policy includes a commitment to maintain public housing numbers in the inner city, including the public housing in Elizabeth Street that falls within the electorate of the honourable member for Richmond.

Further, I am committed to a major redevelopment of that facility and a number of others like it. I refer to the walk-up facilities where people literally have to drag their shopping up four flights of stairs. That redevelopment is one of my first priorities. To that end I have advised my department to develop an implementation strategy that I will put into place in consultation with the residents to ensure that they are rehoused in more appropriate accommodation in places they want to live. Those sites will be redeveloped.

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — The Leader of the Opposition raised a matter with me. I note that he is sitting next to the honourable member for Wimmera. I hope he is not giving him any tips! The Leader of the Opposition is continuing what is becoming a predictable pattern for the opposition. After having completely ignored schools for seven long years — the Minister for Health said 364 weeks — the opposition has now suddenly discovered that Victoria has a Labor government. Whoopee! It wants to wave a magic wand and have the Labor government fix up all the neglect of seven years of Kennett government.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to the Portland North Primary School. I was absolutely astonished at what he said about that school. If my notes are correct, he said:

This school has suffered from inadequate facilities for a number of years.

He said they were archaic. Who was in government for that 'number of years'? Who was the local member at the cabinet table when decisions about money were being made? None other than the present Leader of the Opposition. Now he wants what he says his government promised — a \$675 000 capital injection in the next budget.

As I have said, education is our highest priority in government. I would like to assure the Leader of the Opposition that if that money is not made up of rubbery figures — election confetti that was dropped and sprinkled around the state before the last election — and if it has been detailed and fully costed in the former government's forward estimates, the school will receive the money. If it is part of the rubbery figures and election confetti, it will have to be considered by the Bracks Labor government as a new project and be subject to the serious financial discipline of this government.

The Leader of the Opposition also raised a matter concerning the Portland Secondary College. He said this excellent school was expecting a \$1.9 million upgrade of its science and art facilities. He said:

The school community needs reassurance.

I guess it does, but where was that reassurance during the past seven years? We give this reassurance to every school community in the state: education is our highest priority. We have already discussed the matter and announced that funding will be allocated for smaller class sizes, and more money will be forthcoming for new schools and upgrades. I repeat for the Portland Secondary College and in response to all the other questions I am sure will come during adjournment debates over the next weeks: if those upgrades or redevelopments are real budget estimates that were ticked off in the former government's forward estimates, we will honour them. If they are simply confetti promised during the election campaign in a hopeless and vain attempt to stay in government, they will be considered to be new projects and subjected to the serious financial discipline of the Bracks Labor government.

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Environment and Conservation) — The honourable member for Bellarine raised an issue concerning the Queenscliff coastal action plan. He said a considerable amount of public consultation and various other action had taken place, but he distorted his account to imply some sort of support. Unfortunately, he has not learnt the lesson of the election, which is to be open and honest with the electorate.

He did not mention, for example, the enormous controversy the proposal has generated. He did not talk about the road along the beach, which was subject to an enormous amount of protest, media coverage and total opposition by local people. He did not talk about alienating the foreshore and the public park. He did not mention that it would have allowed unlimited heights for residential developments. All those things met with huge opposition from the local community. More than 500 submissions were presented as part of the process, and most of them expressed strong opposition to the proposal. In fact, an alternative proposal that received much more support was put forward by the Queenscliff community forum.

The Labor Party opposed the beach road when it was in opposition. It is an appalling grab for a public beach. We also opposed the grab for other public parks and Crown land. We have promised to impose height limits along foreshores, and we will.

The government understands the need for improvements to the harbour and an upgrade to the Marine and Freshwater Resources Institute, but the

former government made such a mess of it that the issue will be under consideration.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Gaming) — The honourable member for Bayswater raised for the attention of the Minister for Sport and Recreation, whom I represent in this place, the better pools fund. The \$20 million fund is a relatively recent initiative announced by the previous government under pressure from Labor in opposition, which was running a campaign in suburban and country Victoria about the inadequate level of funding for pools across the state.

The government takes aquatic centres and water safety issues very seriously. In the past Labor has been critical that most of the Community Support Fund — from where the \$20 million better pools funding will come — has gone to large sport and recreation facilities in the inner city at the expense of suburban, regional and country Victoria. That is where all the money has gone in the past seven years.

The government is committed to reviewing that situation and is looking at how it can make money available to local communities in outer suburbs, where people really feel they have missed out and from where gaming machine revenue has been taken for inner city projects. The honourable member is absolutely right in saying it is appropriate that governments consider funding important facilities such as the aquatic facility in the City of Knox. The City of Knox has one of the largest youth populations in the state. However, it is surprising that after seven years of coalition government the honourable member for Bayswater asks the new government to fix up something the previous government should have attended to.

I take the matter seriously. I will ask my colleague the Minister for Sport and Recreation to seriously consider it. I hope we may be able to assist the honourable member to do what the government of which he was a member could not do in seven years.

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — The honourable member for Werribee drew to my attention the Metropolitan Women's Correctional Centre, the privatised women's prison at Deer Park, and her concern about the provision of a safe environment for the inmates. The honourable member related a case of an inmate who has given her some information, and has provided me with further details of her concerns privately.

The honourable member for Werribee takes the problems that arise at the prison a lot more seriously than our predecessors did. I believe the previous

government was appallingly negligent in the way it handled the whole prison system. The honourable member stated that a society is judged by the way it handles those people who offend against it. If that is the case, the previous government is guilty of criminal negligence.

The matters the honourable member for Werribee has raised are extremely serious. I will direct them to the attention of both my department and to the Correctional Services Commissioner, and provide the honourable member with a response in due course.

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — On behalf of the Minister for Consumer Affairs in the other place I am happy to deal with the issue raised by the honourable member for Mitcham in which he called for a tougher government response to shonks and charlatans who are taking advantage of workers in this state. He mentioned a company called Kydaco Painting, which I understand is employing workers, mainly migrants, to undertake painting work and simply not paying them money it owes them. I understand the company is doing that under a ruse of stating that it is facing financial difficulties and is unable to pay. The honourable member for Mitcham handed me a copy of a letter dated 8 February and signed by the managing director of Kydaco Painting, Kylie Lancaster.

That is a ruse that has been commonly undertaken by this company. I understand the letter has been sent out regularly to workers who have been employed by the company. It simply states:

Due to the current financial situation of Kydaco Painting we regret to inform you that all our debts have been handed over to a credit consultancy firm to act on our behalf.

Over the past few months Kydaco Painting has experienced a lot of difficulties with staff members and the misappropriation of funds collected from works carried out by subcontractors.

We are doing our best to rectify this situation and have all debts cleared out as soon as possible.

You will be in receipt of a letter from our credit firm in the near future fully explaining these matters.

We thank you for your patience during this time of hardship.

The problem is that no name of any credit consultancy firm is mentioned and, of course, the former employees never receive any further correspondence. As stated by the honourable member for Mitcham, that has been going on for quite some time.

I understand the matter was raised with the former government and the former Attorney-General. She indicated she was happy to look into the matter, but, as the honourable member for Mitcham said, nothing was

done. Some four months passed and no correspondence was received from the former Attorney-General. That sort of inaction, as the honourable member for Mitcham has said, sends the wrong message to shonks and charlatans. It says that the government — the previous Kennett government in this case — is not prepared to act to protect the rights of workers who had been ripped off.

I send this message to people of that sort: the new Bracks government will act against shonks and charlatans. The message, loud and clear, is, 'Your time in the sun is over. This government will not tolerate rip-off merchants acting in our community. We will take a much tougher approach'. I will refer the matter to the Minister for Consumer Affairs in another place to investigate further as a matter of urgency. It is interesting to note that the federal Office of Workplace Services took this matter seriously and undertook a preliminary investigation, yet the former Kennett government decided to do nothing about it. That is not on. The new Bracks government will investigate it as a matter of urgency.

I refer to the matter raised by the honourable member for Dandenong North, again for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. It concerns a company called VJC House of Linen, which has apparently been advertising the sale of Sheridan sheets and getting people to send money. The people are then told at a later stage — some eight weeks after their money has been paid — that the sheets are not available. They are advised that the sheets will be forthcoming or that, alternatively, VJC is prepared to offer a full refund. The company then requires 180 days before refunding the money.

In fact the money never turns up. As the honourable member for Dandenong North has said, that is absolute exploitation of people who can least afford it. Again I send the message loud and clear to people involved in such practices: they will not be tolerated. We will clamp down on any shonks and charlatans attempting to rip Victorians off. I will refer the matter, again as a matter of urgency, to the Minister for Consumer Affairs.

I congratulate the Minister for Health on his full answer to the honourable member for Berwick, who is not here. I understand the honourable member is currently writing his press release under the heading 'I was done over'.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 11.29 p.m.