

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

10 November 1999

(extract from Book 2)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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¹ Resigned 3 November 1999

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Wednesday, 10 November 1999

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

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling notices I advise the house that, following inquiries from a number of honourable members about the correct form of address for the Deputy Speaker, I have ascertained that the correct terminology is simply ‘Deputy Speaker’ or ‘Madam Deputy Speaker’, or perhaps the house could adopt the gender-neutral term ‘Honourable Deputy Speaker’. That sort of terminology can be applied to the Deputy Speaker and Acting Speakers.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Murray Valley Citrus Marketing Board — Report for the year 1998–99

National Parks Advisory Council — Report for the year 1998–99.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Werribee: toxic waste dump

Ms GILLETT (Werribee) — I draw to the attention of the house a special anniversary that is celebrated at this time of year. At the end of October the people of Werribee celebrate their victory in the battle over the toxic dump. Honourable members will remember that the Werribee community was able to persuade 15 000 people to come out of their homes on a cold and drizzly evening in winter to tell CSR and the Kennett government that they did not want their community to be a dumping ground for toxic waste. Interestingly, we managed to convince CSR, and it withdrew its proposal.

Unfortunately the failed Kennett government did not listen. The former Premier called CSR gutless for withdrawing its proposal. I congratulate the community on standing up to the fatally flawed Kennett government and winning.

Mr Honeywood — On a point of order, Mr Speaker — —

The SPEAKER — Order! Before we proceed, I suggest to the honourable member for Warrandyte and to the house that it might be appropriate for points of order to be taken and dealt with at the end of the 15-minute period. Honourable members should be

afforded the opportunity to make 90-second statements uninterrupted.

Mr Honeywood — Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance on matters of public importance. The issue raised by the honourable member for Werribee is exactly the same as the issue she raised yesterday — it is being recycled this morning.

The SPEAKER — Order! Honourable members are entitled to make 90-second statements on any matter. The only restriction is that the statements must not reflect on or impugn other members, which can be done only by substantive motion.

Ms GILLETT — I understand the pain that opposition members must be experiencing upon my raising this issue. It is a pain that, I am pleased to remind them, they ought to experience. The Werribee Residents Against Toxic Dump, Werribee’s own community action group, has gone on to greater and better things. We now have the western region environment group and the western region environment centre.

CFA: paid firefighters

Mr KILGOUR (Shepparton) — On Monday night I had the pleasure of presenting a fire brigade tanker worth \$130 000 to the Mooroopna fire brigade, one of the greatest volunteer firefighting organisations in Victoria. It was great to see how much the brigade appreciated getting more firefighting equipment, but concern was expressed to me on that night and the matter was previously raised by the Shepparton fire brigade about the possibility of full-time union members wanting to be full-time, paid firefighters in Country Fire Authority brigades.

I ask whether the minister supports the push for the union movement to be involved in our CFA brigades. Will we see a drop-off in the number of volunteers? Will the minister give a commitment that local country volunteer fire brigades will not be abandoned to suit the fire brigade union?

Nunawading Swimming Club

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I congratulate the Nunawading Swimming Club, its members and other people who participated in last Sunday’s fifth annual swimathon, which, since its inception, has raised many thousands of dollars for the oncology unit of the Royal Children’s Hospital.

The swim was dedicated to the memory of a former club member, Chris Honeycombe, who died in his

teenage years in 1992 after a relatively short battle with cancer. A year earlier, Chris had established a national age record in backstroke. Chris Honeycombe was extremely dedicated to his sport and was driven regularly by his parents from Lilydale to Nunawading to both train and participate.

I place on the public record my appreciation of the efforts of many club members, including president, Mary Crough, and vice-president, Peter Sanderson, for their dedication to and enthusiasm for this tremendous cause. I also wish to publicly acknowledge the valuable support of the Forest Hill Lions Club to the very successful day.

Schools: maintenance

Mr DIXON (Dromana) — The former Kennett government made significant inroads into the school maintenance backlog over the past seven years, reducing it from an audited \$670 million to \$130 million. Millions of dollars have been spent in the Dromana electorate on school maintenance, bringing most schools to an acceptable standard. However, the PRMS audit has indicated that \$1.9 million worth of maintenance remains to be undertaken on 13 schools in my electorate. The former government went into the election committing that \$1.9 million would be spent.

The Balnarring Primary School has \$19 844 worth of school maintenance remaining to be completed. Its committee, the school council and the community seek assurances, as I do, from the minister that that amount will be forthcoming in the next two years so that that school's maintenance can be brought to an acceptable standard.

We are worried that the minority Labor government has committed only \$10 million a year to eradicate the maintenance backlog. According to my calculations, that would take 13 years to complete, by which time Victoria will be looking at another maintenance backlog that will certainly have climbed over that period.

Don Daniel

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I direct the attention of the house to the untimely passing of Mr Don Daniel, the chairman of the Maribyrnong Residents Association. Mr Daniel began his professional life as a contractor in the pet food industry. Some of the more spectacular recipients of his services were the animals at the Melbourne Zoo, but that was only part of a distinguished service to his community.

Mr Daniel served for many years with the Scouts. He was a Brunswick city councillor for six years and president of the Maribyrnong Primary School council until, unfortunately, its forced closure by the Kennett government.

Mr Daniel was foundation chairman of the Maribyrnong Residents Association since its inception in 1981 and occupied that position for most years since that time. He was on the property board of St John's in Essendon and was a prominent member of the Essendon Lions Club, including zone chairman for two years in the late 1990s.

Mr Daniel was passionate about preserving the natural beauty of the Maribyrnong valley and protecting its residential areas from overdevelopment. He will be sadly missed in my local community. He is survived by his wife, Kay, and two daughters, Sarah and Emma.

Police: Sandringham station

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — I direct to the attention of the house the promise made by the then Labor government on the eve of the 1988 state election that a new police station would be built in Sandringham. On that occasion the Labor government was re-elected, but I would be delighted to take government members on a bus tour of my electorate to the Sandringham police station site. Now that the Labor Party has the opportunity to revive its promise of community policing, I suggest it should reassure the citizens of Sandringham that they were not duped by a bogus election promise. It was a very clear statement on the eve of the state election in 1988.

Policing is an important issue in Sandringham, as it is throughout country Victoria, even as far away as Mildura. I believe that if good faith were shown the Sandringham community would be delighted at the knowledge that it would receive an increased level of security. The transit police do an outstanding job along the Sandringham railway line. In addition, policing issues arise with increased patronage of the foreshore area, during summer months.

John Arthur

Mr LONEY (Geelong North) — Today I pay tribute to the principal of Corio Community College, John Arthur, who retires on Friday. John has been a major contributor to education in this state over his career. He is a very dedicated and innovative teacher and principal who has been a tremendous asset to the Corio community for about the past decade. Over that period John Arthur has had a real commitment to

providing quality education to students in the Corio area. He has brought an understanding of the local community and its desires and needs to his post as principal, as well as an understanding of how valuable a quality education is to students, particularly in areas like the Geelong North electorate.

John Arthur is respected by the entire school community around Corio — students, teachers, parents and the community in general. I take this opportunity to wish John all the best. I hope he has a long, healthy and fruitful retirement and that his family also has the opportunity to enjoy his presence at home.

Planning: guidelines

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — I raise the issue of residential planning. There is bipartisan political support and strong community support for measures to provide greater requirements for minimum setbacks on residential development and to provide greater protection against overlooking and overshadowing. As well, on 27 October the Minister for Planning announced that he intended to bring all single-dwelling developments under one residential housing code together with medium-density developments.

However, the minister has not taken any action to implement any of those reforms. In consequence, there is likely to be a stampede of developers seeking to rush through building and planning permits ahead of any change in the law.

I call on the minister to act quickly in introducing interim measures to provide those protections on which there is general agreement and those required as a result of his statement of 27 October. Reputable builders and developers, and residents, are entitled to know where they stand. If the minister does not act, numerous inappropriate developments are likely to proceed before the more general and long-term reviews are completed and any changes implemented.

Rail: Sydenham station

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — I thank the Minister for Transport and the Bracks Labor government for fast-tracking the pedestrian railway crossing at the Sydenham railway station. The crossing was promised by the former Kennett government, but was not delivered. I congratulate the Minister for Transport and the government for initiating a pedestrian crossing across the Melton Highway near the Sydenham railway station, a very dangerous stretch of road, especially during peak hours. Many children and adults often take

their lives into their own hands when crossing that section of the highway.

The residents had asked the former Kennett government to fix the problem, but nothing occurred. The community has worked hard in consulting with the honourable member for Keilor and me since the tragic death of Clinton Nicholls earlier this year. The Minister for Transport has supported the community, attended the protest meeting at the railway crossing and promised action as soon as he was elected to office. He has done that and I thank him for his continued interest and support for a safer community.

Stud Road: upgrade

Mr WELLS (Wantirna) — The Minister for Transport promised the upgrade of Stud Road as recompense for the scrapping of the extension to the Scoresby freeway. The minister is reported in the *Knox Journal* of 3 November as saying that the freeway reservation land already owned by the government would be retained and the upgrade of Stud Road made an immediate priority.

When I raised this issue during the adjournment debate last week, the minister refused to answer or give any commitment about the upgrade of Stud Road and refused to make any commitment of government funding to this proposal. It was a straightforward request. The government has committed itself to the scrapping of the Scoresby freeway. I ask the Minister for Transport to establish a time frame for upgrading Stud Road and indicate what government money will be committed to the project.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Acting Speaker reminded the house last night and I do so again that standing orders do not permit members to cross between the line of sight of honourable members on their feet and the Chair. The Chair will not tolerate that practice. In giving this final warning I indicate that the Chair will deal with any honourable member who offends again.

DRUGS: SAFE INJECTING FACILITIES

The SPEAKER — Order! I have accepted a statement from the honourable member for Malvern proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That the government's election commitment to establish heroin 'shooting galleries' should be abandoned unless comprehensive community consultation satisfactory resolves the specific health, legal, planning and social implications associated with such a radical decision.

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — Of all the issues before the house, the drug issue and the approach to drugs of both sides of the house is probably one of the most vexed questions we face. It is one of the most complex, demanding and certainly one of the most emotive. During question time yesterday, the Minister for Health asked for bipartisan support from this side of the house for the government's proposal for safe injecting facilities. The Premier and the Minister for Health both said this is one facet of the entire drug policy. I have no quarrel with that, but there are many other and perhaps larger questions to be faced. However, this single facet is what I focus on today because it is one of the most controversial and is certainly the proposal that has created the most unease in the community, and that unease must be faced.

Yesterday the Minister for Health asked for bipartisan support. My question today is: support for what? The government's approach so far has been haphazard, contradictory, confused and characterised by policy making on the run.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DOYLE — Just lie down. When I quote your own words to you, we will see how you go! I refer now to Labor Party policy and the Labor commitment. Page 14 of *A New Approach: Labor's Plan to Tackle the Drug Crisis* states:

Safe injecting facilities can attract large numbers of users to the facility because it is a safe environment.

It then states that Labor will establish:

five widely dispersed safe injecting facilities throughout metropolitan Melbourne. These facilities will be linked to existing needle exchange facilities and public hospitals.

Labor will introduce safe injecting facilities in five locations on a controlled trial basis.

That policy commitment was underlined and affirmed by the Premier on 3AW on 9 November in responding to a question about implementation of policies. He said:

What you will see under this government is that we will implement all our policies over the four years, I've been resolute on that, I've got a system set up in government to achieve that and tick off as we go through.

Labor has a highly specific policy: five facilities, and a commitment to five premises. Before the election Labor was even more specific. It nominated five locations where those facilities would be established. From memory they were in Springvale, Footscray, Collingwood, St Kilda and the city. Those were election commitments. As of yesterday, the Premier confirmed those commitments.

On 6 September in a radio interview on the Neil Mitchell program on 3AW the Premier said in relation to the involvement of councils:

I indicated last week that we would only go for drug safe injecting facilities on a trial basis where councils approved it and where there was wide community consultation and support for it. And if there's not, we wouldn't go ahead.

There is an internal contradiction in the statement: five facilities will be established at five different locations, but if councils do not approve those locations they will not go ahead.

In an article in the *Herald Sun* of 8 November the Minister for Health contradicts that position. The article states:

Mr Thwaites confirmed the location would be decided by the government and councils would have no power of veto.

I am not arguing whether there should be a power of veto — —

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr DOYLE — I am wondering whether the Minister for Health or the Premier is telling the truth. If you are embarrassed about it I will not dwell on it too long. Isn't life more difficult when one is under scrutiny? That is typical of the Minister for Health. He wishes to make a point about the seriousness of the issue, yet what characterises the government's approach so far has been an ad hoc, simplistic approach that has not been thought through.

A further example is the \$8 million offered to councils in the same article. Was that \$8 million part of the much-vaunted costings of Labor Party policies by Access Economics? Was that part of what Access Economics ticked off and what Labor told people before the election had been so carefully planned? Suddenly government members have gone quiet, because only \$1.5 million a year was provided.

Honourable members interjecting.

I am looking at page 15 of the same Labor policy document which states:

The funding profile for this initiative is: 2000–2001 ...

An honourable member interjected.

Mr DOYLE — Exactly. That is just for the safe injecting facility. That \$1.5 million equates to \$300 000 a facility or \$821.92 a day for the premises, the professionals, including doctors, nurses, paramedics

and counsellors, cleaning and managerial staff. The government says that is costed!

That \$8 million is the reverse magician's trick: now you don't see it but now you do! It is like Rocky and Bullwinkle. Watch me pull \$8 million out of my hat! If the Labor government approaches this serious issue in such a way it shows how it will approach other serious social issues. It is all over the place on the issue, announcing changes every day. I applaud the announcement that Dr Penington, a person of high calibre, will head a committee.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DOYLE — Just wait, there is more! The opposition does not doubt the integrity and calibre of Dr Penington. However, it has concerns about what the committee will do. Will it implement five safe injecting facilities? The opposition has difficulties with a fait accompli. Consultation with professionals or the community would be a sham. The government will give Victorians five injecting facilities irrespective of whether councils want them or not.

If the committee evaluates the questions raised, the opposition will support the work of that committee. However, it is not off to a great start when a member of the committee is reported in today's newspaper as saying he thinks there should be 25 safe injecting facilities. Apparently they would be scattered like confetti throughout metropolitan Melbourne!

The door of one injecting facility has not been opened, let alone evaluated when, before the ink is dry on the press release, a committee member says there should be 25 facilities opened up willy-nilly throughout metropolitan Melbourne and presumably throughout rural and regional Victoria. If the government wants bipartisan support for the issue it should remove those loose cannons. By all means have local government representation on the committee; why not have the Lord Mayor of Melbourne? However, do not have people who make such loose cannon statements before the proposal is evaluated. What a dispassionate, considered approach by that committee member at the beginning of an onerous and difficult task!

I turn now to the questions the government should answer. A two-line policy barely and scantily costed should not be introduced irregardless of serious questions that require answers. To say those questions will be addressed at some point down the track is not good enough. With radical change such as that, proposed questions should be first be answered to the satisfaction of the professionals and then the

satisfaction and comfort of the community. When that is done the government will receive bipartisan support from the opposition. It will not support some half-baked con. The government must address the community's questions in a reasonable and evaluative way.

Health, planning, social and legal questions must be considered. If the committee, the community and the professionals agree that they can work their way through those issues the opposition would consider in a dispassionate and cooperative way any legislation the government introduces. However, the government should first do the work.

Serious health questions must be addressed. Grave health dangers exist if an addict shoots up and half an hour later comes to a facility to shoot up again. Questions about adulterated heroin and highly pure heroin need answers. Are the substances being used examined? How does one distinguish between the first-time user and the habitual user at the door of a facility? What primary health professionals would be available and at what cost? Who would follow up those people who go through the doors of a facility? What means will determine the success or failure of such a facility? The opposition does not want to hear emotive soft stuff such as 'We might have saved a life'.

Mr Thwaites — That is a start.

Mr DOYLE — Not if there is no thought behind it. What about questions of planning? What is the role of councils? Confusion and contradiction have arisen between the Premier and the Minister for Health in the past two days. Do councils have veto power or not? Which is it? Where will the facilities be placed in relation to public hospitals, schools, kindergartens, shops and homes. Those serious questions must be answered before the doors are opened.

I turn now to the social questions. Are facilities also to be located in rural and regional Victoria? If the initiative of safe injecting facilities is so good the government should at least have the policy honesty to say it is not only a solution for the city but a solution that goes from Murrayville to Mallacoota. I have heard no statement on the role of rural and regional Victoria. I presume the drug and heroin problems are the same in both the country and city. Will addicts even use the facilities? Many councillors say they will not. Will they become magnets or, as the opposition says, honey pots for dealers and crime? What is the age limit for someone using them?

But most thorny are the legal problems, and that is why legislation will have to be introduced before we can

move forward. What if someone dies on the premises because they have not been revived in a timely way? What is the legal liability of a worker or of the state? Those are serious questions to which no attention has been given.

What if there are unacceptable rates of morbidity? What are the liabilities and protections of staff, workers and passers-by for and against assault, injury, or theft? What are the conflicts with existing state laws on abetting and aiding drug use? Those questions may have answers and the opposition is prepared to look at them and work with the committee to get those answers, but the government should not come with a fait accompli and say, 'Give us bipartisan support or you are not interested in the serious answers'. It should give the committee the evaluative power to look seriously at these questions —

Mr Mildenhall — It was in the policy — and you lost.

Mr DOYLE — So it is winner take all — never mind the community. That is a great response! What if the answers to the questions are unacceptable to the community and the professionals, and the results will harm the fabric of society? Will the government's answer then be, 'It was in the policy — and you lost'? That is not an adequate response.

The questions I have raised should be referred to Dr Penington's committee, and it should have the evaluative power to say to the opposition and the government, 'Because these questions cannot be resolved to the comfort of the community and professionals, do not proceed. Abandon this policy'. If the government is just locked into the proposal because it was in the policy and the opposition parties lost, then it is not helping Victorians and is not moving this debate forward.

The opposition will offer appropriate bipartisan support to a considered and coherent policy — one that has been thought through. This is not one of those policies. It is a two-line, simplistic policy to which the government is now committed, but which has not been thought through, from which it is trying to back away, which it is unable to implement and about which there are many unanswered questions. The government should answer those questions honestly and be open with the community before asking for bipartisan support.

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — Yesterday the government sought bipartisan support because the issue is so serious. Honourable members

have just heard the shadow Minister for Health speak on the first matter of public importance to be debated in the house, but having listened to him for 15 minutes I do not know where the opposition stands on the issue because it does not know what its position is — it is lost because it does not know what it believes in and what it stands for.

The government has been prepared to be courageous and take on the hard social issues that for seven years the former government was not prepared to take on. The former government was prepared to mount the rhetoric and put out glossy brochures on drugs to every household, but it was not prepared to take on the tough issues.

On Monday I had a phone conversation with a friend about a different matter. In the course of the conversation he said, 'Congratulations'. I asked, 'What for?' He said, 'For what you did today with Dr Penington, the drug policy and the safe injecting facilities'. I could not work out his comments. My friend then explained that at that time his daughter was in hospital, having had a serious drug problem. He said he admired the government for having been prepared to take on the drug issue and make the courageous decisions that those on the other side of politics are not prepared to make.

The former leader on the other side, Mr Kennett, has gone because he was arrogant and uncaring. However, at least at times he was prepared to embrace progressive issues. It seems all we are left with is a conservative rump that is not prepared to take on the difficult problems. We are seeing the result of seven years in office of a bunch of yes-men and yes-women who have nothing to say now their leader has left. It was impossible to work out from the contribution of the honourable member for Malvern exactly what is the opposition's position.

The government has said that safe injecting facilities are only part of a comprehensive drug strategy. The drug problem cannot be dealt with by providing only one answer — there is no magic bullet. That also applies to heroin trials. The former government kept pushing heroin trials and said, 'Do that, that is the solution', as though it were a one-off answer. It knew it could never implement the proposal because it required commonwealth agreement, and that is why it kept pushing it.

The new government believes there has to be a comprehensive strategy. The honourable member for Malvern talked about a two-line policy. The Labor Party's 22-page policy was very public, was released

prior to the election, was fully costed and was supported by Dr Penington, who will oversee its implementation.

Dr Napthine — Is the \$8 million costed?

Mr THWAITES — I will respond to the interjection in a moment. The proposal is fully costed. It was part of Labor's municipal drug plan that was included in the costings by Access Economics. In fact, all of Labor's policies were fully costed by Access Economics.

There are four planks to Labor's proposed comprehensive plan. The first is preventing drug abuse. One of the most serious problems is young people dropping out of school without any adequate support and getting into the drug scene. It can be seen around various Melbourne suburbs and throughout country Victoria. As I mentioned yesterday, it affects all families, classes and areas. Labor is committed to preventing that through a boost in school welfare programs and support — something that was neglected for seven years by the former government.

The second plank concerns saving lives. There have been 247 drug-related deaths this year. As the honourable member for Footscray interjected, that is about four people a week who are dying of drug overdoses in the streets, most of whom are young and should have many good years of life ahead of them. Labor's policy is an attempt to save those lives, and safe injecting facilities are a part of that.

Labor's proposed municipal drug plan would introduce mobile drug safety workers who would be able to move around in areas where people who are using drugs may die. The drug safety workers would be able to administer Narcan and first aid, and direct the drug users to a safer environment.

In many cases people are dying in the family home, so to try to prevent that from happening the government will provide first aid advice and training to families of drug users. If more families can be supported, more lives might be saved. Evidence indicates that many people are overdosing, reviving in hospital, returning home and, after another hit of heroin, again overdosing and dying. Families need assistance in helping to save lives in those circumstances.

A good methadone program, and alternatives to methadone for people who want to rehabilitate, is another part of the government's approach. The government is trying to prevent people getting into drugs in the first place, trying to save lives and trying to get lives back on track. That means providing more

rehabilitation and detox services so that people can move from chaos to normality. The government has put additional funding into these areas to provide ongoing support for people getting off drugs.

Finally, and importantly, the fourth plank of our policy is effectively policing the drug trade to get the drug nuisance off the streets. The government has a commitment to introduce 800 additional members of the police force over the first term of the Bracks Labor government, creating a stronger police presence in the crime hot spots. To get the drug problem off the streets where it is causing so many problems to traders and shoppers, police will be directed to areas where there are high levels of drug-taking and crime. The government has a costed comprehensive four-prong strategy.

To return to the issue of safe injecting facilities raised by the honourable member for Malvern, I am disappointed that the motion uses the terminology 'heroin shooting galleries'. It is a pejorative phrase meant to incite fear rather than confidence that the government is trying to improve the situation for both the users and the community.

The government, Vichealth and other Australian organisations have researched harm minimisation strategies. The research indicates that the establishment of safe injecting facilities overseas has led to significant reductions in the number of deaths from heroin.

In Switzerland since the introduction of safe injecting facilities or primary health care facilities the number of deaths from drug overdose has reduced from 419 in 1992 to 209 in 1998 — a 50 per cent reduction. In Frankfurt, Germany, following the introduction of safe injecting facilities the number of deaths has reduced from 147 in 1991 to 31 in 1998 — an 80 per cent reduction. Similarly, in Amsterdam, the introduction of a range of harm minimisation programs, including primary health care facilities, has led to a massive reduction in the number of needles distributed through needle exchanges because people are getting out of a drug lifestyle and moving towards a safer lifestyle.

Safe injecting facilities do not simply save lives, although nurses and doctors will be available; they also aim to help the drug user get out of a chaotic lifestyle and into a safer lifestyle. Support workers and others are able to advise people, in a controlled environment, on matters such as employment, because so many do not have employment; how to find safe and secure accommodation; how to move away from the peer group — adversely influencing them because they are all drug users — into a safer peer group.

A range of measures are aimed at guiding people towards a safer lifestyle. Overseas evidence indicates a reduction in deaths and unsafe lifestyle.

However, the government is not going to rely on overseas evidence, which is why it proposes to trial safe injecting rooms in Victoria. It is sensible to have a trial to see whether the proposal works. The government is not saying the facilities will be implemented forever but that it will implement a properly evaluated trial, which is why Dr Penington will oversee the process. He will set the evaluation process in place and answer all the questions raised by the honourable member for Malvern.

The honourable member for Malvern raised a number of questions, some trivial and some serious, such as planning questions, the means of determining the success of the program, how to distinguish between first-time users, and others. The government agrees they are serious questions, which is why it has appointed Dr Penington to head the committee to examine the issues and to provide expert recommendations. The government has taken the courageous step to appoint Dr Penington and to proceed with its plan rather than to adopt the weak approach of the opposition, which is to throw up its hands and say it is all too hard. The opposition would rather make political points than do something to save lives and get those lives back on track. I repeat: Dr Penington will address the points raised by the honourable member for Malvern.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition to answer a simple question. If Dr Penington recommends that the trial should proceed in a certain way, will the opposition support it? Dr Penington is not someone who can be told by the government to do anything. The government has chosen a person to investigate the problem who was appointed originally by the Kennett government. Dr Penington may recommend in favour of a particular path. I ask the Leader of the Opposition to indicate today his party's support of that approach. The issue is serious and the government wants to take politics out of it.

When Dr Penington addressed the house and presented his proposals to honourable members and the community the then opposition supported him, as did the then government. At that time honourable members on this side of the house did not behave as the honourable member for Malvern is behaving in making cheap political points. The then opposition took a bipartisan approach that continued until shortly before the election, when the Labor Party put forward its policy. Suddenly the then government came out against

safe injecting facilities. That was difficult to understand because the former government, through the Department of Premier and Cabinet, had been involved in the planning of safe injecting facilities, and Vichealth had agreed to evaluate the Wesley proposal. At the time the honourable member for Malvern was the parliamentary secretary for health and I should have thought he would have been aware that Vichealth was involved. However, he seems to be ignoring that fact today in order to make cheap political points.

I exhort the opposition to take the issue seriously and not to make political points. People are dying today and others will die tomorrow. The only way to solve the problem is to adopt a bipartisan approach.

Dr NAPTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — The drug problem is of real concern to all Victorians and to many people across the world. I am sympathetic to drug users. They have often been trapped into a lifestyle of drug use in which they then become victims of abuse and of the unscrupulous people involved in the enormous drug trade around the world. However, the opposition has no sympathy whatever for drug pushers and will provide all the necessary rehabilitation support for users to assist in their return to healthy lifestyles. The opposition will be unstinting in its efforts to identify pushers, suppliers and importers with the aim that they be punished to the full extent of the law.

Despite the best efforts of governments throughout the world using a range of different approaches to the drug trade — whether it be the strict approach of saying no, a harm minimisation approach or a combination of the two — the drug problem seems to be increasing. We must therefore adopt considered, responsible and sensitive programs if we are to deal with the problem. The former government adopted that approach through the Turning the Tide program. It was based on educating young people about the adverse effects of drugs on themselves, their lifestyles and their families, and empowering them to say no.

I ask the government to give a firm commitment today to the continuation of the Turning the Tide program. As honourable members would be aware, the program was funded to the tune of \$100 million over a four-year period through the Community Support Fund. That funding was due to cease and to be reconsidered by the incoming government. The then government's intention was to extend funding into the fifth year.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Dr NAPTHINE — I appreciate the interjection that the government will continue with the Turning the Tide

program. I also appreciate the government's comments about seeking a bipartisan approach. In the opposition's view a bipartisan approach is best, although the opposition has concerns about heroin shooting galleries. If the government is seeking a bipartisan approach and community support it must be open and inclusive about its proposal for such galleries. The community is concerned and frightened about drugs, drug addicts and the effects of the drug trade on crime in the community.

During the election campaign the now Premier said the government would open five such sites at various locations: Melbourne, Collingwood, Springvale, St Kilda and Footscray. At the time the then Leader of the Opposition, the current Premier, said that the local government bodies involved would have the power to control whether those the placement of those sites went ahead. In answer to a question, Mr Bracks said on 3AW:

... safe injecting facilities on a trial basis where councils approved it and where there was wide community consultation and support for it. And if there is not, we wouldn't go ahead.

Mr Bracks also said there needed to be council support for such facilities. However, Monday's *Herald Sun* reported that:

Mr Thwaites confirmed the location would be decided by the government and councils would have no power of veto.

The first issue the government must resolve is who is right — the Premier or the Deputy Premier? Will Councils have a power of veto over the location of heroin shooting galleries or not? Will the government involve the community and local government in fair and reasonable consultation, and will it adhere to its provision to allow local government to have the final say in its community?

Many other issues regarding the so-called safe injecting facilities need to be resolved. Let me make it clear that they are not safe injecting facilities. The term is an absolute and utter misnomer. There is no way that government members or anyone else can pretend that a person injecting illegal and lethal substances into his or her body in any environment is acting safely. To call them safe injecting houses is like speaking about safe tobacco use — neither is safe.

People using the proposed facilities will be injecting dangerous and potentially lethal drugs into their bodies. There is no evidence to suggest that their taking those drugs is in any way beneficial to them or the community.

As the honourable member for Malvern has said, many issues need to be addressed before we can take a bipartisan approach to the simplistic step proposed.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Dr NAPHTHINE — I will come to that; give me time. The issue of age is important. Will the facilities be available only to those people over 18? Many people under 18 are heroin users. If the facilities are open to under-age heroin users, will their parents be involved? If a 12 or 13-year-old comes into the facility — —

Mr Thwaites — What is your recommendation?

Dr NAPHTHINE — If a young child of 12 or 13 years comes in with a needle and syringe and some heroin, what will the people running that facility do? Will they advise the child's parents or guardian, or will they allow the child to shoot up?

If a person comes in armed with a needle, syringe and heroin and says, 'I want to use the facility', will the people in charge check whether he or she is an existing user? Will they look for marks on the person's arms and say, 'Yes, you are an existing user, you can go ahead', or will they ask, 'Are you a new user? If you are a new user, let us give you some advice about how to do it properly.'? What will they do in those circumstances? Those questions have to be answered before this simplistic solution is proceeded with.

The purity of the product must also be considered. There is no suggestion in the government's proposal that it will in any way, shape or form supply the product. In that case, the users of the facility will bring with them whatever they intend to inject into their bodies. Will there be any checks on whether it is super high-grade heroin, which is extremely dangerous, heroin that has been cut with dangerous products or heroin that is completely adulterated? All those issues are important. Will the government implicitly endorse any product that is brought into those places and allow people to inject themselves with it?

That leads on to important legal issues. If people die as a result of bringing in adulterated product and injecting themselves with it, who will be responsible? Will the government have a legal responsibility? Those are the questions that need to be addressed, let alone the fundamental moral dilemma about a perceived endorsement of heroin use. Giving the imprimatur to heroin use in our community is a real issue.

Mr Thwaites — Do you have a position on it?

Dr NAPHTHINE — The question is about the role of Dr Penington. In answering the Deputy Premier, I need to first ask a question. Is the role of Dr Penington only to advise on the implementation — in other words, he has no power to say ‘This is not a good idea’ — or will he and his committee have the authority to come back to government and say, ‘We have looked at all the issues and decided this is not a good idea. There are too many complex issues that cannot be resolved.’?

Honourable members need to know what riding instructions Dr Penington and his committee will be given.

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

Ms PIKE (Minister for Housing) — In raising a matter of public importance the opposition has deliberately chosen to use the term ‘shooting galleries’ rather than ‘safe injecting facilities’, which are designed to assist heroin addicts. That might be an attempt by the opposition to make the debate more evocative or to garner some sympathy or support for the few in our community who speak about drug addicts only in disparaging terms; and it might even be an attempt to build on the fear that is felt by some of their constituents.

Nevertheless, the opposition’s choice of that term is not accidental. It is deliberate, intentional and designed to maximise division rather than consensus on an issue that is of profound concern to all Victorians. Indeed, it is of profound concern to all caring people throughout the world.

The deliberate and intentional use of the words ‘shooting galleries’ speaks volumes about the opposition. It reveals its lack of understanding of and compassion for people blighted by drug addiction. Further, it reveals the opposition’s ideological bent — which rears its head in so much of its public policy — that people’s pain and suffering are matters of choice and somehow their own fault, rather than being the responsibility of all of us in creating the kind of society which heals division, cares for others and wants to address desperate and self-destructive behaviour.

The opposition has adopted an individualistic blame-the-victim response that plays itself out time and again in heartless and punitive public policy. It tells people that it is their fault and that they alone should fix their own problems; and it reveals that rather than being willing to work together in a constructive and bipartisan way to solve the problem, the opposition is prepared to garner all the emotive invective it can muster and drive

a wedge into the community, shifting all the energy and goodwill that is out there to a place characterised by complacency and defensiveness.

What is a shooting gallery? People flock to shooting galleries at the show, do they not? Shooting galleries are places where we stand up, hold a gun, point at the little ducks going past and enjoy the game. It is a test of skill — it is me and my gun against the ducks moving past.

Does the opposition believe for one moment that injecting heroin is fun? Does it believe that desperate people living desperate lives who have lost their freedom, their choice and their dignity are playing a game? Does it believe that this is about a moment’s pleasure, an aberration before you go onto the Ghost Train or the Mad Mouse? To insist on using the term ‘shooting galleries’ is to insist on using a detached term that implies with a sneer that a safe, supervised injecting place is more akin to a fun parlour than anything else.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Nothing could be more distant from the lonely experience of a heroin addict, who is rarely a willing participant in the game but is rather a trapped and lonely person whose self-esteem and life choices have been stripped away by a daily and relentless craving.

Where is the choice? Where is the pleasure? The response by the opposition shows its mean-spirited character, its willingness to blame the victim, its willingness to somehow glamorise heroin addiction and characterise heroin addicts as free agents with a pocket full of hits going off to the show for a good time.

Victorians have demonstrated time and again that they have a deep compassion for people who are trapped in the cycle of drug dependency. They are profoundly concerned about the impact of abuse on their cities and towns, and they want to identify and address the causes of drug addiction. They want to save lives. That is why decent-minded people will discuss, debate and consider all the options in an educated, intelligent and responsible way.

That is why they will reject the inappropriate notion of a shooting gallery and embrace the notion of the safe and compassionate response of safe injecting facilities. The word ‘safe’ is not about blame and punishment; it is about care and protection and sanctuary and support. It is about a mature community recognising that drug addiction is the responsibility of us all if it is to be tackled together.

The community is way out in front of the opposition when it comes to responding to the drug crisis. Just ask the families who are at the end of their tether; the users who cannot access appropriate services; the people who provide crisis accommodation services, 70 per cent of whom must be turned away; ask ordinary people who fear for their safety; the traders and the shopkeepers; and the ambulance drivers, doctors and nurses. The community is crying out for a compassionate, creative response that has the genuine ingredients of success and which moves away from the rhetoric, divisiveness and partisan debates and which takes heed of the reality that exists in the community.

What is the reality? The number of people who have tried heroin has increased by 50 per cent since 1995. At the current rate more than 300 heroin-related deaths will occur in Victoria by the end of this year. On average, nine non-fatal heroin overdoses happen every day. The time for doing nothing has passed, and Labor's new approach will tackle the drug crisis.

The Minister for Health has clearly outlined the four main components of Labor's policy on drugs, of which the identification, investigation and provision of safe injecting facilities on a trial basis is one component only. It is only one of a very broad, integrated and comprehensive strategy the government has worked out in consultation with the community, taking heed of the enormous research that already exists on this issue both internationally and locally. The four highly integrated and developed major components are: preventing drug abuse; saving lives; getting people's lives on track through rehabilitation; and policing the drug trade.

The opposition's response is to raise this as a matter of public importance and call for the abandonment of the policy unless community consultation satisfactorily resolves all the other issues. Members of the opposition clearly have not read the policy; they have no appreciation of the hours and hours of research and consultation that underpins this policy. They clearly do not know about the enormous work that has been done in our community by academics and health professionals. I am not even sure they have read the report of the previous Penington inquiry.

It is supreme irony that the word 'consultation' appears in the motion for this matter of public importance moved by a party that, while in government, had complete disdain for the notion of consultation. In fact, it considered it to be a sign of weakness. This government has a policy, which is supplemented by the appointment of Professor David Penington to chair an expert committee to ensure its proper implementation.

Mrs ELLIOTT (Mooroolbark) — No-one in the community can fail to be concerned about drug use. There are 80 000 to 100 000 heroin users in Australia. As the Minister for Health said, 246 drug-related deaths have occurred in Victoria this year, and there is widespread concern about that. The larger community also has every right to have real and genuine concerns about a policy which is announced ahead of any community consultation and about an expert panel headed by Professor David Penington of which we do not know the brief or the terms under which the panel will do its work.

The larger community and the children of most people in the community are not drug takers. Their reaction to the comments made this morning by the mayor of Port Phillip, Councillor Dick Gross, who has leapt right ahead of the community by saying there should be 25 heroin injecting rooms, or the social worker Les Twentyman, who said there should be a network of heroin injecting rooms throughout metropolitan and regional Victoria, is easily understood. In my electorate an organisation called Teen Challenge wanted to set up a drug rehabilitation program and the community concern about that was so manifest that the organisation is now reconsidering its position.

I have done considerable reading about the safer — I emphasise that they are not safe — drug injecting rooms in Switzerland, particularly in the City of Berne. It is a very small city with fewer than 300 000 people, and yet 90 000 hits take place within those injecting rooms every year. Imagine how many there might be in a city of 3½ million! As the honourable member for Malvern so eloquently said, there are issues around the setting up of drug injecting rooms. The death rates have fallen in the drug injecting rooms in Berne.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs ELLIOTT — In fact there have been no deaths; the minister is quite right. The Minister for Health should realise that the opposition is struggling to come to a bipartisan approach on this. We need to be fully informed.

In the Berne drug injecting rooms there were no deaths, but so far as I can see there has been no evaluation of how many deaths have occurred in the wider community.

Wesley Central Mission is concerned about children as young as 10 shooting up in its grounds. That is why it wishes to set up a safe — or safer — injecting room. Workers at the mission were also concerned about a pregnant woman who injected herself directly into her

abdomen. That is horrifying to any of us. The thought of it is quite shocking. The Swiss injecting rooms do not allow entry to anyone younger than 16 or anyone who has not taken drugs before. They are open only for limited times during the week and not on Sundays.

In cases like the child of 10 and the pregnant mother who self-injected, what health professional employed to run a heroin injecting room could stand by and watch such things happening without having concerns about what his or her legal liability might be?

How are we going to ascertain the age of teenagers? Some who are 13 or 14 years old look 18 or 19. What sort of evidence are we going to demand from them before they are admitted?

When local traders talk about the effect on their businesses of having a heroin injecting room in the area, which of their concerns will the proposal take cognisance of? The traders of Smith Street, Collingwood, have already expressed their concerns about the effect such a facility might have on their businesses. What planning issues will be considered? Will injecting rooms be allowed near schools or kindergartens? All parents of children in junior secondary, secondary or primary school would be concerned if they thought there was a drug injecting room anywhere near a place where their children might be.

What about the social issues? I have heard anecdotes of schoolgirls coming from schools in the inner city area to score in Russell Street. If we allow only adults into safer injecting rooms how are we going to help the younger children?

We all feel enormous compassion for drug takers and want to find a remedy for the scourge of drugs — a scourge that appears almost as bad as the Black Death of the Middle Ages. Any government, however, that does not take account of the real concerns of the wider community is on a road to nowhere. I, along with the honourable member for Malvern, who is the shadow Minister for Health, question why the eminent committee to be headed by Professor David Penington should include someone like Cr Dick Gross. He is determined, for reasons we can only guess at, to race ahead of community opinion and propose not just 5 but 25 injecting rooms.

What are the terms of reference for that committee? Why can the house and the wider community not know what they are? Are they simply to give an imprimatur to the government's pre-election commitment that there would be five injecting rooms? Or are they to

investigate the whole area, taking on board the concerns of the community, and to evaluate whether heroin injecting rooms would, in fact, make us a safer community?

Letters to the editor sections in both our major dailies and the *Australian* newspaper from time to time — particularly when the project was announced — are full of letters from people saying, 'We do not want these anywhere near us'. As with all social policy, a great deal of community education needs to be undertaken.

The committee has been told it must report by next March. Does that mean the heroin injecting rooms will be set up soon after that? That is a very short period indeed within which to evaluate the concerns of the community. And if at the end of the day it were decided that the injecting rooms were to go ahead, how would the process be evaluated? What criteria would be established to evaluate their efficacy?

I believe the greatest concern in the community is the question of how you keep the drug dealers away from those areas. They would have a ready-made captive market, so how would they be kept away? What would the police be able to do? Would they be able to arrest drug dealers in the vicinity? As the Leader of the Opposition has said, people will bring their own drugs — no drugs will be provided for them in the injecting rooms — so how far away from a centre will the cordon sanitaire be? Will the police be told to leave people alone? Or will they be allowed to arrest within the cordon?

Members of the opposition are not totally opposed to any proposal that will help with problems of drug use. We, however, like the rest of the community — and we are the representatives of the community — need to be fully informed.

The contribution of the honourable member for Melbourne has trivialised the whole debate.

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — I join this debate with a great sense of pride in the new Bracks Labor government. This government has shown enormous courage, as the Minister for Health and Deputy Premier said earlier, in tackling the drug blight on our society in a comprehensive and compassionate way.

The Labor Party has understood for a long time that the drug menace requires more than a quick fix and will not respond to a quick fix. It also requires more than smart marketing slogans; it requires immense goodwill and open-mindedness. It requires all of us to abandon our

prejudices and our sense of fear about the drug menace, particularly if we are parents.

It also requires tremendous political goodwill to work together as members of Parliament and to form partnerships with the health, education and law enforcement professionals to tackle this blight.

It is mischievous or, worse, stupid to try to limit this debate to a mere discussion about the proposal for five safe injecting facilities in metropolitan Melbourne. I am disappointed that the opposition has sought to diminish the magnitude of what is being confronted by simply scoring cheap political points about five safe injecting facilities.

The Labor Party is responsible, courageous and consultative in tackling the drug menace. At the heart of its comprehensive strategy is education. Unfortunately, honourable members know that education dropped off the radar screen in the seven years of the Kennett government. However, education about the causes of drug abuse and about harm minimisation is at the heart of the government's drug strategy. Whether we like it or not, people are dying. The figure is now 246 dead this year alone from drug abuse, particularly heroin overdose. Those figures are magnified when one considers the ripple-effect on families and communities. I hazard a guess that none of us have been immune from the effect of drugs; certainly none of us will be.

Expenditure on drug treatment has been increased in the past couple of years after significant early cuts. The Labor Party welcomed that increase; however, little has been done to consider the causes of drug abuse, particularly among young people. It is interesting that for most of the debate this morning the gallery has been full of young Victorians wanting a lead from this government and this Parliament.

As honourable members will recall, the Labor Party gave bipartisan support to Dr Penington's drug advisory council. It did not give bipartisan support to cuts to education, training and employment programs which allowed young people to be put further at risk of drug abuse. That is why my first question asked as the shadow Minister for Education in this place was to the then Premier. I asked about how his cuts to school welfare, counselling and guidance officers had, unfortunately and unwittingly, contributed to the increase in drug abuse in our state. That is the unpalatable fact; it is the truth.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Ms DELAHUNTY — If the honourable member for Warrandyte has read the government's policy he will know it is putting \$42 million over four years into welfare support in our schools. That is what the Bracks Labor government is doing about drug abuse and its causes.

What other factors have contributed to the problems? What are the root causes of drug abuse? Truancy figures have increased enormously during the last seven years of the Kennett government. The chief magistrate of the Children's Court has said publicly time and again that some of the children who appear before that court are not even enrolled in school; they have dropped out and no-one cares about them. This government cares about our children and cares particularly about those at risk of drug abuse.

Too many young people are leaving school at an early age. Alarm bells have been ringing in Victoria as the year 12 retention rate has dropped nearly 10 per cent.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Ms DELAHUNTY — They are not getting jobs.

I direct the attention of honourable members to the youth unemployment figures for Victoria. In some regions the rate is nearly 50 per cent, and, alarmingly, the statistics clearly show that if people are at risk of long-term unemployment they are also at risk of drug abuse. They are the unpalatable facts.

The government does not want to score political points on this issue; it wants bipartisan support from every honourable member. These matters provide clear evidence of some of the root causes of drug abuse. The government, on behalf of the people of Victoria, will put more money back into education to try to minimise the harm. During the next four years the Bracks Labor government will spend \$65 million to look at the critical school-to-work transition. The government wants individual school-to-work plans. It wants to revive vocation education and training, where there is a fivefold demand. The government will put more money into that area so that young people believe there is a reason to stay at school. If young people drop out of school, the risk that they will fall into drug abuse is enhanced.

I urge honourable members to look at the whole strategy and not to be frightened by the one corner of the canvas that provides for five safe injecting facilities. The government wants to prevent drug abuse, and that is why I have spent most of my time this morning dealing with that issue and indicating the amount of

money and the support the government will provide to schools and to young people.

I share the honourable member for Mooroolbark's absolute horror of young children and pregnant women injecting themselves. The government wants to save lives and encourage young people not to try drugs in the first place. It wants to get lives back on track and get young people into treatment and rehabilitation programs to stop the decay. The government wants to police the drug trade and get the pushers off the streets and into jail.

I urge all opposition members, who in the motion before the house ask the government to abandon safe injecting facilities, to put aside their prejudices and their fears and come with the government to work seriously to confront the drug menace.

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — I am pleased to contribute to the debate. The issues raised today are a poignant reminder to all honourable members on both sides of the house that we are all deeply concerned about this issue. We all recognise that Victoria is facing a complex problem that is shared by most countries around the world. We are deeply concerned about the increase in the number of deaths due to overdoses of various substances. We are concerned as parents, as legislators and as members of the community. We recognise that the causes of drug addiction are extremely complex. Invariably drug addiction is closely linked with mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety.

The former government recognised that link and wanted to set up a national institution of depression to try to find the causes of depression and anxiety, which so often lead to drug addiction and abuse. Young people today are influenced by their peers and the trendiness of going to nightclubs to have a hit of ecstasy, or some other new drug, such as shabu, which renders people violent and can affect their hearts and cause brain damage.

The opposition recognises that young people feel pressure to perform educationally. They suffer the pressure of wondering whether they will get a job and will be able to cope with the responsibility of adulthood. The opposition recognises all those issues, and that is why the former government commissioned the Penington inquiry, which looked at a large number of issues across Victoria dealing with drug abuse and addiction. The subsequent debate in the house showed that many honourable members supported the Penington inquiry and many of its recommendations. One of those recommendations was the liberalisation of

attitudes to cannabis use. Many of us thought long and hard before we came down on the side of not supporting the decriminalisation of marijuana. That was in response to what we felt the community was prepared to accept and go with.

It is all very well in the closed chamber of the Parliament to think you have a good idea that you should go with, but at the end of the day you must be able to take the community with you. That is what the debate is all about — taking the community with us. It is most important. The inquiry's recommendation for the decriminalisation of marijuana was not supported.

In the run-up to the last election the Labor Party supported the decriminalisation of marijuana. Now that it has found itself in government it is strongly backing away from that stance. I heard the Premier with Neil Mitchell on the radio last Tuesday morning, when he made it clear that the matter is now not a priority and the government will have to assess the issue and see what the concerns are. Perhaps the Premier has finally realised that to be successful in introducing something like decriminalisation and more liberal attitudes you must take the community with you.

Last year the number of deaths due to heroin overdoses increased to 247. Opposition members are in favour of looking at all options and are open minded about possible strategies, but we also recognise that there are no quick-fix solutions. The old attitudes and methods of trying to solve the problem have failed. A proper assessment must be made, and that is what the opposition is calling for in the debate today — a proper assessment.

The Turning the Tide initiative introduced by the former government was a new way of looking at the problem of drug addiction. The former government introduced the concept of harm minimisation and education. The Deputy Leader of the government fails to recognise that the Turning the Tide program is being used in Victorian schools, which are working in clusters with communities, to bring awareness to young people. The former government spent \$100 million over three years and planned to extend that initiative.

Part of the process was a huge level of consultation through the Penington inquiry. In my electorate a pilot program that took a holistic approach to drug treatment has just been completed. I hope that pilot program will be used in the wider community.

During the election campaign the Labor Party committed to five shooting galleries, or safe injecting houses, and it is a matter of semantics to try to debate

the definition. I will provide the house with a dictionary definition that I am sure government members will accept. The second definition of 'shooting gallery' in the *Macquarie* dictionary is:

... a place where drug addicts can rent rooms for the period of time needed to inject drugs.

I will make that definition available, and I hope government members will accept it for what it is.

The point I was about to make before the government decided to make a hue and cry about the definitional problems is that in its election campaign the government promised the establishment of five injecting houses, or shooting galleries, but once it got into office it realised it would have to implement that policy.

It is time to consider whether the community will support the strategy of the Labor government. The government has invited Dr Penington to conduct an inquiry into this issue. The opposition commends the government for doing that, but it does not understand and has not been told about the reference given to Dr Penington. Not only should there be an inquiry, but there must also be comprehensive community consultation to satisfactorily resolve specific issues related to health, legal, planning and social implications associated with such a radical position.

I will now deal with just a few of the important issues. I refer honourable members to the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee interim report of December 1997 entitled *Victorian Government's Drug Reform Strategy*, also known as Turning the Tide. The all-party committee had as its members the current Minister for Police and Emergency Services. On page 155 the committee sets out what governments should do. It states:

The committee urges that there be greater public debate concerning the possibility of safe houses, and that that debate be guided by appropriate evidence.

This debate is about making sure there is proper evidence. The opposition wants the Penington committee to examine the issues before the government proceeds with safe injecting houses. At page 153 the committee referred to the concerns relating to legislation. It makes the point that legislation will have to be passed before safe injecting houses can open.

Another issue is whether safe injecting houses will encourage drug use. The proposed houses are different from needle exchange facilities because they introduce the use of prohibited drugs. New drugs coming onto the market can have an amazing effect on people. The

government says that qualified medical officers will be in attendance at safe-injecting houses. What liability will be given to medical officers if someone overdoses? Will those officers end up in the courts? Substances will be tested for their purity on these premises. What is the legal liability if a person dies after taking a substance tested on the premises? Will the person responsible be liable?

It has also been said that people will not travel to shooting galleries to take drugs because once a deal is done on the streets within 20 seconds the user has already taken the drug.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I am disappointed in the wording of the motion of the matter of public importance. I always had a reasonable regard for the honourable member for Malvern. We have had an association in the past when debating matters on radio. I have counted him as one of the progressive members of the opposition; a forward-thinking Liberal in the true meaning of the word. I am disappointed, therefore, at the language he has used in this motion. A number of phrases can be used to describe safe injecting facilities but the honourable member has chosen to use 'shooting galleries'. He has used those words deliberately in this place to divide the community. I am disappointed that the opposition has chosen to use this terminology in this place to divide the community and play partisan politics on such an important issue.

When in opposition, the Labor Party worked with the former Premier and the experts, including Dr Penington. I would have thought the better response would be to submit the detailed information to Dr Penington and then come back to the house after doing some work on this matter.

All honourable members recognise that this tragic problem confronts all Victorians. Over the past seven years there has been an exponential growth in the number of overdoses and deaths from heroin. In 1993 there were approximately 59 deaths from heroin; last year there were 268 deaths; and so far this year, regrettably, there have been 247 deaths. All experts and commentators acknowledge that what we are doing is not working. Turning the Tide is a good program that the government supports. The funding required for the program will continue, but the program in itself is not dealing with the problem.

Honourable members will know that when I started on this journey in opposition about seven months ago I was in a not dissimilar position to the Leader of the Opposition. My disposition after little exposure to the issue, little research or work with those involved in

rehabilitation or those taking or overdosing on drugs, was to disagree with the program. The work I did with the Deputy Leader of the Labor Party persuaded me to change my mind.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Mr BRACKS — That is a stupid response. You should either take this debate seriously or keep out of it. I went through the same journey as a lot of people. I did not want to support the arrangement because I preferred drugs to go away; my preference was that the problem did not exist. I believed it may encourage drug taking and give the wrong signals to the community. I was persuaded from that view after Dr Penington and other experts said that whatever we are doing is not working and we must consider some of the trials being conducted overseas. The Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee has examined some of the overseas trials. I congratulate the committee on its effective work. The committee is chaired by the Honourable Andrew Brideson in another place and has members from both sides of this place. It includes the honourable members for Cranbourne and Knox and Dr John Ross in the other place.

Mr Leigh — On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, on a matter of the privilege of Parliament. I ask whether the final report of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee has been tabled. The Premier should not be allowed to refer to the report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The Premier is not referring to the final report of the committee. There is no point of order.

Mr BRACKS — For the information of the honourable member for Mordialloc, this is the interim report and not the final report. I would have thought the honourable member for Mordialloc would know that.

The interim committee report examined the trials of safe injecting facilities in Frankfurt. It found that no deaths from overdoses in safe injecting houses had occurred. Heroin overdoses in the Frankfurt community had declined from 147 in 1991 to 26 in 1997. That has been attributed to a range of harm-reduction programs in which safe injecting facilities are a key part.

In addition, individual public drug use in Frankfurt shrank from 800 in 1991 to 150 in 1993. The former Premier took some leadership on the issue, in contrast to the current opposition. I am disappointed that without his leadership the other side is floundering.

It is hard work being in opposition. An opposition must have a comprehensive plan to attack each issue. It

should not try to divide the community with cheap shots and cheap statements. It should examine the research, work patiently and propose policies, just as Labor did when in opposition. As the Deputy Premier said, Labor came up with a comprehensive plan that was not only about saving lives through establishing safe injecting facilities but also about prevention, increasing apprenticeships and traineeships for kids, lifting retention rates and the number of rehabilitation beds, and putting more police on the street. The former opposition did not make cheap shots about the former Premier.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — I defy any honourable member opposite to name those matters on which the former opposition differed with the Premier. The former Premier was moving down the same path as the current government. In an article on safe injecting facilities in the *Herald Sun* of 29 July he said:

I'd like to have a look specifically at what Premier Carr is trying to do and then speak to some of my advisers to see whether we take it further ... I am not opposed to safe houses. We'll give consideration to it.

That was a considered response. The former Premier showed his intentions in a letter dated 20 August to Reverend Langley, superintendent of the Wesley Central Mission:

Thank you for your letter of 6 August 1999 about your proposal for a primary health care facility for injecting drug users.

I understand you met with senior government officials to discuss your proposal and that further meetings are proposed. Constructive discussions like those will help us reach a shared understanding about the legal and other issues related to your proposal and possible means of resolving them.

We share a desire for the rapid development of new ideas and strategies to address the scourge of drugs and I hope those discussions will provide important information for the government as we continue to seek potential solutions ...

The reality is that Dr Penington reported on the issue to the former government. The Labor government is finishing unfinished business.

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — Drug abuse is one of the most difficult and pressing issues our society faces. Heroin addicts and abusers are desperate and ruthless people who are unable to do anything constructive with their lives apart from pursuing the next fix.

I first became aware of heroin addiction in 1967, and during the past 32 years the problem has become more profound and acute. Currently a cap of heroin costs less

than a slab of beer. Drug addiction is not discriminatory: it does not choose victims from specific postcodes. It could happen to any of our children.

I have great concerns about safe injecting houses as a stand-alone concept. I take the opposition leader's point that a safe situation in which to inject yourself with drugs does not exist. Although it may be safer, it is not safe. If safe injecting facilities are established without the issues that have been raised being dealt with, society will have significant problems. It is appropriate to consider the concept only if all those serious disadvantages have been considered and resolved.

Dr Penington will be required to resolve those issues and produce an acceptable working arrangement. It would not be acceptable under any circumstances to introduce safe injecting facilities without those myriad problems and difficulties being resolved. The proposed trial is for 18 months. Although I have some apprehension about the concept I will give it the benefit of the doubt, because all avenues should be examined. We cannot close our eyes and shut our ears to the problems that surround us.

Without community and local government support the concept cannot be endorsed. I will not go down a path along which heroin use is an acceptable or encouraged pastime. If we offer our children and young people opportunities, purpose in life and meaningful futures, I am convinced the problems of drug addiction will not be so profound.

Mr SMITH (Glen Waverley) — I support the matter of public importance raised by the honourable member for Malvern on several grounds, the first of which is whether safe injecting houses, shooting galleries or whatever will be honey pots around which members of the drug community will congregate.

The issue of what the police will do instantly causes conflict. In one breath the Minister for Health says his aim is to get drugs off the streets. Earlier the Minister for Housing said the police must be talked to about the matter. I have spoken to police who say they are concerned about being told not to pursue drug traffickers. If a safe injecting facility becomes a honey pot, the police have a conflict.

The opposition is accused of not having any compassion. The government says its members have a monopoly on compassion and suggests opposition members speak to parents. On Sunday I spoke to a friend whose 23-year-old son has been a heroin addict for the past seven years. In that time her family of four has been destroyed. They are people of some means.

They have used everything that is available in the community in an attempt to get the boy off heroin, including a visit to Israel for the naltrexone program. But do addicts want to get off heroin? You can provide all the facilities under the sun. My friend said, 'Let Mr Bracks talk to me. I'd love to tell him because all I see a shooting gallery doing is providing an excuse for the others who weren't too sure — you're sending out the wrong message'.

The establishment of shooting galleries is against United Nations conventions. The UN says that the countries who sign its agreements cannot condone the heroin trade. I realise what the government is saying and I am not insensitive enough to say I disagree with any plan to try to solve the heroin addiction problem, but nowhere in the world has the problem been solved. As my friend said on Sunday, 'If we set up shooting galleries what will the implications be?'. If the police are not going to stop people going in to galleries how far away will they have to be before they are allowed to apprehend traffickers, because there will be a honey-pot effect of drawing in people who want to get their fixes? Users will buy heroin from dealers who will come into the areas in which galleries are situated. At what point should the police not intervene? The whole proposal is surrounded with conflict.

In recent weeks New South Wales has dealt with the same argument. It is opting for one shooting gallery, yet the Victorian government is going for five. The families of addicts who are involved are saying it is sending out the wrong message. Drug users comprise approximately 2 per cent of the population and cigarette addicts comprise 25 per cent. Removing the illegality factor and the fear of being caught will send addicts the message that their actions are condoned. Once drug use is condoned the community might as well say it has lost. I do not disagree with the Premier's comment a moment ago that every avenue should be explored, but to prevent conflicting messages the ground rules have to be extraordinarily tight before shooting galleries are set up.

Labor believes that the opposition members do not speak to shop traders. I have spoken to the traders in Collingwood and they are horrified. At one stage they were going to bring in vigilantes because experience in other places has shown that no police presence would be great enough to stop drug addicts going into such areas. Nowhere in the world has the problem been solved. The government can pull out what other places might try to do, other experiences —

A government member interjected.

Mr SMITH — The government quotes the Honourable Andrew Brideson, a member for Waverley Province in the other place. I have also heard him speak at public meetings and he said no country has beaten the scourge of heroin. That does not mean we should do nothing, but it is wrong for the government in its first few months in office to send a message that it will adopt the easy way out of providing a facility, and it will increase the use of heroin in the community.

My friend has said she will talk to the Premier of her experience of seven years. She will tell him how, when her son came home having been desperate for a fix, he came to their house and took money. She will tell him how she and her daughter were beaten up by the son and how he intimidated her daughter's boyfriends. She said it was the most horrific experience. She felt awful admitting there were times after her son's recovery from an overdose that she wished, although she later changed her mind, he had died because of the damage he had caused to the family. My friend's point is that if the government goes into the unknown as proposed, it will be sending a message to young people that what we do not want to happen will happen — this scourge on the community will increase.

Giving heroin to heroin addicts is a bit like trying to solve the alcohol problem by giving alcohol to alcoholics. Young people who are uncertain, have problems in their lives and are ready to experiment will say, 'The government said it was all right'. It is no good quoting Dr Penington because the message will still be there. The treaties signed by United Nations countries acknowledge that condoning or in any way giving credence to the heroin trade will only send out the wrong message, and mortality rates will increase.

If they are set up, these places will become honey pots. A person who wants a quick fix will not wait to get from one side of the city to the other, say to Springvale — addicts will not wait. I feel sorry for the honourable member for Springvale because it has been proposed he will have one of these facilities set up in his electorate. Addicts will use drugs there and then when they get them, have their whole lives centred around the honey-pot place around which their drugs will be available or will have to buy drugs and shoot up in a particular place. They will be sent the wrong message.

New South Wales has been considering a similar program. When the places are set up people will be waiting for the first person to die on the premises. What is the New South Wales government going to? What are its legal obligations?

The government cannot indemnify itself or its staff. Vicarious liability and disregard for the duty of care are the responsibility of the government.

The problem is common throughout the world and requires more resources in law enforcement and drug prevention agencies. The cheap, easy fix of a shooting gallery is not a sensible solution and will not solve the problem.

Mr WYNNE (Richmond) — I welcome the opportunity to address the chamber on the question of illicit drug use. Over time, the electorate of Richmond has had to confront the use of and trade in illicit drugs, particularly in the Smith Street, Collingwood area.

The opposition has failed to come to terms with the fundamental thrust of the government's drug strategy. The government particularly addresses the need for more police on the beat and will provide 800 more officers — 200 specifically directed to what has been called a street crime task force. However, the increase in the number of police officers is only part of the government's response, which also includes education and prevention programs, court diversion programs, counselling and detox and rehabilitation programs.

The government also addresses the need for providing additional residential care services and for piloting safe injecting houses. It is a comprehensive strategy. The opposition has chosen to address only one aspect of the policy, and presumably supports the broad thrust of the government's proposals.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr WYNNE — I assume that, for the sake of the honourable member for Footscray, opposition members support the comprehensive range of programs put in place by the government.

By any measure, the committee established by the government is regarded as an expert committee — it is headed by Dr David Penington. It consists of a group of eminent people who have been involved in the drugs question for many years. The government should be applauded for establishing the committee under the leadership of Dr Penington because of his past work with an earlier committee to develop a comprehensive understanding of the illicit drug question. He is now provided with the capacity to implement many aspects of the strategy and to provide expert advice on the way forward.

The City of Yarra has shown great leadership on the drugs question. It is important that local government be involved in the question of safe injecting facilities. I am

happy to say that in principle the City of Yarra has already agreed to the piloting of a safe injecting house in Richmond. That is nothing new for the municipality, which is the responsible local government authority. It has a responsibility to work with its community and deal with the traders in Smith Street. The city is obviously working with the traders in partnership to try to address some of the immediate problems stemming from the drug trade in the area. Cleanliness and drug use in public toilets are issues the city deals with daily. It is appropriate that local government should be involved in safe injecting houses.

Mr Doyle interjected.

Mr WYNNE — No, that is what the Minister for Health has said. The City of Yarra has already shown leadership on this question, and has agreed in principle to the pilot program involving a safe injecting house. In 1998 there were 22 heroin-related deaths in the Fitzroy–Collingwood area, the highest number in the metropolitan area. The area also had the highest prevalence of non-fatal overdoses compared with any other Victorian postcode address in the period November to April 1998. There is clear evidence that people who use heroin quickly and covertly increase the risk of overdose. Every time a user chooses to shoot up in a back alley, car or some other secluded location, he or she makes a life-or-death decision.

The government is seeking to provide an opportunity for addicts to use a facility that will provide support in the unfortunate event of an overdose, thus eliminating the need for addicts to shoot up in back alleyways or secluded areas. The proposed safe injecting facilities should be located in the community. Many community health centres that already address the drug problem — I cite as examples Springvale, Footscray and my electorate of Richmond — are possible locations for the placement of safe injecting rooms. The centres in my electorate already provide support to drug users via needle exchange programs.

The government intends to work with the community, traders, local government, community health centres and health professionals to ensure a result in the City of Yarra that is agreed to by all parties.

Mr ROWE (Cranbourne) — I join the debate in the hope that I can correct some of the government's misapprehensions about the motion. I was deputy chairman of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee for three years under the past government, and before that a member of the Crime Prevention Committee. I believe my colleagues the honourable members for Knox and Shepparton and I are better

qualified to discuss the matter than is the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

The government needs to understand that the opposition is not against safe injecting facilities or, as they call them in Germany, junkie centres. The opposition is looking for a response from the government that will give it and the community a degree of certainty about where the facilities will be located and what the government is currently recommending. The opposition has discovered that regardless of overseas evidence that states safe injecting facilities are beneficial for the small group within our population affected by drugs, a number of adverse effects rebound on surrounding communities.

Many aspects also need to be addressed with regard to the liability of people who operate the facilities. The Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee commissioned a paper on safe injecting facilities in an effort to generate discussion in the community. Chapter 5 of the paper addresses the legal issues. The first issue of concern is criminal liability. There are conflicts with and exemptions from existing state laws that prohibit illicit drug use and the aiding and abetting of that use. The honourable member for Glen Waverley mentioned the observance of international treaties. Although there may be ways of overcoming the problem following consideration, discussion and consultation with the federal government, that has not been addressed publicly by the government.

Civil liability revolves around the fact that the promotion of the facilities as safe injecting facilities imposes a degree of implied liability in the event that something should go wrong and that the people overseeing the facilities have an obligation to the people using them. That matter needs to be addressed for the protection of the people running the facilities as well as of the people using them.

Another concern is the proposal that the users bring their own heroin when it may or may not be possible to test the purity or otherwise of the drug. That increases the potential liability of the people operating the facility.

Those questions about the steps the government will take must be answered for the community's sake. The reference to legal liability allows me to raise a concern about Dr Penington's committee. In every circumstance that members of the former Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee investigated while they were overseas there was a strong police involvement in the program.

There is not one senior police officer on the Penington committee. Does that mean the Minister for Police and Emergency Services has not been able to get onto the committee, and is that because of his right-wing views on drugs?

Mr Smith interjected.

Mr ROWE — Perhaps it could be the other. The police are not involved, even though they are charged with enforcing the laws of the state. Unless the police are involved in the implementation of the program it will not work.

There is another reason why the police need to be involved. Time and again while the committee members were in Europe we saw drug deals taking place outside and in the vicinity of those injecting facilities. We saw undesirable people pull up in their cars and do their drug deals through the windows. Do the honourable members for Springvale and Footscray want increased drug trade in their communities? I think not.

Safe injecting facilities, or shooting galleries, will attract dealers. They will see the users who go there to shoot up as a ready supply of customers.

Mr Mildenhall — It already happens!

Mr ROWE — Following naturally from that — we know, as the honourable member for Footscray interjects, that it already happens — availability will increase because users will know where to go to get their drugs. I acknowledge that they can walk past the office of the honourable member for Footscray or down Smith Street and past the office of the honourable member for Richmond and pick up drugs any day they like, but this proposal will concentrate the supply of drugs in other areas as well.

Members of the community need to know that the police are involved so they can put together strategies to deal with the trading of drugs around those facilities. I agree with the honourable member for Mildura that the facilities and programs are worthy of trial. I come from a background similar to that of the honourable member for Mildura, having been a policeman for a number of years. Three years ago I was totally opposed to any of this, as was the Premier. However, my attitudes have also changed as a result of the investigations I have undertaken — that is, three years of investigations with members of both sides of the house.

The point the opposition is making in its motion is not that it is opposed to any method of alleviating the suffering of drug users; it is saying the government

should abandon its plans until it is prepared to allow the community to know what Dr Penington's terms of reference are, until it establishes the method and mode of operation of the facilities and establishes once and for all a budget that people can believe.

Let us consider the Swiss experience. I checked the *Financial Review* before coming into the house to speak on this matter, and I found that the Swiss franc is basically one-for-one with the Australian dollar. One facility in Holland costs the equivalent of A\$900 000 a year to operate, and another in Berne costs more than 1.2 million Swiss francs a year to operate. That translates to A\$1.2 million.

Victoria has a total budget of \$1.5 million a year — for five centres! That will not provide the proper medical, clinical and counselling facilities that Victoria needs and it will not provide the proper physical facilities needed to make a trial of this nature work.

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

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I am disappointed that the debate has been raised in the way it has. I am sure every member of the house would agree that the drug problem is the most serious social problem confronting our community.

Honourable members will find if they examine Victoria's prison system that 65 per cent of males and over 80 per cent of women inhabiting the prison system are there for drug-related offences. That is an indication of the contribution the drug problem makes to crime in this state. It has enormous social and economic costs which I have gone into in various debates before and will not repeat now.

It was stated earlier that there have already been almost 250 heroin-related overdose deaths in Victoria this year. In simple terms of the number of deaths from heroin overdose, the problem is of a similar magnitude to the road toll. However, in terms of the costs the drug issue produces in crime, family breakdowns and a whole array of other issues it is a far greater problem than the road toll.

The strict law enforcement and prohibition approach, which has been tried for a long time, has failed. If law enforcement and prohibition cannot keep drugs out of Victoria's prisons with 20-foot high walls, razor ribbon, electronic monitoring and 24-hour surveillance, how is it going to work in a free community and a free society? It is not.

The honourable member for Glen Waverley — who sat on this side of the house as a member of a government that was cutting 800 police officers from the police force — has said that Victoria needs law enforcement. Those words are somewhat hypocritical.

The drug problem is a complex one and it needs new solutions. There is no single solution to the drug problem. As earlier speakers have mentioned, the problem goes to issues of education and educational opportunities, and it requires a strong early intervention approach. The Minister for Education referred earlier to addressing the problem of truancy, which was completely ignored by the previous government.

One thing the previous government deserves some credit for is at least focussing on depression and anxiety and the contribution they make to the drug problem. Many factors influence the drug problem — unemployment, lack of employment opportunities, and youth culture — and they need to be addressed in a multifaceted way. That is what the government is seeking to do.

The government is conscious of the need for a strong approach to law enforcement on the issue, and that is why it is committed to putting 800 more police onto the streets and undoing what the previous government did in that regard. That is why the government is proposing a tougher approach to drug traffickers and, in particular, the commercial heroin traffickers, who get off far too lightly. That is why it is putting forward the early intervention and truancy responses and trying to provide new educational opportunities.

That is why we are trying to address the dearth of community-based opportunities for detoxification and rehabilitation in the community.

Safe injecting rooms are one solution to one facet of the problem. They are not a panacea, and the government has never suggested they are. I am not even suggesting that they are necessarily a solution — they are a way of trying to manage the problem as best we can.

I am not sure whether the honourable member for Mooroolbark wanted to debate the issue from the point of view of this side of the house, but she said the safe injecting facilities in Berne were recording something like 9000 hits a week, yet not a single death had occurred in any of the facilities. I am not aware of any safe injecting facilities in any of the European cities that have recorded deaths from heroin overdoses.

The honourable member for Mildura rightly made the point that there is no such thing as a safe injecting facility, but they may be safer. The evidence seems to

indicate that. If we can save lives by establishing those types of facilities in our city, we are doing the community a service. Of course we need to try to reduce the demand for hard drugs and we need to address the problem in a variety of ways, but the people who will inject drugs must be given the opportunity of doing so in a safe or relatively safe environment.

The honourable member for Caulfield and a number of other members opposite used the term 'shooting galleries'. I must say I find it extremely disappointing that they have used that emotive and pejorative term to try to score a cheap political point. The use of that term is designed to feed fear in the community rather than encourage rational debate on the issue. I know some opposition members would like to participate in rational debate on the issue, and I sense the embarrassment of some members on the other side of the house who I know have a far more sensible attitude to the problem than has been manifested by some of their colleagues.

The reality is that we already have so-called shooting galleries in Victoria — our streets, back laneways, trains and playgrounds — and the government is trying to get those activities off the streets and into areas that are both less visible and safer for the people who will inject heroin. I am aware of sandpits in playgrounds in some areas of Melbourne where councils routinely have to sift the sand for syringes. As I said, Victoria already has shooting galleries, but the government is trying to bring those activities under some sort of control.

As the honourable member for Cranbourne rightly acknowledged, the solution to the problem requires a strong law enforcement presence. I believe that is the intention of the government. It is disappointing that some honourable members, such as the honourable member for Cranbourne, who would like to make a more constructive contribution to the debate are constrained from doing so because of the position their party has taken.

The honourable member for Cranbourne has travelled a considerable distance on this issue, as have many of us who were members of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee. As he said, many outstanding legal, clinical, planning and economic issues need to be addressed. Dr Penington and his committee have been engaged to try to address those issues. Instead of trying to score cheap political points, I invite the opposition to come to the government to work out how best we can make the decisions that have to be made. It is simply a case of trying to find the best options. These sorts of facilities in other cities have overcome many problems. The government will come up with a unique solution for our city, and I would like honourable members on

the other side to be part of that solution rather than part of the problem.

Mr LUPTON (Knox) — I believe this is an important matter. It is probably one of the most important issues the house has discussed for some time.

I reject the comments of government members claiming that the opposition is trying to score cheap political points. The motion before the Chair states that comprehensive community consultation should be undertaken to satisfactorily resolve the specific health, legal, planning and social implications associated with such a radical decision.

In Victoria this year 247 people have died from overdoses. In my town, Boronia, four people overdosed last weekend — one of them fatally. We must ask whether the community of Victoria wants to stop those deaths, and if it does we must look at ways of changing the existing policies. Like the Leader of the Opposition I have concerns about the term ‘safe’ because injecting facilities are not really safe. I also do not like the term ‘shooting galleries’, but we must be able to come up with some name that is suitable. I have had to change my thinking on the issue dramatically. If some people wish to use those sorts of facilities to inject drugs they should be able to do so.

We must realise that people will not buy their drugs at the facilities, they will purchase or steal them elsewhere. I am not condoning that, but the problem is that they will not know anything about the purity of the drugs they obtain. As was said earlier, the drug could be pure and therefore strong or it could be cut to blazes. Although the injecting facilities will be government sponsored, there is no guarantee of the quality of the drugs being used.

If we go down the path of letting people use safe injecting facilities, the only guarantees we will be able to give are that when they get in there they will be given clean needles, swabs and sterile water and that they will be able to sit down, relax and have a cup of coffee. They will not have to rush as they do at the moment. When they finish they can go outside and go about their business.

The situation at the moment is that a person wanting to shoot up goes down a back lane and sits in a corner or under a stairwell, hurriedly whacks the needle in, pulls it out again and perhaps shares it with someone else. That is how disease spreads. The person cannot relax and take time because of concern about law enforcement activity.

Hasty injecting contributes to the ever-increasing incidence of overdosing. In Victoria so far this year 247 people have died by drug overdose. That is a disgrace. We must do something, because the existing system is not working. We need some initiatives to try and solve the problem.

As the honourable member for Malvern has indicated in his motion, we also need to look at some of the social and planning issues. They are very important too. We cannot afford to place an injecting facility just anywhere because that seems to be the right place. It might have a detrimental effect on the surrounding area. People will congregate in the vicinity and some will move into the general area to live.

Overseas, so far as I am aware, there have been no deaths inside injecting facilities, so it follows that if we can get, say, 10 per cent of drug users to use injecting facilities we will reduce the number of deaths caused by overdosing. We also need to bear in mind that it is usually not just the heroin that people overdose on, it is a cocktail of drugs that might include alcohol and speed, or amphetamines, as well as heroin. We cannot blame heroin alone for the majority of deaths from overdosing.

When the time comes and a facility is in place there will, as has been said, be a honey-pot effect. The dealers will be around. I would like to get all the dealers, lock them up and throw away the key. That sort of policy, however, involving police in the immediate area taking the dealers away, would leave us with the question of where people would get their drugs from. We have to look for other solutions than that one because, without condoning the trade in illicit drugs, stringent law enforcement associated with injecting facilities will only cause the dealers to move away, after which quantities of drugs will again be consumed in back alleys and other such places. That is one of the social aspects of the problem raised by the honourable member for Malvern.

I do not believe any government, including the minority Labor government, can afford to turn a blind eye to the sale of heroin and other illicit drugs around injecting facilities. That would be a form of legalisation. We must, nevertheless, find some way for the people involved to take illicit drugs without police interference, because lack of such protection will only send the problem underground. We are in a catch-22 situation.

We need to convince the community that Victoria, as a government and as a state, should spend money to provide facilities that will save the lives of people

taking illicit drugs. That will not be easy. How can we, for example, convince diabetics of that when they don't get a brass razoo from us to help them when they require injections and other treatment because through no fault of their own that have become ill? We are talking about putting extensive efforts and government money into programs for people who have chosen to get involved in drugs in an attempt to stop them from dying. I would not blame a diabetic for asking the question, 'If they are doing that for illicit drug users, why can't I get some sort of assistance?'. Diabetics in our community far outnumber drug addicts. We have to find a way of assisting them, too.

I believe we have a real problem. I have a great deal of sympathy for the idea of safe injecting facilities. We must, however, address the social implications. The situation in Switzerland has been referred to in the debate. I point out that Switzerland is only about half the size of Tasmania but it has a population of 8 million, whereas our population is only 4 million. Our people are far more dispersed. That would have a great influence on the number of safe injecting facilities that could be needed.

Prior to the publication of the Penington report the honourable members for Koonung and Wantirna and I held a number of meetings with people affected by the drug crisis. What became apparent in those meetings

was that families were feeling left out and unable to fight the problem themselves. Members of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee who went overseas last year emphasised on their return that the family unit is a vital component in the fight against drugs.

The Minister for Health in the former Kennett government allocated \$20 000 to an organisation called Focus on the Family for a program known as How to Drug-proof your Kids. I believe the minority Labor government should also be looking for ways to build up family strength and efficacy — that is, it should go back to square one. If we can provide the family with the necessary strength and moral fibre we will have gone a long way towards alleviating the problem.

We need an overall view. Nothing is going to be easy. We cannot put an injecting facility just anywhere and then open it up. The social and planning implications must be fully examined. The opposition agrees with the overall concept, but opposition members have concerns as to the end result and its effects on the community.

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — As a result of requests that have been made I seek leave to incorporate in *Hansard* the terms of reference and membership of the drug policy expert committee.

Leave granted; documents as follows:

**DRUG POLICY EXPERT COMMITTEE
TERMS OF REFERENCE**

In the context of the government's licit and illicit drug policy, the Drug Policy Expert Committee will, following consultation with local councils, community, business and other stakeholders, provide reports on:

Stage 1

- A. The implementation of a local drug strategy, targeted at municipalities with high levels of illicit drug use. The strategy to be capable of integration with an overall local health plan.
- B. The implementation of a trial of safe injecting facilities, in consultation with local government and communities, and with linkages to relevant services and an appropriate evaluation design.

The first stage report is required by the end of March 2000.

Stage 2

- A. Options for strengthening licit and illicit drug prevention, treatment and control strategies in ways that would be consistent with the policy and which address shortcomings of existing drug strategies as identified by independent evaluators and key stakeholders.
- B. The implications of changing patterns of demand and supply and recent developments in the prevention, treatment and control of all non prescribed drugs nationally and internationally.
- C. Arrangements that would assist community, local government and expert stakeholders to support and be involved in the drug policy initiatives.

**DRUG POLICY EXPERT COMMITTEE
TERMS OF REFERENCE**

- D. Leadership, accountability and coordination arrangements across government required to maximise the effectiveness of the policy.
- E. The most appropriate range and mix of interventions required to implement the government policy and achieve its policy goals.

In providing advice on these matters the committee should:

- consult with social policy, drug and legal experts and local government;
- take account of commonwealth government policies and planned outlays within Victoria as they may impact upon government policy;
- use available evaluations and data, review the effectiveness of existing services and arrangements;
- assess the civil, criminal and inter governmental issues relating to proposals which may require legislative change;
- take account of the need to ensure that services are appropriately linked to and integrated with primary health, community welfare and mental health services.

THE DRUG EXPERT COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

MEMBER	BACKGROUND COMMENT
Dr David Penington AC (Chair)	Dr Penington’s specialist field in medicine was blood diseases. He headed the National AIDS Task Force and was a member of the National Health and Medical Research Council. Dr Penington was vice-chancellor of Melbourne University from 1988 to 1995.
Prof. Margaret Hamilton	Prof. Hamilton is director of Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, Victoria’s leadership centre for research, education and clinical practice on alcohol and drugs. Prof. Hamilton is also a member of the Australian National Council on Drugs and serves on many advisory groups both in Victoria and nationally.
Prof. Pat O’Malley	Pat O’Malley is professor of law and legal studies at La Trobe University and has been the John Edwards professional fellow, Centre of Criminology, at the University of Toronto, Canada. Pat O’Malley is a criminologist specialising in the fields of crime control and criminal justice.
Cr Dick Gross	Mayor, City of Port Phillip
Mr Robert Richter QC	Criminal barrister
Mr Bernie Geary	Associate director, Programs and Services, Jesuit Social Services, past director of the Brosnan Youth Service and the Youth Parole Board.
Dr Rob Moodie	Dr Moodie is the chief executive officer of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (Vichealth). Dr Moodie returned to Australia to take up this position after several years working with the United Nations AIDS Program. Dr Moodie has also worked extensively in central Australia with Aboriginal populations.

Mr MILDENHALL — This extremely important and sensitive issue arouses great insecurity, uncertainty and fear in the community. I am appalled that the opposition has not resisted the temptation to sensationalise and exploit that justifiable fear and make political capital out of it. Members of the opposition did not resist that temptation during the election campaign when Liberal Party candidates went around telling local people that there would be a safe injecting facility in their town, in their shopping centre or around the corner from them. Members of the opposition succumbed and thereby failed the first test of integrity and character in dealing with this issue. This motion is a further example of the use of sensational language and scaremongering — ‘All these things are going to go wrong’.

Before the election the Labor Party in opposition joined with the Kennett government in its journey with Dr Penington. The Labor Party resisted the opportunity to indulge in scaremongering and had the courage to accompany the former Premier and his government in doing something real and substantial about this issue.

The present opposition has failed the first test of character and integrity by choosing to use the term ‘shooting galleries’. If we were debating brothels, would they move a motion talking about knock shops? If we were debating mental illness, would they move a motion talking about loony bins? Why not use the correct terminology? Why not take the pejorative, the sensational, out of motions like this and get real and fair dinkum instead of engaging in political opportunism.

The government is being asked about proper consultation. What do members of the opposition think this is all about? Isn’t that what the terms of reference and the public announcements are about? Isn’t that what Dr Penington is committing himself to? This is not occurring in a vacuum. We do not have the luxury of sitting back and saying, ‘Give us the answers to all the hypothetical questions before we proceed with consultation’.

In my electorate 23 people died from drug overdoses in the period from the start of the year until the end of August. Every day 60 young people shoot up in the car park at the back of my office. Part of my daily ritual when I go out to the car is to look at the comatose people in the car park and check if they are still breathing. I talk to the ambulance officers and ask whether they are still alive and how they are travelling.

This is the most serious social, economic and health crisis that faces the community in my area. We need to proceed with a comprehensive strategy that deals with

everything from keeping our young people safe to investments in education and policing. We need to take a comprehensive, multifaceted approach.

For opposition members to draw pieces out of that policy for the sake of sheer political opportunism is a poor reflection on the way their party has dealt with the crisis.

In the street where my office is located the needle exchange program is handling 1000 needles a day. In the shopping centre on the other side of my office in a six-month period earlier this year 900 arrests were made for dealing. It is a difficult situation for the traders, the community, the schools and the families in my electorate.

One light at the end of the tunnel is the location of the Macfarlane Burnet Centre for Medical Research in the middle of the dealing activity. In discussions with me last week eminent researcher Dr Nick Crofts pointed to some ominous signs of increased cocaine dealing and a strengthening trafficking subculture in the dealing community that is becoming more impervious to both policing and attempts by social workers and welfare agencies to reach it. His advice was that needle exchanges and safe injecting facilities are among the most effective ways to reach traffickers and users of illicit drugs. The operators of the facilities come into contact with users in a way few others do.

Safe injecting facilities must be trialled. The reports of the parliamentary committee suggest that the matters everybody agrees need to be sorted out are best sorted out through a trial. Dr Penington, one of the more learned observers of this issue, supports the policy. I have looked at the evidence and thought about it, and I have thought about the 23 people who died in my electorate. If safe injecting facilities had been introduced I wonder if the number of deaths might have been 12 or 13 or 5 or 6. Isn’t that worth a trial? Isn’t that worth serious investigation?

I am convinced the consultation process will be genuine and will produce a positive outcome. I appeal to opposition members to come on the journey with Dr Penington and local communities. I call on opposition members to resist indulging in rank political opportunism by playing on the fears and justifiable concerns in the community about these types of initiatives.

AUDIT (AMENDMENT) BILL*Introduction and first reading*

Mr BRACKS (Premier) introduced a bill to provide for the appointment of the Auditor-General under part V of the Constitution Act 1975, to amend the Audit Act 1994 with respect to the functions and powers of the Auditor-General, to repeal the Audit (Amendment) Act 1997, to make consequential amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

Read first time.

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
(MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL***Introduction and first reading*

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) introduced a bill to amend the Freedom of Information Act 1982 to provide for increased access to documents under that act and for other purposes.

Read first time.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (BEST VALUE
PRINCIPLES) BILL***Introduction and first reading*

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Local Government) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to amend the Local Government Act 1989 and for other purposes.

Ms BURKE (Pahran) — I would like a brief explanation of the bill from the minister.

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Local Government) (*By leave*) — The basis of the legislation is to abolish the hated Liberal–National Party compulsory competitive tendering policy, which, Mr Acting Speaker, you will be aware is detested in most parts of Victoria, particularly in regional and rural Victoria.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

**REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE
DEVELOPMENT FUND BILL***Introduction and first reading*

Mr BRUMBY (Minister for State and Regional Development) introduced a bill to provide for a fund to be called the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund to be established in the public account as part of the trust fund and for other purposes.

Read first time.

ESSENTIAL SERVICES (YEAR 2000) BILL*Introduction and first reading*

Mr BRACKS (Premier) introduced a bill to provide a temporary system of emergency powers to deal with events arising from year 2000 computer problems, to amend the Emergency Management Act 1986 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

**HEALTH PRACTITIONERS (SPECIAL
EVENTS EXEMPTION) BILL***Introduction and first reading*

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) introduced a bill to allow visiting health practitioners to provide health care services in the state in connection with special events without becoming registered under state law and for other purposes.

Read first time.

LEGAL PRACTICE (AMENDMENT) BILL*Introduction and first reading*

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) introduced a bill to amend the Legal Practice Act 1996 with respect to the powers of the Legal Profession Tribunal and for other purposes.

Read first time.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH**Address-in-reply**

Debate resumed from 9 November; motion of Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) for adoption of address-in-reply.

Mr DIXON (Dromana) — It gives me great pleasure to join this debate in replying to the Governor's speech. I congratulate the Governor on his speech and for the wonderful way he and Lady Gobbo have carried out their duties over the past few years. They do so with great dignity but with a common touch. I also thank the Governor for his hospitality earlier this year when I joined the parliamentary tennis team which roundly thrashed the Governor's team. I hope that tradition continues.

I congratulate Mr Speaker on his appointment. It is an appointment of great significance and I am sure he will carry out his duties in an outstanding fashion and join his illustrious predecessors whose photographs are hanging outside this chamber. I congratulate and welcome back the continuing members of this place and especially welcome the new members on both sides of the house. I have been impressed by the quality of the inaugural speeches of all new members. When I was the youngest and newest member of the government in 1996 and made my inaugural speech I do not believe I reached the heights of the new members today. I hope I have improved but it says something about the quality of the new members who have recently entered Parliament.

It is a great honour to be re-elected as the honourable member for Dromana. We had a wonderful result with the Liberal Party primary vote increasing by 3.5 per cent. The electorate of Dromana is the poorest electorate in Victoria and is a rural seat. The result is due to the recognition of the tremendous work of the former Kennett government throughout Victoria, and particularly in the Dromana electorate. It is also due to a lot of hard work by me and my staff. I pay tribute to all my staff for the way they worked diligently and applied themselves to their task. I thank Barbara Walker and Alison Bonnici for their work and my late electorate officer Pat Wagner for the work she did in the time that she was with me. I acknowledge the support I received from the ministers of the previous government who visited my electorate and who worked assiduously on my behalf. That contributed in no small measure to our victory.

I thank the Labor Party candidate who insisted on making the GST a state issue during the campaign. That was of great help to me. Since my re-election as the member for Dromana, the ALP candidate has gone on the public record demanding that I, as the member for Dromana, ensure there are no disruptions to essential services and power over the new year. I do not think the ALP candidate has got used to the idea that there is a minority Labor government. If the coalition parties had been re-elected I could have made that commitment,

but as I am not a member of the government I cannot do so. I hope she reappears as the Labor Party candidate at the next election.

I pay tribute to my campaign staff led by Bob Merry until November. Bob was involved in a serious car accident in November and survived only because of the wonderful care and attention he received at the Alfred Hospital. His successor, John West, led a great team of campaign workers. I thank them for their three and a half years of dedication, fund-raising, manning booths, pre-polling and all the hard slog that goes into supporting a member of Parliament. I also thank the support I received from the central office at 104 Exhibition Street. I thank my family for their support. My family thought that the only upside in having a minority Labor government was its commitment to family-friendly hours. When Parliament finished at 1.30 a.m., 12.30 a.m., 12 midnight and 11.30 p.m. in the past my family were not very friendly. They felt let down. They have supported me and I thank them for their confidence in me and for allowing me to pursue what I want to do.

Some members of the Labor Party think that working-class families are a monopoly of their party. I grew up in the working-class area of West Heidelberg in the electorate of the honourable member for Ivanhoe. My family still lives there. The Honourable Ron Best, a member for North West Province in the other place, also came from West Heidelberg and his mother still lives in the area. Many members of the Liberal Party have roots in working-class areas. I learnt much from growing up in West Heidelberg and I look back with fondness to my experiences there because the influence of my family has stood me in good stead. Some special friends have supported me over the past few years and I thank them for their support.

As I mentioned earlier, the Dromana electorate is the poorest electorate in the state. It has the highest percentage of people of any electorate earning less than \$300 a week. It is the oldest electorate in the state and it has the highest percentage of least-educated people. An indication of the poverty of the area is that a number of schools have 60 to 70 per cent of children coming from families who are receiving the education maintenance allowance. That puts a great strain on the local community, the community groups who help and especially the teachers who work in the schools. The building industry is booming and employment is high. The rate of unemployment has dropped from 13 per cent in 1992 to 6 per cent, which is under the state and national average. The property boom is due largely to the increasing tourism, the result of initiatives of the former Kennett government and the then Minister for

Tourism who promoted tourism throughout the state. It is reflected in the growth in employment and the huge growth in visitor numbers to the Mornington Peninsula.

I am sure no other honourable member can lay claim to the fact that there are seventeen 18-hole golf courses either being constructed or planned in his or her electorate. Those courses bring a large number of people to the electorate. Unfortunately, my golf game has not improved but in opposition I may have more time to practise.

I am also in the invidious position of having more than 200 wineries in my electorate. I am working my way around them because it is incumbent on the local member to encourage the primary industry in a rural electorate. Western Port Bay and Port Phillip Bay are wonderful recreation and environmental areas for local people and visitors to enjoy.

During this parliamentary session I will hold the minority Labor government to account and I will watch a number of issues closely, especially the \$1.9 million in maintenance works for 13 of my schools that have not been completed and which the previous Kennett government committed to do in two years.

At \$10 million it will take the Bracks government 13 years. Those schools deserve to be maintained over the next couple of years even though their requirements are minor.

Local businesses and several constituents involved in the tourism industry are concerned at the lack of commitment to the recognition of Port Phillip Bay as a tourist area of recreational and environmental significance. I encourage the government to continue the work of the former Kennett government in bringing the bay to life.

I am concerned that Parks Victoria will be abandoned and replaced by two bureaucracies, bringing with it duplication. Parks Victoria was a success story of the former government. It did a wonderful job in my electorate and I am sorry to see its work dismantled.

I will watch with interest the dismantling of the hospital networks. The Peninsula Health Care Network was acknowledged as excellent by the Premier and the Minister for Health on their visit to the Frankston Hospital. The Rosebud Hospital in my electorate is part of that health care network. The network was successful in gaining well above-average funding for hospitals and health care facilities in the area. As a local network it brought local knowledge and was able to have input about the health care needs of people in my electorate.

Residents are concerned that it is being dismantled to become part of a central bureaucracy.

The refurbishment by private operators of the Lotus Lodge Hostel has been abandoned. I hope the government will honour that commitment and spend the required millions of dollars on Lotus Lodge to bring it up to federal standards by 2001. Through government funding the former health care network committed to extend and renovate the Rosebud Rehabilitation Centre by the provision of a hydrotherapy pool. I will watch to ensure that is followed through.

The decision of the panel regarding the Blairgowrie Safe Harbor was handed to the former planning minister. I imagine that decision is now on the desk of the current Minister for Planning. Many people await his decision on that project.

The former government was committed to several initiatives on public transport. I will follow up those issues with the new Minister for Transport.

The Kosovar refugees left last Friday and the future of Point Nepean is unknown. I will follow up with the Minister for Environment and Conservation about how the government will work on the area and to what degree it will be involved.

When the former Kennett government was in power the opposition took it to task for moving government departments from rented accommodation in high-rise towers to the Treasury buildings and Macarthur Street. I will watch with interest whether the government will return to the high-rise towers to which it seems to be so attached. The former opposition vehemently opposed renovations and the purchase of new furniture. If it remains in the new offices I assume it will undo renovations and remove some of the furniture!

I encourage all honourable members to consider again the completion of Parliament House. It is a shame for the people of Victoria, visitors, members and staff that the building is incomplete. The Victorian people would support the completion of the building and I ask that the government consider that issue during its time in power.

I am proud to be part of a wonderful team on this side of the house. It includes former ministers and parliamentary secretaries with great experience in ministerial offices. New members bring a diverse background of experiences and occupations. I contrast that with the large number of inexperienced members opposite in senior positions. Some ministers oversee more than one large portfolio. The diverse range of those portfolios is recognised by the Premier with the

appointment of several assistant ministers. When looking through the members handbook I found that many new members, particularly in the Labor government, came from union and electorate offices. They have a distinct lack of experience of the real world and of being involved in activities such as owning their own businesses.

As a member of the education policy committee I look forward to making a major contribution in education. I have both experience and expertise in education and I look forward to making my mark.

In the coming years I especially look forward to vigorously representing the people of the Dromana electorate regardless of whether they voted for me. I love the area. I have lived there for many years and shall continue to do so. Most of all I look forward to working with honourable members on both sides over the coming term of government.

Mr MAXFIELD (Narracan) — I congratulate the Speaker and Deputy Speaker on their election to those positions. Democracy is well and truly alive in Victoria. Never before have voters taken their vote so seriously as they did on 18 September and 16 October at the supplementary election in Frankston East.

East Timor and the ensuing crisis associated with the voting process highlighted for many Victorians a responsibility that until recently many took for granted. The ability to directly change policy that affects all Victorians was uppermost in the minds of many rural voters.

My position as the new member for Narracan is a culmination of the choice made by those constituents whose votes did make a difference. I am honoured to be here representing an electorate that did not feel compelled to vote for the party line. I am here because many individuals in Narracan decided they would no longer put up with the social and economic consequences of decisions made by the former coalition government and were ready to vote for an alternative.

My predecessor assisted some Narracan constituents with their concerns. He was able to work with coalition state and federal governments to bring about the best outcome for individuals. The Honourable John Delzoppo, a former Speaker of this house, also held the seat of Narracan. He improved the standing of the electorate and tried to give his Melbourne parliamentary colleagues a better understanding of life in Gippsland.

It will be imperative for me to take up the concerns of and advocate for rural Victorians, especially those

living in the Narracan electorate. It has always worried me that rural Victorians have been treated like country cousins — family members who have made the most of the little they received. Perseverance and determination to survive have always been paramount in the minds of Australian explorers and those characteristics have enabled Victorians to continue fighting when all seemed lost. Forgetting rural Victorians when making grants, initiating building projects and the like might just be forgetful. However, closing schools, hospitals and regional infrastructure is plain neglect.

Communities in country towns have had formal and informal structures to assist individuals who have required assistance. However, the neglect of rural Victoria decimated those structures to the point where anger brought political change. Charitable organisations are struggling to provide food vouchers to needy families. Suicide rates among farming families are increasing insidiously. Young people must move away from their towns of birth to have any hope of employment, little though it might be. Social groups have become marginalised as kindergarten has become a luxury that families cannot afford. Families with disabled children desperately queue for respite care, anxiously waiting to hear whether they may be allocated a weekend or even overnight respite.

Your country cousins have had enough — enough marketing, grandstanding and spending in Melbourne. Who needs racing tracks when hospitals close? Who needs a casino when schools must close? With a Labor government at the helm of Parliament, rural Victoria will be heard in Melbourne — not only because Labor holds the most rural seats of any party in Victoria but because it consults with those whose lives will be affected by decisions implemented by legislation.

The electorate of Narracan can be considered the 'Gateway to Gippsland'. It has two main centres: Moe–Newborough and Warragul. The larger of the two, Moe–Newborough, has recently received a large amount of unfair press because of tragic circumstances. It has not given a fair picture of this rural city. It is a city of individuals with enormous strength of spirit and resolve to support one another in times of adversity. Moe–Newborough works extremely hard to continue to develop its community spirit, which is exemplified in the establishment of the Moe development group. Just last week when the *Herald Sun* bike tour travelled to the city an enthusiastic large group was out on a weekday to greet the riders. The crowd gave the cyclists a great welcome and reflected the enormous pride those constituents had in their township and the achievement they saw in the riders having ridden all over Victoria. As one might imagine, the team

sponsored by local businesses was well commended by the home crowd.

Moe–Newborough has the highest rate of unemployment in Victoria, with more than 18 per cent of its residents unemployed. It has also had its efficient hospital closed. But you will not find Moe residents giving up. Unfortunately the previous coalition government did not assist Moe–Newborough to make the most of its assets. With the privatisation of the power industry netting billions of dollars to Victoria, one might ask: has any of it been returned to the Latrobe Valley? The answer is no. Worse than that, the way Victoria's power industry was sold off has meant rural businesses now pay more for their power than metropolitan businesses. Businesses in Moe, such as the Rocklea Spinning Mills, pay more for their power usage than similar businesses in Dandenong. It is difficult for businesses to remain in Moe or for new businesses to be attracted to relocating there when the cost of one of the utilities is so high. Moe is within 5 kilometres of Yallourn W power station. It should have a natural advantage with power, being so close to the source of supply. How could the previous Kennett government get it so wrong?

The other larger centre in Narracan is Warragul, in dairy country. It is the main shopping and service centre for West Gippsland. It is a beautiful rural city. It is well serviced by an array of service clubs, churches and sporting clubs and increasingly provides a haven for commuters who travel to Melbourne to work. Warragul has a well-earned reputation for looking after people with disabilities, with outstanding organisations, including Mawarra and Pindari, providing care over many years.

West Gippsland also provides the backdrop to the gourmet deli trail — a food connoisseur's drive around superb West Gippsland vistas offering tourists fine cheeses, wines, berries, smoked meats, trout, venison and other gourmet products from the region. Labor's commitment to funding the gourmet deli trail demonstrates the need to nurture an excellent program to maximise its potential. The government also realises the importance of nearby possibilities such as those at Tarago Dam at Neerim South and Toorong Falls at Noojee, and plans to fulfil its commitment to fund those proposals. The plans are not an isolated grab bag but part of a well-thought-out plan to promote Narracan as a clean, green food bowl of Gippsland. Walhalla, Erica and Rawson have promoted their tourism potential and are to be encouraged as a unique part of a tourist's itinerary while in Gippsland.

However, the dairy industry is the most important industry in the western end of the electorate. It is under a cloud of uncertainty and unsure of its future, mainly due to issues to be considered with dairy deregulation. We must be careful how we proceed and focus on getting it right this time because we may not have another opportunity in the future. The imminent decision on deregulation is a decision not just for current farmers but, more importantly, for farmers' children and grandchildren and the rural communities they serve. We are blessed with the best dairy farmland in Australia and we cannot treat our dairy farmers the way we did during the green drought that almost sent many in the farming community to the wall.

Towns such as Yarragon, Trafalgar and Thorpdale have struggled under the forced amalgamation of their shires. They have suffered at the hand of local government, which has introduced compulsory competitive tendering and thereby restricted access to local services.

When crowds of unionists demonstrated on the steps of Parliament in late 1992 I felt angry. In my late teens, as a worker at the Drouin butter factory, I had seen the importance of being a member of a union: I saw the last of the old blokes who wandered about the factory doing their allotted tasks with hearing losses that affected their ability to communicate with their loved ones at home; and I saw old blokes who worked with asbestos and developed cancer that would shorten their lifespans.

In those days all the boilers and boiler pipes associated with dairy factories were lined with asbestos. Years later, I saw men whose first job had been at the Drouin butter factory retrenched after 48 years because of a drop in the share market of the parent company. I saw decisions made which disregarded the consequences for workers thousands of kilometres away.

My background as an electrician and union organiser at the dairy factory led me to see the dangers in the workplace — cutbacks in workplace inspectors and reductions in Workcover benefits are a disgrace. I have asbestos in my lungs — a time bomb which I hope will not go off. One of my last and proudest acts at the Drouin butter factory was to have the asbestos removed from the boilers, ensuring future employees would not be subjected to it.

Unfortunately many workers from the power industries in the Latrobe Valley have suffered and died from asbestos-related conditions. Many years ago the union movement lobbied to have asbestos removed. We were told it would not harm members. We must be vigilant to ensure a tragedy like this never occurs again.

Union members who took a day off without pay to walk up Bourke Street to the steps of Parliament in 1992 reminded all Victorians that democracy can be seriously eroded by decisions such as those that resulted in the Workcover legislation. In hindsight, this was the beginning of legislation that restricted democracy to the 'haves, not the have-nots'. I perceived a real change for the worse from this moment on. I felt my anger boil over. What could I do — as a union organiser and a union member — to bring about change for the better?

As an organiser for the Shop Assistants Union my job involved many discussions with employers and members over issues. Without the supportive legislative framework, any discussion with employers was fruitless. At the end of the working week most companies aim to make a profit. Some do so while taking due consideration of a worker's dignity as a human being. However, there are many companies that treat their workers as units, to be moved around and utilised like building blocks in their organisation without any regard for their needs and those of their families.

My union executive, with its state counterparts, was able to improve conditions for union members and lobbied the federal government to restrict the impact of many of the changes implemented by the previous state government through the introduction of federal awards to replace the state awards ripped out from under Victorian workers. Jim Maher, Jo de Bruyne and Michael Donovan worked tirelessly to improve the difficult conditions of Victorian shop assistants under a coalition state government.

The Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Union (SDA), with more than 80 years of heritage, has continually worked in support of shop assistants. I am honoured to be an organiser for a union that values workers — chiefly women workers — and the jobs they do in the paid and unpaid work force. It was the SDA that initially set up the first women's bureau, specifically targeting the needs of women in the work force. It was the SDA that investigated the child-care needs of its workers and lobbied the federal government to introduce the family income supplement. The SDA has supported its members' safety outside the workplace with the introduction of self-defence courses for all members. It provides counselling services to any member who feels emotionally and psychologically in need regardless of whether the cause is outside the work site.

Michael Donovan, the current SDA state secretary, has always worked loyally for the membership and defended its rights in all situations. Michael has been at

the forefront of negotiations that impact dramatically on all workers. His understanding of the difficult responsibilities of many SDA members has ensured a detailed and thorough investigation of any discussion with employers that may intrude on our hard-won awards. He has shown the true meaning of union membership: working together we stand, divided we fall. I will take this thought with me as I work in the parliamentary area.

I decided to stand for Parliament because seven years ago I felt that it was only through legislative reform that Victorian workers could be supported in the paid work force. My philosophy has always been to support and work for others and ultimately to improve the community in which I live. It is a win-win situation. Because I come from a Christian background in the Anglican Church tradition, the catchphrase 'for the common good' is paramount in my mind. There have been many times in my life when, though exhausted, I have felt that the effort put in and the result achieved have made it all worthwhile.

I represent the electorate of Narracan and intend to represent to the best of my ability the constituents in all the towns that encompass Narracan. I would not be here without a support team beside me. The members of that team have contributed skills, talents and time. Without them I would not have had the opportunity to represent the Labor Party in Narracan. It is difficult to include everyone by name, as someone will always be left out. However, at this cost I will name some of the members of the team who assisted me over an 18-month campaign.

Mark Biggs, my campaign manager, was a wonderful organiser, and with a little luck will remain one of my closest friends for life. My wife, Christine, and children Ben, Luke and Kate contributed immensely to my success. I hope they will continue to share the good and the bad times with me. Tony Flynn and the Flynn extended family, Chris Devers, David Wilkinson, Andrew McDonald and Judy McKenzie, worked extremely hard throughout the campaign. Many times the night merged into day for these tireless workers. Moira and Franz Onger were always ready with support and advice whenever it was required. From the western end of the electorate Peter and Tonnie Schipper, Bill and Debbie Wigglesworth, Sandy Komen, Rob and Colleen Crookston, Leon Kahan and Jo McMillan, John McCracken and Denis Parker all contributed, along with many others, to the great success in Narracan. John and Denis particularly know many parts of Gippsland better than most, especially by foot.

The Narracan team would not be complete without the retired accountant, Graham James, who used his accountancy skills to assist me to speak with many small businesses in Narracan. With Graham's assistance I was able to formulate strategies to target individual towns in my electorate. I believe that if the small businesses in towns are promoted and encouraged such assistance will flow on to the communities in which they work. Small business is one of the largest employers of our young people, and if we can support small business there will be opportunities for our children to remain in our towns rather than leave for Melbourne.

I also thank Christian Zahra, the extremely able federal member for McMillan, who is doing great things in his electorate. I had a wonderful team that worked unselfishly to bring Narracan to Labor. However, I take this opportunity to thank those shadow ministers who prior to the state election took it upon themselves to visit the Narracan electorate throughout my campaign to speak with rural constituents. They often came with little notice and spent many hours travelling around the electorate looking at issues such as the food regulations legislation, problems concerning the privatisation of the hospital in the Latrobe Valley, concerns with cutbacks to disability services in the region, the privatisation of nursing homes and the concerns raised by many dairy farmers about deregulation of the industry.

I thank all the former shadow ministers, especially Christine Campbell, John Brumby, Monica Gould and John Thwaites, who came to Narracan time after time showing their support for me and the electorate. I will not forget the faith shown in me by my family, friends and the Australian Labor Party, but most importantly by the electors of Narracan, who have given me the honour to represent them. I will repay their faith by ensuring Narracan is well represented within this house and throughout Victoria.

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — Before I make my contribution to the address-in-reply debate I congratulate Mr Speaker on his elevation to high office, and I also congratulate you, Mr Acting Speaker, on your appointment. I pay tribute to the work of the Governor Sir James Gobbo and Lady Gobbo. Having worked closely with His Excellency as minister I congratulate him on the superb job that he and Lady Gobbo have done in the exercise of their official duties.

I also touch on a theme that many women members have touched on and comment on the good trend toward an increase in the number of women in this chamber. In the last Parliament there were a total of 17 women in the Legislative Assembly, including

1 Independent. That number has now grown to 21. All change is incremental, and change on this issue is slow. The parties have different approaches to assisting women to come into this chamber in particular — the chamber of government — and I do not wish the opportunity to pass without noting my pleasure in seeing another incremental change in the numbers of women here.

I have a number of concerns about the minority Labor government's platform as outlined in the Governor's speech. I am particularly concerned about the 12-page catalogue of strong-spending promises the government has set out. It includes just one line about a commitment to maintaining a surplus, which I hope is not just a throwaway line. I am not saying for one moment the spending commitments are not justified. Viewed on a case-by-case basis many are very worthwhile projects, but ultimately governments have to balance budgets. At a minimum the minority Labor government has committed to a surplus, and the opposition will be holding it to account to ensure it achieves that surplus.

I am also concerned, particularly given that Labor was elected on a platform of open accountable government — again a theme that was reiterated in the Governor's speech and in the government's response to the Independents — that that commitment is proving to be a sham, in particular on the issue of financial reporting. I am also concerned that the minority Labor government appears to have walked away from the taxation commitments in the election promises it reiterated most forcefully to the business community. There is no mention of these tax commitments. I contend to the house at this early stage that the minority Labor government has walked away from its taxation promises.

It is interesting to note what the Labor government inherited when it came into office and compare it with what the coalition government inherited in 1992. The coalition government inherited a \$2 billion deficit and a \$32 billion debt, and recurrent expenditure was being financed by borrowings. It inherited a particularly bad state of finances from its predecessor, the Cain-Kirner government. By contrast, in 1999 the minority Labor government has inherited a strong state, not only in terms of budgetary management or economic confidence — jobs and all the accompanying economic conditions — but also a state with a budget surplus, something the previous government did not even get within cooe of inheriting. It is an undefined surplus at this stage, but it is a surplus nonetheless.

The minority Labor government has also inherited a more beneficial situation for Victorians in that state debt has been reduced from the \$32 billion inherited by the coalition government to \$6 billion. In terms of the impact on services in Victoria, the reduction in state debt from \$32 billion to \$6 billion enabled the former government to contribute \$800 million per annum to services or debt reduction. It is one of the great Kennett legacies, yet there was a fundamental failure by the ALP in opposition to recognise that debt reduction and debt servicing costs impact directly on the recurrent budget.

During my time as a minister I noted that members of the Labor Party seemed to think that debt reduction was unrelated to the management of the budget, whereas the high debt-servicing charges that the coalition government inherited were responsible for eroding the basis of the recurrent budget. The lack of understanding about the impact of, for example, a AAA credit rating and the impact of debt-servicing charges on the recurrent budget has translated itself into a spending culture in the new minority Labor government. As I said, the Governor's speech was 12 pages of spending commitments, with one line about a commitment to an operating surplus and absolutely no mention at all about the tax reductions the Labor Party promised during the election campaign.

That should come as no surprise to us, however. After all, the ALP has a grand tradition of economic incompetence, whether it be under Gough Whitlam, John Cain or Joan Kirner. The ALP is a master at running the budget dry, running a state into debt and spending on commitments that it cannot finance. The opposition will scrutinise very carefully the minority Labor government's commitments on spending and taxation — which it appears to have walked away from — and it will draw that regularly to the attention of the house.

I turn now to the undefined surplus and I will discuss two surpluses: the 1988–99 surplus and the 1999–2000 surplus. In the months to come I am sure they will be the focus of considerable media and public attention. The former government's Budget Statement 1999–2000, Budget Paper No. 2, shows at page 188 that initially the 1998–99 surplus was factored in at \$550 million and revised to \$769 million. That was the former government's best estimate so far of the surplus for the previous financial year.

The 1999–2000 surplus has been the subject of much speculation by people on both sides of politics. At page 29 of its budget documentation the former government projected that surplus as being of the order

of \$129 million. However, it is the opposition's belief that that figure will be greater.

I shall say a few more words about the 1998–99 surplus because that is where the minority Labor government has walked away from its promise to be open and accountable. The Victorian Parliament has a requirement that the government table an annual financial statement. The annual financial statement that by law should have been tabled last Wednesday would tell us what is the surplus for the year 1998–99. It is the right of the Parliament to know what that surplus is — that is, what surplus the Kennett government left for the minority Labor government. More importantly, the law actually provides that the documentation should have been tabled in this house last Wednesday.

So much for honest and accountable government and a raft of promises about the minority Labor government's financial transparency and a commitment to table half-yearly financial statements. As I said, under law the annual financial statement should have been tabled in this chamber last Wednesday, but the minority Labor government, including the Premier and Treasurer, have failed to be accountable and abide by the law.

Mr McArthur — What are they ducking?

Ms ASHER — I think they are hiding a very healthy surplus!

Section 27 of the Financial Management Act requires the Premier and Treasurer to table that documentation. It will show what is the surplus, whether it is less or greater than the projection and whether revenues have increased. It will make a statement about the budgetary position of the state. It is absolutely inconceivable that members of a party who spoke so much about accountability and transparency — particularly financial transparency — have failed to table the basic documentation required by law.

Mr Baillieu — They have just reverted to type.

Ms ASHER — Indeed. The 1999–2000 surplus is another issue. As I indicated earlier, the former government projected it to come in at \$129 million. It is our guess that there may well be an additional \$300 million. I go back to my earlier point — that is, contrasting the appalling financial management and circumstances that the coalition inherited when it was elected to government in 1992 with the absolutely brilliant financial record that the minority ALP government has inherited in 1999.

The Governor's speech made a passing reference to a commitment to surplus over four years. In its election

campaign the Labor Party committed to an operating surplus over its first four years in government. Labor's budget statement released during the election campaign committed to a surplus in 1999–2000 of \$101 million; in the following year, \$328 million; the year after that, \$321 million; and the year after that, \$239 million. Indeed, the other day the Premier and Treasurer indicated in the house that he thought he would be able to exceed those surplus targets. However, it is particularly interesting that the opposition's calculation of the spending commitments released during the election campaign is that \$2.5 billion of spending promises were made by the ALP at the same time as it was making a commitment to maintain an operating surplus.

My additional concern is about state taxation. I turn to commitments on state taxation made by the ALP during the election campaign. Again I refer to a document entitled 'Financial Responsibility: Getting the budget basics right', authorised by Steve Bracks, then Leader of the Opposition. I quote from that ALP campaign document under the subheading of 'Labor's plan for financial and economic management':

... the task for Labor in government will be to secure the future strength of the finances of the state and to make certain that fair, open and accountable processes are in place.

Government Members — Hear, hear.

Ms ASHER — I am absolutely delighted that members of the minority Labor government agree with that statement because the fair, open and accountable processes — for example, the tabling of the annual financial statement — have not occurred. That demonstrates that words are one thing and actions in government — particularly from this government — are quite different. The ALP promise goes on:

... this means the government taking Victorians into its confidence by open and accountable reporting of budgets, contracts and finances generally.

I keep making the very important point that the annual statement indicating where the tax revenue has increased and the state of fiscal management in Victoria that is required by law to be tabled has not been tabled by the Premier and Treasurer.

In terms of taxation, again I refer to the document:

Our state's taxes and charges are much too high — now \$314 million higher than the national average.

During the election campaign much was made of that. The policy document makes an oblique reference to cutting payroll tax:

Whilst Labor's financial management policy does not allow any immediate change in payroll tax rates, we will work with peak employer groups and unions to examine long-term options for reducing payroll tax directly tied to the real jobs created by the private sector.

However, that reference to taxes being too high and to the possibility of a payroll tax cut became much stronger when the then Leader of the Opposition and current Premier addressed the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) on Thursday, 22 July 1999. He obviously had a rush of blood to the head when addressing a genuine business audience. I quote from the transcript of that speech:

... the fiscal policy involved in there requires a substantial operating surplus on every budget that a Labor government brings down in future. It requires taxes and charges to be pegged to the national average. As you're probably aware, in Victoria, for example, taxes and charges and fees and fines are about \$330 million over the average of the other Australian states and that's risen in the last budget. Now we want to peg it and make sure it's roughly equivalent to the average in Australia.

In my language, that is a very clear political commitment to CEDA of a \$330 million tax cut by the minority Labor government. Indeed the Premier and Treasurer was far more forceful on a payroll tax cut. Again the opposition can speak with some authority on the matter because the former coalition government cut payroll tax in its last three successive budgets. The Premier and Treasurer said:

We will reduce payroll tax over time ...

That is a very strong commitment to the business community, and the opposition will be looking to ensure that that commitment is honoured.

I have a number of very serious concerns. Although the minority Labor government's policies were costed by Access Economics, it is important to know what data Access Economics was given. For example, in February, the then Leader of the Opposition promised tertiary students cheaper concession cards at an estimated cost of \$16 million, but that figure was not given to Access Economics. The opposition will be scouring the Access Economics costings. As I said, they are only as good as the data given to Access Economics by the minority Labor government.

The minority Labor government is old Labor. Its members are in favour of everything. On the one hand, they have made spending commitments of \$2.5 billion — the Governor's speech is 12 pages of very expensive spending commitments. On the other hand, the Premier and Treasurer has promised to CEDA that the government will provide \$300 million of tax cuts, including a payroll tax cut. Yet another feature of

the government is that large budget surpluses have been promised, and already the Premier and Treasurer has indicated in this chamber that he believes he can exceed the surplus he promised in his election commitments. Labor also promised to reduce debt. Indeed, its policy was that the surplus would be used partly for infrastructure and partly for debt reduction.

The Premier and Treasurer is showing all the flair he showed when he advised Premiers Cain and Kirner. He is committed to a surplus, to \$2.5 billion of spending, \$300 million in tax cuts, and to debt reduction. He is committed to everything simultaneously, not understanding that there is give and take on such matters. Ultimately the objective is surely to be responsible.

I call on the Premier and Treasurer to table the annual financial statement he was required to table under law as his first step to honouring his promise of open and accountable financial transactions as part of a minority Labor government. The coalition government left this state in a very sound financial condition and it wants to know the precise figures on that. It is our legal right and the right of the public to know them. In the first financial act perpetrated by the Premier and Treasurer, he has broken the law but, more importantly, he has broken his commitment to transparency.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Loney) — Order! Before calling the honourable member for Carrum, I remind honourable members that this is an inaugural speech and should be granted the customary courtesy given to such speeches.

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — I support the motion, and I ask you, Mr Acting Speaker, to pass on to the Speaker my congratulations on his election to his new parliamentary office and my best wishes in the challenge of keeping order in this place.

I take this opportunity of thanking the electors of Carrum for electing me as their parliamentary representative and assuring them that I am very conscious of both the honour and the responsibility they have given me.

As I stand here looking forward to the next four years of the Bracks government — which will restore openness and decency to government in Victoria and which is committed to addressing large class sizes in our schools and excessive waiting times in our hospital accident and emergency departments and to providing our police force with more personnel to ensure effective policing in our communities — I acknowledge the Labor members who have served the people of Carrum

in this place before me. In acknowledging the contribution made by Ian Cathie and Mal Sandon to Victoria in general and the people of the Carrum electorate in particular, I acknowledge also their support, advice and friendship that they have so freely given me in my endeavour to follow them here.

Ian Cathie served as the member for Carrum from 1976 until his retirement in 1992. In 1985 he became the Minister for Education, and in that capacity he oversaw the introduction of the Victorian Certificate of Education. Ian was educated at Wesley College and he is quoted in the *Herald* as saying on 20 March 1985:

I think it's important for parents to have a choice, and equally, I think it's important the state system is the best we can make it.

I share that view of education. Having been educated at St Joseph's Primary School and Killester Catholic Girls College in Springvale, I know first hand of the sacrifices my parents made to educate their seven children in the Catholic education system. My choice is to educate my children in the state system, and I am committed to ensuring that they have access to the highest quality education. I have served on both primary and secondary school councils, and I know first hand the dire effects of the former government's decision to spend less per head on schools than any other state. My children and their friends have been pupils in classes of 32 and 33 students. Friends and neighbours have seen their children become statistics as the number of students completing year 12 has fallen.

Mal Sandon has been my friend, mentor and employer. Equity and social justice were the tenets on which he built his contribution to public life. In his inaugural speech in 1982 Mal raised issues that he sought to redress during his time as the member for Carrum — poverty, the rights of women and the pollution of Port Phillip. As Minister for Police and Emergency Services Mal set himself to addressing the right of women to safety and security. The Violence is Ugly campaign made domestic violence and violence against women more generally a mainstream issue and we became aware that all of us were responsible for it.

From both Ian Cathie and Mal Sandon I have learnt that effective representation can make a difference to the lives of the people we represent and to the social fabric that weaves our communities together. That representation argues, regardless of the political flavour of the government of the day, for the best in service provision and delivery, insists that the necessary infrastructure is provided, and acknowledges that government policy is failing the people when it does so. That is the legacy of the Labor representation of the

electorate of Carrum and it is the high bar by which I will judge myself and by which others will judge me.

The western boundary of the electorate of Carrum is made up of 16 kilometres of Port Phillip. It is a unifying feature of a very diverse electorate. From Warrigal Road in Mentone, along the Nepean Highway through Mordialloc, Aspendale, Edithvale, Chelsea and Carrum to Seaford Road, Seaford, you can catch a glimpse of water as you drive along. You cross the Mordialloc Creek and the Patterson River, and Kananook Creek meanders just inland of the Nepean Highway through Seaford. All those important waterways present their own mix of opportunities and challenges.

The foreshore, the bay and the waterways that drain into them present many opportunities and challenges for all Victorians, but for those of us who live alongside the water's edge those opportunities and challenges impact daily on our lives. For many people recreation is water based, and that stretch of foreshore boasts lifesaving, sailing and rowing clubs as well as yacht, motorboat and canoe clubs. It has fishing clubs and marinas, boat builders and hirers, as well as places to launch and moor. In fact, the Carrum Coast Guard launches from Patterson River.

The area boasts the internationally important Edithvale–Seaford Wetlands. Living in the electorate you come to cherish the natural environment. The challenge for all is to find the balance between public access and enjoyment of the foreshore and its environs, and the preservation of our magnificent beaches and wetlands.

New housing developments along the Wells Road corridor where parts of the degraded Carrum Carrum Swamp are being regenerated show how development that includes a commitment to improving our natural environment can deliver very positive outcomes. I acknowledge the voluntary work and commitment of the Friends of Edithvale–Seaford Wetlands to the task of regenerating the degraded wetlands system.

Our natural environment is a unifying feature of a diverse area. The area is extremely broad socioeconomically, with areas of considerable affluence along the beachfront and in Patterson Lakes, with water access to Port Phillip. However, pockets of Chelsea, Carrum and Seaford are areas of very low income that have seen nothing of the much-promised social dividend that was so callously promoted by the former government.

During the election campaign a number of commitments were made to the Victorian people. The

Governor has outlined in his speech the legislative program that the Bracks government will introduce in this Parliament. The program was fully costed and presented to the people of Victoria, who supported it by a majority of votes, so it has been mandated by them. Much of it, particularly the legislation relating to the office and powers of the Auditor-General, was supported by the former Premier in his response to the Independents charter. The full powers and independence of the Auditor-General will be restored by the repeal of the Audit (Amendment) Act 1997 and the enshrining of the independence of the Auditor-General in the Victorian constitution.

The Freedom of Information Act will be revised to ensure that Victorians have appropriate access to public documents. Legislation will be introduced to establish an essential service commission. The independence of the Director of Public Prosecutions will be restored. Already a bill to amend the Local Government Act to provide increased powers and autonomy for local councils has been introduced. Compulsory competitive tendering will be abolished. The passage of that raft of legislation will restore the checks and balances that protect our democracy and keep governments honest. It will provide open and accountable government and encourage full participation of communities in decision making.

During the election campaign the people of Carrum were given specific commitments that formed part of Labor's broad agenda. Labor committed to govern through a new partnership between the people and their government. I am proud to represent the people of Carrum in this new partnership and look forward to participating in decent and accountable government that keeps its word and delivers on its commitments.

Particular commitments given during the election campaign which will reverse the decline in the provision of health and community services for the people of the Carrum electorate include the allocation of 64 additional beds at Frankston Hospital and the restoration of an elected board of management for the Central Bayside Community Health Centre.

The decision by the former government to spend less per head on schools than any other state has seen class sizes grow and retention rates fall. It has also seen new housing areas denied the provision of new schools as a result of changing criteria and a move away from the neighbourhood schools that parents and children need as a focus for community life. In building the Aspendale Gardens primary school in its first term, the government will put a stop to children travelling many kilometres a day to access their schooling. It will also

mean that all the children wishing to attend the Edithvale Primary School — and who actually live in Edithvale — will be able to attend that very fine school. At this stage I thank the honourable member for Mordialloc for his help in my election campaign in the Aspendale Gardens area!

All children in their early years of schooling will benefit from Labor's commitment to cut class sizes for grades prep, 1 and 2 to 21 or fewer. It will lead to better educational opportunities for young families with children at all primary schools within the Carrum electorate.

Labor recognises the importance of both the Dingley bypass and the extension of the Mornington Peninsula Freeway to the long-term future of the south-eastern and bayside suburbs and has committed to commence a 10-year program to ensure that both those roads are constructed. The government will work with the City of Kingston to develop an agreed program of works to ensure the earliest possible relief is provided to traffic conditions throughout Mordialloc and the Wells Road corridor. Unlike the previous government that promised to build the Dingley bypass but did not do so, the Bracks government will deliver on its election commitments.

Labor has also committed to building a pedestrian bridge over the Patterson River at Wells Road. It will provide a safer pedestrian and bicycle connection from the new Harbour Town development and Patterson Lakes proper with its schools and shopping centre. Importantly, height controls on the foreshore will prevent inappropriate development and safeguard public access to our beaches.

The provision of 800 more police officers will result in better and more visible policing in our community and our police will be provided with decent working conditions. Mordialloc will be provided with a new police station building — many years too late and highlighting another broken promise of the former government.

In closing, once again I thank the electors of Carrum for selecting me as their representative. I look forward to playing my part in delivering the legislative program that will restore the decency and openness to government, which was supported by the people of Carrum at the state election.

I also thank the Australian Labor Party for giving me the opportunity to stand as a Labor candidate. To the women of Bayside Labor Women's Network — thank you for your support and encouragement. To the Labor

Party members and supporters in Carrum — my deepest and most sincere thanks; thank you for your support and friendship so readily given and your determination to return a Labor member that has meant a long and onerous commitment. As in all campaigns, the tasks were not evenly distributed. For taking on more than I could reasonably ask, I am indebted to Kevin Howlett, my campaign manager, who allowed his life to be totally consumed during the campaign, and to Mark and Gloria Ford for allowing their house to be overtaken on an ongoing basis before and during the election campaign.

To my friend and past employer, Senator Jacinta Collins, I offer my heartfelt thanks and appreciation. Your generosity of spirit and understanding of the difficult task I had taken on made it possible for me to balance my work, family and ambitions. I wish you every success — personally with the arrival of your second child in the new year and professionally in continuing to advance your career in federal Parliament.

To my parents, Jack and Doris Colwell, thank you for your constant love and support. Thank you for providing me with the example of community participation and involvement that was always evident as I grew up.

Finally, thank you to my three best friends: my son, Simon, whose love, care and concern I can always rely upon; Jessica, whose generosity and love always lifts my spirit; and Roland, whose love and support provide me with the personal foundation that has made my achievement possible.

I am honoured to have been elected by the people of Carrum. My commitment to them is to be accessible and willing to represent their interests and to work hard and honestly on their behalf.

Mr SPRY (Bellarine) — I am pleased to stand in this chamber representing the people of Bellarine electorate in the debate in response to the Governor's speech.

I echo the words of my colleague the honourable member for Dromana when he commended previous speakers, particularly those making their maiden speeches, on the calibre of their contributions. In spite of the fact that those speeches sometimes get a little emotional, the contributions new members have made have been worthy and augur well for the standard of debate in the future.

I am pleased also to have the opportunity to review and reflect on the performance of the previous government

and its effect on Victoria and, more particularly, on my electorate of Bellarine. I shall also comment on the new minority Labor government, its dependence on the support of the Independents and the effect its agenda is likely to have on the electorate I represent.

Before I go down that track, I wish to thank the people of Bellarine for the confidence they have shown in my representation of their interests. Those interests are both broad and small; they are interests that come to my attention on an individual basis and they reflect the dynamics an electorate such as Bellarine can look towards in the future.

In terms of my re-election by the people of Bellarine to represent them, I shall reflect on the work my electorate officers have done on behalf of the electorate. I have now had five electorate officers. The representation they have provided for me in delivering to the people of Bellarine their expectations and in assisting me to address the needs of the electorate has been outstanding, and I thank them. Two officers have now left — Heather Blair and Robert Barber have gone on to different things. My three current electorate officers are Jenelle Downey, Martelle Love and Darylin Ramondo, and I cannot thank them enough. The number of times people come into my office and comment on the service they get from those officers is extraordinary. On behalf of the people of Bellarine, I place on record my thanks to those five staff.

It is fair to say that the results of the state election were unexpected. However, members of the Liberal Party accept that decision, as other speakers have already said, and will provide a robust and cohesive opposition that will keep the government on its toes for the ensuing years, or for however long it manages to survive.

It is also fair to say that Parliament now hangs in the balance and is governed at the pleasure of the Independents. That comment was essentially made by the Governor in his speech. The thread that binds the Independents and the government is the Independents Charter Victoria 1999, which confirms that the Independents are prepared to support the minority Labor government while it pledges, among other things, to improve the democratic operation of Parliament.

The Independents' first test on that came during the debate on sessional orders, which took place in this house last Thursday. In my view, regrettably, the Independents failed that test. The new sessional orders are designed to enable the government to veto debate on such issues as matters of public importance and private members' bills. That is the very thing I would

have expected the Independents to resist at all costs, and I am certain the Victorian electorate would feel the same.

Ms Davies interjected.

Mr SPRY — The honourable member for Gippsland West is interjecting. It will be interesting to observe the actions of the Independents in this place as the sitting progresses to see whether they are prepared to hold the government to the spirit of their charter or whether they will simply acquiesce and support the government on every issue.

The seven years of coalition government in Victoria — the Kennett years — have been a remarkable experience. There was never a dull moment in this chamber and beyond. In 1992 the challenge was enormous. Victoria was a state in virtual economic collapse. Two points made by the shadow Treasurer are worth repeating: firstly, in 1992 hard core debt was \$32 billion with about the same amount in unfunded liabilities; and, secondly, in the same year the Labor Party brought down a budget with a \$2 billion deficit and borrowed to pay interest and salaries. That was the legacy of the Cain–Kirner government, and the people of Victoria clearly expressed at the ballot box that they had had enough.

Regardless of personalities and of likes and dislikes, the achievements of Victorians — I say 'Victorians' because we all shared it — under seven years of coalition government brought about a stunning reversal of fortune. Regardless of the knockers, including the honourable member for Gippsland West, history will record the success of those years.

I shall refer to a number of achievements of the Kennett government, which has handed the minority Labor government a gift-wrapped state. Victoria is now totally restored and functioning extremely well. Members of the Labor Party must have felt that the coalition government was something of a Father Christmas.

The first thing the Kennett government delivered was financial stability. The sorts of services the current government has committed to cannot be delivered without the dollars. The former coalition government restored the state's coffers, and no-one can deny that. As the shadow Treasurer said earlier, hard-core debt was reduced from \$32 billion to between \$5 billion and \$6 billion, an extraordinary achievement. Victoria's AAA credit rating has been restored, and that has had a huge impact on interest payments and the borrowings the state has had to undertake. Above all, the coalition government created a stable environment for private

investors to be attracted back to Victoria. Investment in this state over the past seven years has delivered unprecedented growth in jobs.

Another feature of the previous coalition government was restoring to Victoria a recognition of its place in the world. In a decade of unparalleled, rapid global change Victoria has embraced the challenge of competition, particularly in the areas of high-tech industries, including communications, information technology, science and engineering.

Under a conservative government Victoria met the challenge of change with courage and absolute, decisive leadership. During that period Victorians were entitled to feel individually and collectively extremely proud of their achievements. No matter what the Labor Party says, the record of the past seven years can never be erased.

I shall now refer to achievements at the local level. The focus of attention in the electorate of Bellarine is the City of Greater Geelong, despite the fact that most of Geelong is not in the electorate. Nevertheless, people who live in the areas around Geelong focus on that city for activities and services such as the arts, major retail, major events and the education facilities of Deakin University and the Gordon Institute of TAFE, for which I have the privilege of serving as a council member. I have enjoyed that involvement enormously over the past five or six years. I have seen the institute expand under the guidance of the former coalition government and produce results for that region that are second to none in terms of technical and further education.

In addition, the acute health service facilities at the Geelong Hospital have been upgraded, extraordinary development has taken place on the waterfront and the International Fibre Centre at the Deakin University campus has been built and commissioned. Extraordinary advances have been made in the three electorates surrounding the Geelong area — namely, Bellarine; South Barwon, represented by my Liberal Party colleague; and your electorate, Mr Acting Speaker, Geelong North. In addition to the efforts of the lower house members are the efforts of my upper house colleagues, one of whom has now sadly departed while the other continues to answer the call of the electorate.

The most extraordinary advance which has occurred in the Bellarine electorate and which will have the biggest impact in both the short and long term is the relocation of the highly respected Bellarine Secondary College from the centre of Queenscliff into central Bellarine to better service the rapidly growing areas of Ocean Grove

and Collendina on the surf side of the electorate and Drysdale and Clifton Springs on the bay side. It is the biggest piece of social infrastructure that has been put in the Bellarine electorate in many decades. It was introduced by the coalition government soon after it came to office in 1992 after a decade of inaction by the former Labor government.

I shall now refer to health. The Bellarine Peninsula Community Health Service was the first such service to be introduced anywhere across the length and breadth of Australia. It was in danger of losing its identity, but with my assistance and the heavy involvement of the honourable member for Malvern, the former parliamentary secretary for health, the independence of the service has been guaranteed. I am sure that will continue under the current government. That service complements the acute health services at the Geelong Hospital that I mentioned earlier.

The coalition government was about to spend \$3.6 million on a primary health care service to cater for the needs of the residents of Whittington, Newcomb and Moolap. I trust that that initiative will proceed. Confirmation is yet to be given on that, but if sanity prevails the government will honour that commitment.

Law and order was an issue at the centre of attention during the election campaign. It is never easy to provide services for scattered population centres such as those on the Bellarine Peninsula. Four or five major townships in Bellarine range in population from a couple of thousand to 10 000. The fact is sometimes ignored that townships such as Ocean Grove, Clifton Springs, Collendina and Drysdale have populations equalling more recognised townships such as Echuca and Portland. Those little townships are extremely significant. Nevertheless, because of their scattered nature they are very hard to service in terms of public transport and law and order.

During the election campaign it was interesting to note the commitment of the Labor Party to law and order. It said not only that it would maintain the four existing police stations on one end of the Bellarine Peninsula but that it would somehow also establish a 24-hour police station. I wonder whether that has been properly costed by Access Economics and whether the government has any idea of the numbers of police officers required to man those stations. I am told that between 35 and 40 police officers will be required to man a 24-hour police station. If the four existing stations are not to be lost, it will be a remarkable achievement if the 24-hour station is established. The people of Bellarine would love to see that, and I wish

the government well in trying to implement that election promise.

It was interesting to hear the Minister for Education describe last night the former coalition government's election commitments as confetti. I suggest the marginal seat of Bellarine must now be the bride of the year if one takes into account the confetti that was strategically and cleverly scattered throughout the electorate in the Labor Party's pre-election promises. Some \$6 million-worth of confetti was scattered, and I hope those commitments can be met. I have already mentioned the 24-hour police station and there is also the promise of gas for Portarlington, Indented Head and St Leonards. In the minds of the people of Bellarine it is not a question of whether that will be delivered but when it will be delivered. There is an expectation that gas may be switched on in time for next winter, and that is an expectation I urge the government to meet.

The government promised \$3 million for the permanent upgrade of the years 7 to 8 campus at Ocean Grove. I am pleased that that was confirmed by the new Minister for Education last week when the matter was raised during the adjournment debate.

Although it has not yet been confirmed, the Labor Party promised to upgrade the Leopold Indoor Neighbourhood Centre. I notice the new member for Ballarat East grinning; I believe his family had something to do with the Leopold community in times gone by. I hope that commitment will be honoured by the government.

I could go on to mention many other things. However, in view of the time I will conclude with these remarks. The government has promised much in Bellarine; in fact, it has committed approximately \$6 million. I hope that expenditure has been approved by Access Economics. My upper house Liberal colleague and I will be working very hard to ensure that those promises are delivered not just in time for the next election but now, when the people of Bellarine need them.

Debate interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Drugs: safe injecting facilities

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — Given written departmental advice that it will cost \$890 000 per year in running costs alone to provide appropriate medical, welfare and security services at each supervised injecting facility, will the Premier now

confirm that his drug policy, which earmarks just \$300 000 per year per facility, is massively underfunded and that the minority Labor government plans to establish nothing more than basic shooting galleries without having the necessary fundamental supports in place?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — The government has a fully funded and costed package of \$20 million for its drugs policy. The matters raised by the honourable member will be addressed by the expert committee that has been set up by Dr Penington. All matters, including costing and implementation, legal, local government and medical considerations will be examined as part of that process. The government has a full capacity, with its \$20-million package, to ensure that the matter is fully funded and receives the attention it deserves.

Auditor-General: office

Mr LENDERS (Dandenong North) — Will the Premier inform the house of the true budget cost of breaking up the Victorian Auditor-General's Office by the previous government?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — The Parliamentary Secretary for Treasury and Finance has a keen interest in the Auditor-General's office. As honourable members would be aware, prior to 1997 the Auditor-General's office undertook all performance and compliance audits for the then government. At that time the actual costs and expenditures of that office were \$20.5 million.

In December 1997 the former government amended the Audit Act. It split the functions of the Auditor-General, and Audit Victoria was established. Not only did that neuter and silence the Auditor-General, it also cost Victorian taxpayers an enormous amount of money. In 1998–99 an additional \$5.6 million had to be provided to Audit Victoria to divide up the office and neuter and silence the Auditor-General. In the same year a budget supplementation of \$4.2 million had to be provided to the Auditor-General's office to meet the extra requirements of splitting the office into two. That was to cover — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRACKS — I welcome the interjection, Mr Speaker, because that was to cover — —

The SPEAKER — Order! Interjections are disorderly and should be ignored.

Mr BRACKS — Indeed they are. I will ignore them, Mr Speaker.

That additional funding covered the costs of separation packages, accommodation, and — most of all — increased contractual arrangements because of the Audit Victoria establishment. An additional \$9.8 million of taxpayers' money was spent to establish the failed Audit Victoria experiment.

But it does not stop there. During the current financial year a further capital injection of \$5 million was required because the \$9.8 million was not enough to make the change. That took the total to \$14.8 million of spending on the failed experiment, which even the opposition now admits has failed.

Additionally, prior to the election there was an agreement at officer level to supplement the Auditor-General's office by a further \$3.1 million, so the total cost to the taxpayers of Victoria is \$17.9 million. That is what the former government sank into what it concedes was a failed experiment. When it comes to a choice between spending \$17.9 million on health, education or police and silencing its critics, the government knows what the opposition is about — the funds will go to silencing critics every time.

I have asked the Department of Treasury and Finance to examine the costs to see what can be recovered. Preliminary work has been undertaken, and my understanding is that about \$8 million of the lost \$17.9 million can be recovered in forward estimates.

I will be ensuring that in restoring democracy to this state the government will do it efficiently and well. It will not be entering into privatisation experiments such as the former government's failed experiment with the Auditor-General, which did not work and which cost Victorians \$17.9 million. The government will restore democracy within budget and within a proper budget framework.

Police: chief commissioner

Mr RYAN (Gippsland South) — Does the Minister for Police and Emergency Services have total confidence in the Chief Commissioner of Police?

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — The answer to that question is a lengthy yes.

Independents charter: freedom of speech

Ms DAVIES (Gippsland West) — In view of the fact that people on government contracts and in the public service are still telling me that they have been instructed not to talk to members of the public and members of Parliament, in particular about past events,

will the Premier reassure Victorians that the right to freedom of speech has finally been returned to them as per the Independents charter?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — The honourable member for Gippsland West has had a longstanding interest on behalf of her community in this matter, as distinct from Liberal and National Party members, who have had no regard for freedom of speech in this place or outside it. There are three clear matters in the Independents charter that the government will adhere to, address and implement.

Firstly, the government will abolish the teaching standing orders that silence teachers on matters of education policy. Secondly, it will abolish clauses in funding contracts that require silence from the organisations receiving funding, resulting in their being unable to speak up on their own behalf or on behalf of their communities. Those clauses in the contracts will be struck out, and the community organisations funded by government will be able to speak freely and openly in the future.

Thirdly, the government will introduce legislation to protect whistleblowers in the public sector and in the Victorian community. It will not persecute those whistleblowers, as the National and Liberal parties did previously. The government will not hound them and will enable them to speak up. We want public servants who witness corruption, maladministration or waste to speak up on behalf of the public. They will speak up under this government; they will not be silenced.

I look forward to implementing those initiatives to bring about a more open and democratic Victoria — a Victoria where free speech and democracy are the hallmarks of the new government.

Drugs: safe injecting facilities

Ms BURKE (Pahran) — Given the difference of opinion between the Premier and the Deputy Premier about local government's right to veto the locations of heroin shooting galleries, I ask the Minister for Local Government to explain to the house whether he will —

Government members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the government benches to come to order and allow the honourable member for Pahran to ask her question.

Ms BURKE — Will the minister provide an assurance to the house that local councils will have the power to veto the locations of shooting galleries?

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Local Government) — I thank the honourable member for Prahran for the opportunity to reinforce the government's commitment in this matter yet again.

The government is determined to tackle the drug problem, and as a consequence of that it will cooperate and work with local communities and councils.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr CAMERON — I always thought the honourable member for Prahran was one of the more sensible and caring members of the house and was prepared to be socially progressive. Drugs are an enormous problem in her electorate, and it is extremely disappointing to see her and the members opposite try to politicise this sensitive issue. The government will cooperate with local communities and local government on this particularly sensitive issue.

Federation Square

Mr WYNNE (Richmond) — I ask the Minister for Major Projects and Tourism to provide details to the house of the true financial state of the Federation Square project.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Major Projects and Tourism) — I thank the honourable member for Richmond for his question. He has taken a keen interest in many of the projects that were very much associated with former Premier Kennett and his government.

This project has been plagued with delays and financial blow-outs. The previous government rushed the project through and increased its scope from day one without considering the full financial cost or other implications to the community.

In 1996, when the concept stage of Federation Square was announced, the public was told that it would cost \$124 million. In June 1998, when the project was rescoped, the figure given to the public was \$220 million. In September 1998, following further adjustments, the cost had blown out to \$235 million. I am now advised that as at November 1999 the cost has blown out to \$262.6 million. Time and again we have seen blow-out after blow-out.

The federal government has committed \$50 million, which we have not yet received but which is needed as soon as possible to pay some of the bills. The Melbourne City Council has committed \$64 million, and the state government has to pick up the rest of the tab. The \$27.6 million increase is the latest in a series of

blow-outs. As the minister responsible for major projects I am concerned about the continual blow-outs and what they will mean for Victorian taxpayers.

It is important for the new Bracks Labor government to inform the public about the true status of projects of this sort and the state's financial obligations in completing them.

The reasons for the blow-outs include a reluctance by industry to take the risk on a number of the project's key design elements, including the facade and the roof, which resulted in higher-than-budgeted tender prices, as well as necessary changes to the tendered deck design to accommodate the finalised design of the primary cultural buildings, such as the Museum of Australian Art and Cinemedia. According to media reports, many of which came out today, the reasons for the delays include the Exhibition Street extension of the City Link project, which has had a financial impact on the project.

The government is performing all of its contractual obligations for the project and is also instructing the Office of Major Projects to prepare a management plan to minimise the chance of a further cost blow-out on the project in the future.

The government inherited the project, and it is committed to it. We are not about ripping up contracts. We looked at the details of the contracts, which reveal that the government is financially and contractually obligated to the project. However, the government is not a money tree that can keep forking out more money as the project cost continues to blow out.

The project is not yet even 40 per cent complete, yet the latest blow-out adds an additional \$27.6 million to its cost. The government is committed to finding out the details and minimising the cost to the public.

The government will report to Parliament on its progress in the future.

Dairy industry: deregulation

Mr McNAMARA (Leader of the National Party) — Because interstate trade in fresh milk is inevitable, given that section 92 of the Australian constitution provides for free trade between the states, I ask the Minister for Agriculture whether he will confirm that Victorian dairy farmers stand to lose \$740 million from the commonwealth compensation package unless the Victorian government supports dairy industry reform.

Mr HAMILTON (Minister for Agriculture) — That question is not very becoming of a former Minister for Agriculture. The former minister has, in his

own words, said in effect that he does not believe in giving the constituent dairy farmers of this state their democratic right to have a say.

It needs to be said on the record, and I am disappointed that the former minister did not do so himself, that the \$1.8 billion said to be a federal government package is in fact not a federal government package at all but an amount to be raised indirectly from the consumers of dairy products in Victoria. The myth that the federal government has in some way contributed to the support package for dairy farmers should be put to rest. As legislated, the DMS package will disappear on 30 June 2000.

This government came to office with a series of well-publicised and well-known printed policies about carrying out certain processes, and one of the features of the Bracks Labor government is that it will honour its promises. That includes the promise of a ballot of all dairy farmers to give them an opportunity to express their opinions.

I am sure the honourable member for Benalla is not ignorant of the government's commitment, which was well publicised and has again been well publicised in today's newspapers. If the honourable member has had the chance to read those reports he will understand that the result of that ballot is important — —

Mr McNamara interjected.

Mr HAMILTON — You won't be here to see it.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the National Party has asked his question!

Mr HAMILTON — The interjection indicates either that the minister cannot read or that he chooses not to understand — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Mordialloc will desist from interjecting.

Mr HAMILTON — It is good to see members on the opposition benches are still awake enough to pick up my deliberate faux pas.

The information published in all country newspapers as well as today's *Herald Sun* clearly states that the government's position will be determined on five criteria, not just one as is being implied by honourable members opposite. It is sad. I am sure they are expressing a deliberate misunderstanding and are, in a way, intending to deliberately mislead constituents in

country Victoria, whom the government considers to be a very important part of the Victorian community. The government understands, as do most fair-minded citizens, that it is the right of every person to have a democratic say. The people understand that the ground rules will be determined on five criteria, one of which is the result of the ballot. The others — —

Opposition members interjecting.

Mr HAMILTON — Again members opposite are failing to listen and to understand what has been going on in country Victoria for the past seven years.

The second criterion is the economic and social impact on rural communities, including the impact on families. The government is concerned about those things.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr HAMILTON — That is a puerile interjection and most unbecoming to a Leader of the Opposition who has demonstrated that he cannot even drive a car.

The third criterion is the impact of the deregulation proposal on jobs in manufacturing and processing industries. The government certainly cares about workers, especially workers and jobs in country Victoria.

The fourth is the impact on the dairy industry, which is a vital industry for the state and its greatest rural export earner. The fifth is the national implications.

I am disappointed that the opposition has deliberately chosen not to re-examine the issue or understand it.

Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE

Mr MAXFIELD (Narracan) — I refer the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment to the claim by the honourable member for Warrandyte about the finances of the Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE — —

Mr Perton interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster.

Mr MAXFIELD — Will the minister inform the house of the true state of the institute's finances.

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment) — I thank the honourable member for his question and his concern about the issue. Over the past few months he has demonstrated a far greater concern about the finances

of the Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE than the opposition did during the entire period it was in government.

As many honourable members know, I have long held grave concerns about the finances of the Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE. I have had those concerns despite the rhetoric and the assurances that were provided to the house by the former minister about both the finances of that institute and of technical and further education institutes in general.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Ms KOSKY — The honourable member for Warrandyte asked whether we were going to bail them out.

Mr Bracks — That is an admission.

Ms KOSKY — It is an admission. Sorry, Mr Speaker, I could not help but take up that interjection. That clearly demonstrates that the former minister was well aware of the financial difficulties of the Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE, which is different from what he told the house at the time.

I raised the matter in the house on 11 and 25 May. The response by the then minister, now an opposition frontbencher, was that the TAFE institute had got itself out of those financial difficulties. He said it was enjoying a resurgence and that it was fully supported by the government. On 25 May he went on to say that the institute had reported a projected 1999 calendar year operating surplus of \$513 000. He said the budget was going up and the institute's operating surpluses were going up. That was wrong.

He went on to say that the institute's policy was to pay its bills within 30 days of receiving the invoice from the labour hire company. That may have been its policy, but it certainly was not its practice — and he knew that. The previous minister hid the true financial situation — and given his earlier comment, I wonder whether he knew that —

Mr Honeywood — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I find the statement that I deliberately hid the truth offensive and I ask the honourable minister to withdraw it.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Warrandyte finds the statement offensive, and I ask the minister to withdraw it.

Ms KOSKY — I apologise for the fact that I did not say he deliberately misled the house.

However, the honourable member for Warrandyte did hide the true financial situation. The truth is that the finances of the Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE have deteriorated alarmingly. The honourable member for Warrandyte failed to mention in May that the institute had a negative working capital of \$151 000 and failed to take into account a note from the director of the institute at that time about the inability of the institute to meet creditor accounts. The current situation — —

Mr Honeywood — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the minister is reading from a document, which I ask her to make available.

The SPEAKER — Order! Is the minister reading from a document?

Ms KOSKY — No, I am not. I have read from *Hansard*, and I am happy to make that available in case the honourable member for Warrandyte is unable to gain access to it.

As of September, when the election was called, the institute had a projected operating deficit to the year's end of \$1.1 million plus a projected working capital deficit of more than \$2.1 million. Creditors include local suppliers who are not being paid within 30 days. That is despite the minister's assurances that the institute was experiencing a financial resurgence.

Further, the institute is unable to meet repayments on a loan it took out in 1997; some \$2 million is still owing. The liabilities are three times greater than the assets of the institute. No wonder the honourable member for Warrandyte did not make the leadership team. He cannot do his numbers — he cannot count — although he may be able to drive better than the Leader of the Opposition!

Within weeks of coming to office the Bracks Labor government announced an additional \$14.7 million for regional institutes of technical and further education in recognition of the fact that they face greater costs than their metropolitan counterparts.

I have asked my department to look at the situation at the Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE. The government will address the issue because it has a commitment to TAFE institutes throughout Victoria, unlike the former government. I point out that my comments are in no way a condemnation of the institute's capacity to deliver quality services to its students. It has done that under trying circumstances and with no assistance from the former government.

Eastern Freeway: extension

Mr LEIGH (Mordialloc) — Given Labor’s commitment to build a long tunnel for the Eastern Freeway extension, will the Minister for Transport inform the house of the construction commencement date and the total estimates for the proposal? I make my documents available to the house.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I thank the honourable member for Mordialloc for what I believe is his maiden question as shadow Minister for Transport, and I congratulate him on it. English is a savage language — to juxtapose the honourable member for Mordialloc with maidenhood and its implications of chasteness and purity is a bit oxymoronic, isn’t it?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Mordialloc will desist from interjecting, and the minister will answer the question.

Mr BATCHELOR — I am enjoying answering the question. The honourable member for Mordialloc asked the government to provide a construction date and an estimate of costs for the project. As the honourable member would know, the government has been presented with a series of options for various lengths and types of tunnels that were developed by the previous government. Two options are contained in a report by Halcrow Pacific Pty Ltd, and the government believes the options favoured by the previous government are appalling. The Bracks government is calling for other options because it does not believe the choice for the extension should be limited to only those options considered by the previous government.

The government will release the report prepared by Halcrow Pacific. Other reports that look at various options are being prepared because the government is not prepared to be limited by the restrictive choices provided under the previous regime.

The government has asked Vicroads to draw up some realistic alternative options. When those proposals have been finalised the government will release them with the Halcrow Pacific report to enable everybody to understand the full range of choices available.

City Link: contract

Ms BEATTIE (Tullamarine) — I refer the Minister for Transport to claims by the former government that the City Link project would not cost one cent of taxpayers’ money. I ask the minister to inform the

house of any liabilities taxpayers have been exposed to under the 34-year contract the Kennett government signed with Transurban.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — How do you put up with him? Of all the people you could have chosen, you chose him!

Mr Leigh interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! As entertaining as the house finds the interjections from the honourable member for Mordialloc, I ask him to cease interjecting, and I ask the minister to answer the question.

Mr BATCHELOR — It is a perplexing dilemma, though, isn’t it?

The City Link contract is an appalling example of financial mismanagement and recklessness by the previous government. The Kennett government’s handling of the City Link project shows that at every opportunity it put the interests of the taxpayers and the motorists last.

It was brought to my attention last week that in August — interestingly, on the eve of the state election — the previous government made a secret payment of \$10 million to Transurban and its subcontractors.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BATCHELOR — Opposition members are becoming very agitated about the government’s exposing their mismanagement of the contract for which every member of the previous government voted. We did not vote for it — you did!

At a critical time on the eve of the election, when there was pressure to open the western link free to motorists while the companies were sorting out their problems, a secret payment from taxpayers’ funds was made. That payment was kept secret from taxpayers, motorists and the general public. On the eve of the election money was taken from taxpayers’ funds and handed to Transurban and Transfield Obayashi Joint Venture and the contractor. If the Kennett government did not want the payment to be kept secret at that critical time why did it not reveal the payment? What motives or other reasons lay behind its decision to keep the payment secret? Preliminary advice from my department suggests the payment was made to settle claims from contractors on a number of contractual issues.

I contrast that with the claims made on numerous occasions by the former Premier and the former Treasurer that the City Link contract would not cost taxpayers a cent or expose them to any future liability.

Mr Leigh — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I too read the *Herald Sun*. The only thing we do not know is why he won't give it to the Auditor-General.

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

Mr BATCHELOR — The former Premier and the former Treasurer said the City Link contract would not expose the state to an inappropriate risk. We now know that was not the case.

Mr Leigh — What are you hiding?

Mr BATCHELOR — You are the ones who are hiding something.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the government benches to come to order.

Mr BATCHELOR — The contract allowed for the payment of \$10 million for the western link. I am now advised that a future claim could be made against the state regarding the southern link. It is appalling. Private companies have been given \$10 million. This week I will ask an expert to undertake an independent assessment of the circumstances of the contract and the secrecy surrounding the payments. The government will get to the bottom of it and when it does the information will be made available to the public and the house.

The SPEAKER — Order! The time for asking questions has expired. A minimum of 10 questions has been asked and answered.

Mr McArthur — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I refer to the operation of the sessional orders adopted by the house last Thursday. I specifically refer to sessional order 3(4) and (5) and the Chair's management of those two matters. I raised sessional order 3(5) with you yesterday and you advised the house that the Chair had no control over the way ministers answered questions other than to make sure that they were relevant.

Mr Speaker, today you attempted to shorten the first question asked by the Leader of the Opposition, even though it was approximately 80 words. Although there have been few interruptions — far fewer than have

happened previously — it has taken 45 minutes to complete 10 questions and answers. If sessional order 3(4) is enforceable, so is sessional order 3(5). I ask you to give some guidance to the house as to how you will manage the two provisions to meet the targets set by the house last Thursday so that question time takes 30 minutes.

Mr Thwaites — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, the manager of opposition business is attempting to mislead the house by misinterpreting the purpose of the sessional orders. They were never intended to achieve a maximum of 30 minutes in order to answer 10 questions. The point of the sessional orders is to ensure 10 questions were asked, something the former coalition government never allowed when the Labor Party was in opposition. The government has put a bottom line of 30 minutes, so that if answers are short there can be more than 10 questions. The sessional orders are not designed to complete 10 questions and answers in 30 minutes. That would be quite rare and inappropriate. Under the previous sessional orders the only time 10 questions were asked was on Tuesdays when 45 minutes was allowed for question time. On Wednesdays and Thursdays a maximum of six or seven questions were asked in the 30 minutes.

The objection to answers was taken by the Labor Party in opposition because ministers used it as a device at question time to limit the number of questions. That purpose can no longer be achieved because of the minimum number of questions that must be asked. The fact that ministers give full answers is an appropriate use of question time and shows that this side of the house has a lot to offer.

Mr Clark — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, the Deputy Premier has responded to only part of the point of order raised by the honourable member for Monbulk. The main part of the point of order was the relative interpretation you give to sessional order 3(4) and (5). If you are arguing that ministers are not bound by sessional order 3(5) regarding the answering of questions, it is not consistent for the opposition parties to be bound by sessional order 3(4) in relation to posing questions. The honourable member for Monbulk was seeking your guidance and ruling on the issue of consistency.

Mr Batchelor — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, various points have been raised about sessional order 3 (4) and (5) and how they should be applied to question time. We know, as do all honourable members in this place, that the provisions are applied equally to both sides of the chamber. To suggest otherwise is nonsense. The nub of the complaint being acted out is a

political complaint in disguise as a point of order. That is inappropriate.

Sessional order 3(4) relates to the asking of questions and the seeking of factual information. Those who ask the questions can hardly complain when they are supplied with the information.

The SPEAKER — Order! On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Monbulk, I first indicate that reflections on the Chair are disorderly and should be resisted.

It is true that sessional order 3(4) and (5) requires questions and answers to be directed succinctly and to seek factual information. The Chair tries at all times to enforce that. However, it cannot limit a particular question or answer to so many words.

Judgment and discretion will be used in any decisions on the asking and the answering of questions. As to the first question, the Chair requested that the Leader of the Opposition ask some form of question. I believe that was done. There is no point of order.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! I remind the house that the honourable member for Ripon is making his inaugural speech and should therefore be heard in silence.

Mr HELPER (Ripon) — It is an honour to have been elected as a member of Parliament for the electorate of Ripon. I congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Speaker. As a new and inexperienced member I look forward to your guidance in the ways of the chamber.

This being my first opportunity to do so on the record, I thank the electors of Ripon for putting their trust in me as their local member. I take that honour seriously. The responsibility to represent my electorate well in Parliament will always be foremost in my considerations.

Along the path that has led me to Parliament are many outstanding individuals whom I want to acknowledge and thank. The first are my wife and family: Julie and our two children have gone through as much dislocation as I have, if not more, in travelling along that path. I know all honourable members appreciate

the burden that places on our families, particularly the families of members who come from regional Victoria. I hope I can repay my family's sacrifice and the electorate's trust by playing my part in making this state a better place in which to live.

I also pay tribute to my parents. Their courageous decision to pack their bags and emigrate to Australia with five children in tow — leaving behind their friends and family and all they knew — to make a new life in a country on the other side of the world shows a spirit that I hope I have inherited and a spirit I hope I can bring to my duties as a member of Parliament.

As honourable members who represent marginal seats would know, conducting a campaign is an enormous logistical exercise. It requires a team effort by hundreds of individuals and the expenditure of significant resources. For the Labor Party's winning campaign in Ripon I thank the local branch members for the extraordinary effort they put in in the Ararat, Maryborough, Carisbrook and Creswick branches.

The support extended to the Ripon campaign and to me by the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party is appreciated. Members of the party's King Street head office can be justifiably proud of their part in making this election result the most outstanding achievement in recent Victorian political history.

Members of the then opposition, now the government — how sweet it feels to say that! — played an enormous part in the Ripon victory. They were always there for support, advice and on-the-ground campaigning. It felt as though every member of the parliamentary party was prepared to walk over a bed of hot coals to support the Ripon campaign. Fortunately for their health, our campaign strategy did not require them to do so!

The leaders of this extraordinary team, the Premier and Deputy Premier, receive my sincere thanks and gratitude, firstly for moulding such a strong team and secondly for their personal support and effort in the Ripon campaign.

I come to this house from a practical background. My previous occupation as a service station proprietor in a small town certainly helped shape the perceptions I have about the challenges ahead for my electorate. The numerous discussions I had about affairs of state with the real and diverse people I came into contact with were of enormous assistance in helping me formulate my ideas on the answers to the problems that lay ahead.

My previous working life has also equipped me to better understand the real difficulties faced by small and

micro businesses. The burden placed on individual proprietors and their families by a relentless regime of change and uncertainty has taken a toll on businesses in regional Victoria.

As a practical example of that one need look no further than the former government's ill-thought-out reform of the food industry in the shape of the Food Safety Act. The burden those clumsy bureaucratic changes have imposed on the local milk bar owner or the corner takeaway outlet should not be underestimated. Without doubt, those changes will, if left unchecked, result in many small businesses being wiped out — kaput! To me it is the most striking example of a government removed from reality.

Julie and I moved to central Victoria because we believed that the sense of community that comes from country life is a good foundation for our children's future. That goes some way towards explaining my single-minded conviction to maintain and further the advantages derived from the strong sense of community shared by most people in country Victoria.

We have seen that sense of community put under immense pressure by the former government on many fronts — take as an example the countless small schools closed around the state.

While we are fortunate that our school at Yandoit has survived the onslaught of the misnamed quality provision program, we can appreciate the impact a school closure has on a community's sense of self-respect. Country Victoria will benefit tremendously from the move to a more caring approach that will come from the new Labor government.

The Ripon electorate is a beautiful part of Victoria. Within its boundaries lie the towns of Maryborough, Ararat and St Arnaud, as well as Creswick, Beaufort and Avoca. The enormous area of the electorate — some 9445 square kilometres — has many more towns, all as important as each other but too numerous to mention here today. The electorate stretches between the expanses of the Kara Kara forest in the north to the Grampians gateway of Ararat in the south-west. It takes in the picturesque Pyrenees mountains between Avoca and Beaufort. Its vast expanse also extends to the westernmost outskirts of Ballarat. The rivers in the electorate include the Avoca, Wimmera and Hopkins. It is a part of Victoria that we all have a responsibility to protect.

Wine, cropping and grazing are the most significant primary industry sectors in the electorate. Those industries not only flavour the scenery but are also

critically important to the electorate's economic base. Another important industry to the Ripon electorate is book printing. It is a major employer in Maryborough and a truly dynamic industry. Despite its dynamic nature it is also under attack by an uncaring government. This time the culprit is the federal government. Not only will the domestic book market suffer from the impost of the goods and services tax (GST), it is also being hit about the head by the accelerated removal of the book bounty. Many manufacturing sectors face equally challenging futures. The challenge for Parliament is to deliberate in ways that enhance the future of manufacturing, particularly in regional areas.

For a number of years now public sector employment, which was so important to the electorate's economic base, has suffered a rapid decline. Policies of the previous government that have led to the contracting out of local government services and the placing of teachers, for example, on short-term contracts have led to the erosion of economic certainty for many communities. I look forward to the benefits of the Bracks government's commitment to taking the 'compulsory' out of compulsory competitive tendering. CCT is the single most despised issue raised with me by the municipalities in Ripon.

During my initial contact with local government it was obvious that councillors were looking forward to the partnership approach of the Bracks government, which it will make the centre of the relationship between the state and local government. The attitude is welcomed as a positive change from being treated by the previous government as a mouthpiece for Spring Street.

Without exception, the deterioration of road infrastructure is seen as a most pressing problem. Road spending has suffered years of neglect. It was often reported to me as the single most important infrastructure impediment to the advance of regional economies. I look forward to working as a government member of Parliament to give priority to that need.

Tourism is a potential for all of regional Victoria, and nowhere more so than in the Ripon electorate — the natural and heritage beauty of that part of Victoria is second to none. During the election campaign the ALP committed to establishing a wine centre of excellence at the disused Aradale hospital site in Ararat. The commitment, which is now government policy, will give a focus to the Victorian wine industry's training needs. I hope the focus will not only maintain Victoria at the cutting edge of wine technology but will also help to further unlock the tourism potential of the industry. As a rapidly growing wine region, central Victoria and

my electorate will certainly benefit from such developments.

I would like to take the liberty of making some observations about this place. I have only spent a handful of days here, but maybe my freshness is an advantage when reflecting on first impressions. The public demands that its politicians be real people — people with real and normal day-to-day experiences. Our parliamentary setting has a touch of unreality about it. It is coated with a great degree of tradition and with a liberal dose of pomp and ceremony. While I am certainly respectful of the tradition, I feel that many aspects of the pomp and ceremony make the obligations of Parliamentarians to remain in touch with the real-life aspirations of their electorates more difficult. I sincerely hope that as parliamentarians we succeed in overcoming that obstacle.

There are, of course, many much larger challenges ahead of us as a government — meeting as far as is possible the expectations raised during a frenzy of pork-barrelling inflicted on regional Victoria during the last election campaign. The previous government indulged in unparalleled efforts to buy its way back into office. Besides obviously not having the desired effect it also resulted in further heightening the level of cynical perception with which the electorate views all politicians. The desired political outcome eluded the now opposition and it may, for the time being at least, remove pork-barrelling from its political lexicon.

I am setting out to work with the Ripon electorate on increasing its economic wellbeing. Underpinning that, we have to create a sense of security — a sense that tomorrow everything will not be turned upside down and inside out, as it was yesterday. We cannot stand still in terms of our economic activity, but surely we have to take count of the toll that change fatigue is inflicting on our social and economic wellbeing.

I look forward to re-creating a sense that every opinion, no matter how small or how loud, has the same right to be taken seriously. I will rely heavily on the advice I know the electorate can provide to me. I am a firm believer that the wisdom of the electorate is far greater than that of any member or committee that may be able to pitch at a problem.

In conclusion, I express the honour I feel that the 21 years of commitment I have made to the labour movement has led me to this place. My involvement has seen me be a part of more campaigns than I care to remember. The labour movement has received and will always receive my willing commitment on the basis that it is the ALP that reflects my values most closely.

I thank the house for the courtesy extended to me during my inaugural speech. I hope I live up to the expectations of my electorate and that during my time here I make a positive impact on the governance of Victoria.

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — I congratulate the honourable member for Shepparton on becoming one of the group of people who undertake the role of Acting Speaker in the Parliament. I also congratulate the members from both sides of the house who delivered their inaugural speeches. The people and their speeches have been impressive, and it was a privilege to listen to them.

In responding to the Governor's speech, I wish to make a few points. With the greatest respect to the Governor, I point out that his speech almost replicated the policy speeches of the Australian Labor Party members before the election. A political turnaround like the one just experienced has never before been witnessed in the state Parliament — I have certainly never witnessed it in my life. The former opposition did not expect to win an election, and they did not win but gained government through the support of a small group of Independents who traded their independence to become part of a block vote. I find this difficult to understand and accept. The Independents will find the decision harder to live with as the political situation goes towards its full term.

Consider some of the events since Parliament resumed and some of the promises of the new government: the introduction of condom-vending machines in secondary schools; the relaxation of the laws in respect of the use of marijuana; and the ad hoc introduction of shooting galleries or safe injecting places for hard drugs such as heroin. Despite my understanding of the need, I find it difficult to accept the ad hoc way safe injecting rooms have been introduced and the apparent degree of tolerance for the use of hard drugs.

As these are the issues that have come up first, each of the Independents will be severely challenged by the others and by their electorates — conservative country electorates — as we go into the three or four-year term of the government. These are the issues that have been raised first and they are related more to city areas than to country areas. It is the country areas of the state and the issues raised in the Governor's speech and in Labor policy documents that I am interested in. I wish to highlight the difficulties for the government in maintaining these policies and the increasing difficulty for the Independents in supporting them. Many of the policies are idealistic and, if successful, will be valuable to country areas. The first is a promise of 800 new jobs

in a new call centre for north-eastern Victoria. We would all love to see that happen. All honourable members would love to see that happen. I await it with bated breath.

The second policy to which I refer is that within 100 days of Labor attaining government a full feasibility study into the reopening of the Benalla–Yarrawonga–Cobram railway line and the Benalla–Rutherglen railway line will be completed.

Mr Acting Speaker, you would be fully aware that the Benalla–Yarrawonga–Cobram line has never been closed. In fact, it takes an enormous amount of freight, and grain in particular, out of the southern Riverina. The policy of reopening a railway line that has not closed defies logic — or my sense of logic at least.

Under the policy the Benalla–Rutherglen railway line is to be reopened. There is not and never has been a Benalla–Rutherglen railway line. I find it extraordinary to have a policy document state that a railway line that does not exist is to be reopened. As the honourable member for Murray Valley would attest, there used to be a railway line from Wangaratta to Rutherglen, but there was never one from Benalla.

Although one might say I am playing with words, to have a policy document on major infrastructure that is totally wrong is an indication that much of the policy Labor took into the election was not properly thought out and was introduced on the run.

The third point I raise in the Labor policy pertaining to north-eastern Victoria in particular is road funding. The government has committed \$120 million to the upgrading of arterial roads in north-eastern Victoria and other areas of country Victoria. I would be only too delighted to see that promise kept. Like you, Mr Acting Speaker, I have seen the use of country roads increase. The fact that country roads are now carrying more freight than ever before is an indication that there is a continuing need to upgrade those roads. I want to see with my own eyes that commitment of \$120 million come to fruition.

A fourth promise is a flood mitigation study for Myrtleford, Violet Town and Benalla, which is to happen immediately on the Labor Party coming into government. I would be happy to see that occur, but again I await it with bated breath.

The fifth promise in the policy document is the upgrading of rail facilities throughout the state, but in particular in north-eastern Victoria. The promise includes the upgrade of rail facilities in Wodonga, which is, as most honourable members realise, the

fastest-growing city in country Victoria. The former government made a commitment of just on \$19 million to relocate outside the Wodonga CBD the section of the railway line that has the sharpest bend between Melbourne and Sydney.

Will the incoming government meet that commitment? Will it go ahead with it? It has given a commitment in writing to upgrade the rail facilities in that fast-growing city. I want to know whether the commitment given by the former government will be taken up by the new government, because it is vital to the city's future. Wodonga has incredible growth and is self-sufficient, but it is a city that is split, and its potential is reduced by the fact that the interstate railway line runs through the middle of it.

I am also delighted to see the suggestion that there will be an increase in the capacity of Business Victoria in regional centres, including Wodonga, Shepparton and Wangaratta. I am sure you, Mr Acting Speaker, will be pleased to hear that as well. However, I look forward to seeing the jobs, the increased number of premises and the increased work that will be sustained by the proposed increases.

The sixth promise worth mentioning is additional assistance to hospitals in the north-eastern region. In my electorate of Benambra about \$19 million has been spent on the public hospital in Wodonga, which, based on the number of patients it treats, is now the fastest-growing country hospital in Victoria. The first sod has been turned to start the work on a new hospital at Mount Beauty. A new multipurpose service hospital has been built in Corryong. Approximately \$3.5 million has been spent in upgrading the public hospital in Wangaratta. The former government committed about \$9 million towards the rebuilding of the hospital at Beechworth. How is the present government going to upgrade the hospital?

I notice the next policy suggests the government will have cleaner public hospitals. Does that mean the hospitals of which I am immensely proud are not clean? Does it mean practices have been carried out in those hospitals that are not up to scratch? If it does mean that, the incoming Minister for Health should say precisely that to each of the hospitals in my electorate, all of which I know well. He should say that those hospitals are not as clean as they should be and that they are not delivering the standard of cleanliness they should be delivering.

Another point the government makes is that it will reduce emergency waiting times and waiting lists in country hospitals. It is interesting when living on the

Victorian border to see the contrasts between the way the public hospital in Wodonga and the public hospitals on the other side of the river are performing under a Labor government.

As I said, the number of patients it treats means the public hospital in Wodonga is the fastest-growing hospital in country Victoria. It has reduced its emergency waiting list to zero. Every emergency inpatient gets treated immediately. The waiting lists for semi-emergency treatment have reduced enormously. That is in stark contrast to what is happening in New South Wales, just over the river from Wodonga.

I quote from the *Border Mail* of 2 November:

NSW hospital waiting lists hit an all-time high this winter with patients forced to wait more than 8 hours as staff battled to find beds.

... 220 people waited almost an entire working day for admission in August, breaking last year's record high —

that is a record high of waiting lists —

of 203 in the same month.

That is an indication of how waiting lists are going up under the New South Wales health system. In Victoria, the former government progressively reduced waiting lists.

I come back to the government's promise that Labor will reduce emergency waiting lists, spend money to advance the development of regional hospitals and encourage the expenditure of further funds to ensure that Victoria has cleaner public hospitals.

I refute all those claims, because I understand the public hospitals in my electorate very well, and I respect the fact that their services are up to scratch. They are clean, wonderful services, and we in country Victoria do not suffer from a second-grade service at all. In fact, I suggest that the health service in my electorate, about which I can speak personally, would be the envy of most city and metropolitan areas.

I am delighted to see that another policy pledge of the incoming government is to encourage new investment into north-eastern Victoria. Investment brought into Wodonga and the electorate of Benambra generally under the Kennett government in its last term was in excess of \$75 million.

Mr Wells — How much?

Mr PLOWMAN — Seventy-five million dollars! Private investment in Albury–Wodonga collectively is

in the area of about \$370 million a year, and that is increasing.

It is a phenomenal growth area, and it shows that sustainability in country areas is possible. Undoubtedly that growth reflects the confidence the Kennett government generated in Victoria, which is reflected not only in metropolitan areas but also in the regional centres of country Victoria.

Mr Spry interjected.

Mr PLOWMAN — I am delighted to accept the interjection that on occasion the local representation has a small part to play in that.

Another statement of the Labor government that appears in the Governor's speech is that Victorians in regional and rural areas pay more for fuel than people in Melbourne. I want to see the new government keep its promise that it will change that, because over the past seven years the former government heard jibes from the other side of the house saying that that would change with an incoming Labor government. Now members of the Labor Party have gained government they must keep their promise and find out how cheaper product can be delivered to country areas. How can the incoming government meet the promise it made in its policy document and in this place over the past seven years? I look forward to seeing how it will be done.

The other promise to which I refer concerns the upgrading of rail facilities in Wodonga such as the West Wodonga freight node, which is estimated to cost about \$7 million. I look forward to seeing that freight node being built. It is a promise I will hold the government to.

Another claim in the policy document is that the unemployment rate in north-eastern Victoria has consistently been above the national average, particularly since the election of the former Kennett government. There was a period early in the term of the Kennett government when unemployment rates, particularly youth unemployment rates, were high in country Victoria. However, I must say with a deal of pride that in north-eastern Victoria — the region that the Acting Speaker and I come from — the level of unemployment is the lowest in Victoria. This document is absolutely wrong in that respect. Youth unemployment is still a problem, but youth unemployment rates in the north-east of Victoria are lower than the rates in any other area in country Victoria and lower than the rates in most metropolitan areas. The document is factually incorrect. It is of

concern that a policy document with those sorts of statements in it is released.

I would like to make two other points about the policy document, which states that the government will reduce crime by stopping police station closures. Not one police station has closed in north-eastern Victoria. The former government built a new police station in Beechworth, and it committed about \$9 million to building a new police station and a new courthouse in Wodonga. That courthouse would allow the first ever local County Court hearings to be held in Wodonga. I want to see that commitment upheld by the new minister. It is not just a pre-election commitment but a long-term commitment that was on the books for at least 12 months prior to the election. I accept gratefully the answer I have just heard from the police minister, that he will provide extra police, provided that the commitment that the police station and the courthouse will be built remains, because they are badly needed.

The Labor government's financial statement guarantees a substantial operating surplus each year. I hope to see that, and the opposition will hold the government to its promise.

Mr HOLDING (Springvale) — I join other honourable members in congratulating the Speaker on his election to that office. The role of Speaker is always a challenging one, and in the circumstances of the current Parliament that will be particularly so.

There has been no better definition of the Speaker's role than that provided by the former Speaker of the House of Commons, William Lenthall. When King Charles I ordered him to disclose the whereabouts of the so-called five members he replied on behalf of the Parliament:

May it please Your Majesty, I have neither eyes to see, nor tongue to speak in this place, but as this house is pleased to direct me, whose servant I am here ...

Although it was a fine statement of principle, Speaker Lenthall was taken by the King's men, unfairly accused of regicide and killed.

I am certain that despite Her Majesty's awareness of Mr Speaker's republican sentiments, his tenure in the position will be a happier one.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Dixon) — Order! I am also planning that for the current Acting Speaker.

Mr HOLDING — Nevertheless, it highlights, even if somewhat dramatically, the tensions that may exist between the executive and the Parliament.

One of the great outcomes of the election held on 18 September is the fact that this Parliament is relevant once more. Two challenges arise from that. The first challenge is to ensure that this house remains the chamber where governments are formed. A government enjoying the confidence of this house has a right to expect that it will be able to govern.

The greater challenge is to ensure a meaningful role for the Legislative Council. For the past seven years it has not functioned as a genuine house of review. It has not safeguarded the rights and liberties of Victorians — a role that many upper houses are eager to perform. It has sat infrequently — for only 27 days in 1995–96. The system of election is undemocratic. The composition of the house does not reflect, even vaguely, the proportion of votes received by the various parties. In 1996 the coalition obtained 77 per cent of the seats, having received only 51 per cent of the primary vote.

Prior to 1992 the Legislative Council also failed to assume its proper constitutional role. It was obstructionist in that it relentlessly amended and rejected legislation — even policies for which former governments had clear and unambiguous mandates. I welcome the priority this government has given to Legislative Council reform. Redistributing political power is never an easy process. Nevertheless it will be one of this government's most enduring achievements.

I would like to thank the people of Springvale for continuing to support a Labor candidate at the recent state election. I wish the retiring member, Eddie Micallef, and his wife Joy, well in the years ahead. I am sure they will continue their active involvement in our local community.

Springvale is socially and ethnically diverse. People from all over the world have settled there. Each generation has brought with it people with a fierce determination to pass on to their children better life opportunities than they were able to enjoy themselves. It is a place that proves that multiculturalism can work.

Sadly, however, it is impossible to speak about Springvale without discussing our local drug problem. It is a problem that touches everyone: the addicts and the families of those affected by addiction; others in our community, including older people, who no longer feel safe shopping in their local community; families who return home to find their houses have been broken into by addicts looking for a means to support their habit; and even the mother of a seven-year-old child who contacted me recently, angry that she had to explain to her son what a syringe was because he had found one in the local park.

Not everyone will agree on the best way to tackle the drug crisis. Nevertheless, most people agree that our current approach is not working.

Our first instinct has been blanket prohibition. Before I lived in Noble Park, and now in Springvale, it was an approach I agreed with. I could not accept that providing a syringe to a drug addict could be part of a solution to drugs in our community. I could not accept that prescribing methadone to a heroin addict could be part of a solution to drugs in our community. Nor could I have accepted that trialling the supply of heroin to registered addicts or providing a safe injecting facility, sanctioned by the state, could be part of a solution to drugs in our community.

As a community, however, we must accept responsibility for the results of public policy, and as a Parliament we must show leadership when confronted with the reality of policy failure.

The truth is that drug use is escalating. According to the Premier's Drug Advisory Council the number of regular heroin users doubled between 1986 and 1990, and the council believes the trend is continuing. It is not alarmist to say that in some parts of Melbourne our streets are awash with heroin. It is sadly and simply a matter of fact. In Springvale heroin is bought and sold for \$20 a cap. It is not hidden; the trade can be watched on the main street at any time on any day of the week.

Blanket prohibition may be intellectually comfortable, but let us be clear about exactly what blanket prohibition means. It guarantees the involvement of organised crime, a cancer that compounds and multiplies. It means the price is kept artificially high, which ensures that a web of criminal conduct is required to support addiction — prostitution, housebreakings, drug dealing and other criminal conduct. It means that cutting agents, often more dangerous and harmful than the drugs themselves, dilute the final product. It means harm-minimisation strategies are less effective because those being targeted are part of a criminal subculture, clandestine and underground.

I hate drug trafficking. I hate seeing the waste and despair that drugs inevitably bring. I hate what the drug trade has done to Springvale. I hate seeing the frustration of a police force which lacks the resources to enforce the law. I hate seeing mothers with prams buying drugs on the main street. I hate seeing parks and gutters littered with syringes. I hate seeing ambulance crews reviving overdose victims and wondering where such addicts will be in six months or a year's time.

Above all, I hate the fact that all of that is regarded as part of daily life in Springvale. I cannot sit by and support the continuation of a policy that is doomed to perpetual failure.

The Bracks Labor government is committed to the conduct of a heroin trial. We are also committed to the introduction of up to five medically supervised safe injecting facilities in those parts of Melbourne where the heroin problem is most acute. Any move away from blanket prohibition is inevitably controversial, but we must think with our heads and not our hearts. Our response must be driven by experience and not focus-group-tested fear campaigns.

Opposing safe injecting facilities will not save one life in Springvale. All it will mean is that addicts will continue to share needles and expose themselves and the rest of the community to blood-borne diseases. It will mean young people will continue to die from overdose, each death a preventable death — 247 young Victorians this year already. It will mean that syringes will continue to litter our suburbs — the City of Greater Dandenong picked up over 200 000 spent syringes in the past 12 months — and it will mean that providing addicts with information and support services will continue to be that much harder.

There is no single solution to this tragic problem. That is why Labor's comprehensive plan tackles the issue at several levels: through law enforcement, more police and better use of existing police resources; through better rehabilitation and better support services for families; and, perhaps most importantly, through programs that address the long-term causes of drug addiction, including boosting school retention rates and providing employment opportunities for young Victorians.

No-one in this Parliament has all of the answers, but I urge all honourable members to think carefully before they reject a policy just because it is not their own.

People often remark that Australia is overgoverned. While on the face of it that is an easy criticism to make, the truth is that our constitution is unlikely to lose its federal character in the near future. Therefore, the challenge is to make our federation function in a more efficient and responsive manner. Part of the challenge is for state governments to address the problems of vertical fiscal imbalance and to continue to seek opportunities to work cooperatively with the other states and territories and the commonwealth. In some areas, such as Corporations Law, much has already been achieved. In other areas more work needs to be done.

A separate challenge is for state governments to more properly and maturely address their relationship with local councils. Serving as a councillor with the City of Waverley gave me an insight into the opportunities that exist to improve our system of government by addressing the relationship between local councils and state and federal governments. Looking through the *Victorian Parliamentary Handbook* I note that is an insight that has been shared by many of my colleagues in this chamber.

As a Waverley councillor I was fortunate to serve alongside Dr Graeme Frecker, whom many honourable members may remember as a past president of both the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Australian Local Government Association. Graeme's enthusiasm for local government is boundless and infectious. He never tolerated the use of the phrase 'third tier' to describe local government; he preferred 'sphere'.

Rather than seeing councils as agents of state or federal government policy, we need to build on the notion that local government is an independent sphere within our democratic framework that is capable of working in partnership with other areas of government. Few western countries delegate less responsibility to local government than Australia. I have no doubt that some of the frustration that exists in rural and regional Australia is the result of decisions made in far-off places or of service delivery that is insensitive to local needs because the agency providing the service has no connection with the local area.

When Labor was last in government its most worthwhile local government reforms were those that extended local democracy and increased council accountability. Labor extended the franchise, opened council meetings to the public and required the publication of corporate plans and annual reports. For Labor, accountability meant accountability to the local community through democratic elections and transparency.

For the coalition, accountability meant accountability to the state government. In opposition, the coalition promised that boundary changes would be driven by the local community. In government, boundary changes were driven by the minister — firstly in Geelong by an accounting audit and then throughout Victoria by the Local Government Board. The same people who in 1986 paraded around Victoria opposing attempts by the then Labor government to achieve boundary changes sacked 209 of Victoria's 210 councils.

The same people who, through the upper house, wrote into the Local Government Act the sections that

ensured that municipal restructure would require affirmative polls from local residents suspended those sections when they no longer suited their convenience. It was not a process that was driven by the local community; rather, it was driven by a false analysis of economies of scale and promises of rate reductions that were not sustainable. Boundary change was accompanied by compulsory competitive tendering (CCT). Once again, accountability was to the state government, not to the local community. A process that might have assisted local communities to identify the real costs in providing services and infrastructure has instead become a straightjacket — a one-size-fits-all philosophy blinkered by a preference for the private sector regardless of objective criteria.

The truth is that competitive tendering was already widespread in local government. Imposing it arbitrarily and inflexibly through legislation with artificial thresholds deprived councils of the independence to determine expenditure decisions for their local communities. Removing CCT and allowing local councils to make resource allocation decisions unfettered by an ideological preference for the private sector will be one of this government's highest priorities.

Historically, councils could do nothing beyond the powers specifically prescribed by the Local Government Act. When last in government, Labor introduced a general competence power, which extended greatly the legal reach of local government action.

Future state governments must look to extending the reach of local responsibility. Many issues confronting Victoria have solutions that require the involvement and cooperation of local councils — encouraging recycling, reducing landfill, containing urban sprawl, providing sensitive service delivery to elderly Victorians, and generating employment through regional industry policies. I am greatly encouraged by those aspects of the Governor's speech that foreshadow a new partnership between the Victorian government and local councils.

I joined the Labor Party in February 1990. It was not a popular time to join the party because we were facing difficult elections at both the state and federal levels. A lot of people have had a lot to say since then about branch stacking in the Labor Party. I can assure honourable members that there were no problems in accommodating all the new members in 1990. I joined because I was a Labor supporter and wanted to make a contribution to keeping the party strong.

I have no memory of the enthusiasm that greeted the election in 1972 of the first federal Labor government for 23 years, nor do I remember the traumatic events of October–November 1975. I was only 10 when John Cain led Labor back into government in 1982 after 27 years in the political wilderness. My direct memory of Victorian and Australian politics is of long-term Labor governments. Seared into my ideals is a belief that Labor is a party of government or it is nothing. I like promoting Labor governments more than pointing out the mistakes of conservative ones. Although no government is perfect and compromise is part of being in power, I prefer the imperfections of power than the impotence of opposition, however good it may occasionally feel.

I am proud to stand here today as a member of a Labor government. It means practical things for my constituents: better housing, better public schools and better hospitals, and a sincere willingness to tackle our local drug problem. I am immensely proud to represent the people of Springvale and the Australian Labor Party in this Parliament.

I am proud to represent a party that has at its heart a commitment to individual progress through collective action, a party that seeks to make people's lives better, a party that instinctively sides with the disadvantaged and the underdog.

It is a party that asserts an independent Australia. It is not a party that would tolerate the unedifying spectacle of cabinet ministers tripping over one another to peddle the cleverest way to sink a once-in-a-generation opportunity to demonstrate a national identity. It is a party that practices racial tolerance when others look for political advantage. For the Labor Party racial tolerance is a question of human rights, not the state rights demanded by each division of a federalist party. Such things are not lost on an electorate such as Springvale.

This building has enormous historical significance for the Australian Labor Party. It was here almost 100 years ago that members of the newly formed commonwealth Parliament elected under a Labor banner met for the first time. We are told they met in a stuffy room in the basement of the building, the home of the commonwealth Parliament for the first 27 years. It was moved and resolved that they form themselves into a federal Labor Party. We are the oldest political party in Australia and one of the oldest in the world. Alone of all modern parties the Labor Party predates Federation. The celebration of Australia's centenary therefore has a special significance for us.

We accept the principle of majority rule and take a pledge that obligates us to honour collective action. We are conscious and proud of our history. Above all, the Labor Party is a party of beliefs. Each generation must be able to explain how Labor's philosophy can reflect the needs and aspirations of today.

For Ben Chifley it was the light on the hill — a metaphor for security; an appropriate goal for a nation grappling with the uncertainties of the post-war period. For Gough Whitlam it was positive equality — not equality imposed through the enactment of restrictions, but equality achieved through the creation of opportunity.

Today it is managing the challenges of change — ensuring that the benefits accruing through the most rapidly changing era in human history flow to all in the community and do not create classes of winners and losers.

Today our standard of living is not dependent on how much we earn but rather is determined by how we use our collective resources to provide those things that no individual can ever provide alone — a quality health system, better schools, better infrastructure and a social security net.

All of us here owe a debt to those who have supported us along the path that has brought us to this place. In particular, the former member for Dandenong North, Jan Wilson, gave me a wonderful opportunity to learn about this Parliament and the work of a local member. I will always value the friendship of Jan and her husband Eric.

I wish to acknowledge the debt I owe to Senator Robert Ray. Robert is quite simply the finest practitioner of politics I have ever met. My four years with him provided an apprenticeship that I will draw on for the rest of my political life. However, before anyone ascribes to him responsibility for any of my actions in this place, Robert would want the following disclaimer read: I taught him everything he knows, but not everything I know.

Finally, I thank my parents, Carol and Bruce, for supporting me in everything I have done. The expectations and the faith that they and the people of Springvale have in me will be the basis of everything I do in the years ahead.

Mr WELLS (Wantirna) — It gives me great pleasure to join the address-in-reply debate, and I take this opportunity to thank the people of Wantirna for putting their faith in me for a third time.

The address-in-reply debate gives members of Parliament an opportunity to talk in great depth and glowing terms about their electorates. I remember when I was first elected to the seat of Wantirna in 1992 the area had the highest number of primary school students per total population of anywhere in the state. It is interesting to look at the latest statistics, which show that the electorate now has the highest number of secondary school students, which indicates that the area is a reasonably stable electorate for families.

I concur with the honourable member for Knox, who would remember back to 1992 and the disgraceful situation in the outer eastern areas left by 10 years of Labor government neglect. Stud Road, Wellington Road, High Street Road, Boronia Road and the Mountain Highway were single-lane roads. Schools had leaking roofs and the toilets could not be used. Bus routes did not connect anywhere — they just went from point A to point B and did not assist the local residents. I remember the honourable member for Knox fighting very hard when a previous Labor government shut down the Bayswater, Ferntree Gully and Boronia police stations in one fell swoop. The local Labor members did absolutely nothing.

The new Labor members of Parliament have arrived in 1999, and I sincerely congratulate every one of them. When I entered Parliament in 1992 Victoria's finances were in a disgraceful state. Today the new Labor members are looking at a state with a surplus of \$400 million to \$700 million.

The first Kennett government set up a Victorian Commission of Audit because it could not trust the figures of the previous Labor government. The first finding of the commission was that in 1991–92 the Victorian public sector lived beyond its means to the tune of \$3 billion on a full-cost basis. In 1991 the previous Labor government was spending \$3 billion more each year than it was receiving in revenue. Revenue generated in the year was \$23.6 billion, sufficient to meet only 90 per cent of the state's expenditure of \$29.3 billion. Additional borrowings of \$2.5 billion were obtained to finance the state's overall cash flow shortfall. The Labor government of the day had to borrow money to pay the wages of teachers and nurses. The ongoing effect of that was that it had to pay interest on the borrowings, so it was paying interest on top of interest.

At 30 June 1992 the total liabilities of the Victorian government were \$69.8 billion. The Labor government was out of control and had no plans; the state was sliding backwards. Victoria was the rust bucket of Australia and a laughing-stock. When one travels

interstate today one hears people speak of Victoria in glowing terms, or they did prior to 18 September. I wonder whether the new Labor government would like to call for a Victorian Commission of Audit to look at the figures as the coalition did in 1992 to see how cash rich the state is now.

I mentioned some of the problems in the Wantirna electorate and how the former government went about fixing them. In 1988 the RACV conducted a survey on road congestion around the metropolitan area, which found that the most congested road in the metropolitan area was Wellington Road. What did the Labor government do about it? It did absolutely nothing. In 1992 the former coalition government made a commitment to duplicating the road, and it went on to do it. That government fully committed itself to its promises in the outer east, including the duplication of High Street and Stud and Wellington roads. Promises were made, and the state realised the coalition government was prepared to stick to its guns and deliver.

Our schools are now well maintained. The Kennett government built new schools where they were required and upgraded many schools in my area. Schools have done well in the period to September 1999. There is now some apprehension in the community that with a minority Labor government Victoria will go back to the dreadful days between 1982 and 1992 when the outer east was all but forgotten.

I support the push to save Waverley Park. I know the honourable members for Glen Waverley, Dandenong, Bayswater and Mitcham have been to many public rallies to save the facility. There has been general cooperation between all parties on this issue. I know I spoke on the same stage with the honourable member for Mitcham. The Premier approached the Australian Football League commission on many occasions and pushed the case for saving the ground. He asked the AFL what the government could do to maintain it. There is no point in the minority Labor government buying it, and I hope the government will not commit taxpayer funds for that purpose if the AFL commission is not going to allocate games there. It will be buying a white elephant. I understand that no AFL games will be scheduled for Waverley Park for the 2000 season. All matches for the season are divided evenly between Optus Oval, the Docklands stadium and the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Contrary to the rhetoric of the minority Labor government, I was the first honourable member to raise the issue in this house. If Waverley Park goes, the nearest ground for my constituents is the MCG. If

people who live in Sale, Morwell, Wantirna and Dandenong want to see a football match they will have to travel to the MCG. Surveys have shown that about 20 per cent of people who attended Waverley Park did not support either team playing at the oval. I am a St Kilda supporter but I have gone to Waverley Park to watch games between Richmond and Carlton because I knew they were usually good games.

I put on the record the enormous hard work the former Premier did to try to save Waverley Park. He called in every council affected by the decision to close the ground, sat them down in the boardroom at the Premier's office, and asked them one by one what finances they would commit to saving it. He did that because the Valuer-General had valued Waverley Park at between \$30 and \$40 million and the law provided the government could not purchase the ground for more than the valuation. The AFL has said the land is worth \$70 to \$80 million.

There is no point in purchasing Waverley Park if the AFL is not committing to schedule games there. There is no need for it to be used for local football because there are already sufficient ovals available for local teams to use.

The minority Labor government has referred to a football tipping competition. Such a scheme would simply encourage more gambling. I will watch with great interest to ensure it is not topped up with taxpayers' funds.

Mr Robinson interjected.

Mr WELLS — The honourable member for Mitcham interjects and refers to Federation Square. On either the first or second day following the election of the minority Labor government trade unionists at the project went out on strike. They were demanding a \$24-a-week increase and a reduction in hours of 36 a week. If there is a cost blow-out it will be because of unionists demanding more money.

Another significant blow to the people in the outer east is the scrapping of the Scoresby freeway proposal, which may be news to many people. The proposed freeway would have extended from Frankston to Ringwood. Honourable members representing Labor electorates on the other side of town may not realise that Springvale and Stud roads are clogged and congested. Stud Road has recently been upgraded and nothing more can be done. It has reached its capacity. I direct to the attention of the house the economic benefits of proceeding with the construction of the freeway. The impact on state annual gross domestic

product in 2025 is estimated to be about \$200 million, and the impact on the national annual gross domestic product in 2025 is estimated to be about \$400 million. Those figures are significant. Stud Road is so bad that at times traffic speed is down to 51 kilometres an hour.

I am bemused by the minority Labor government's alternative to the freeway, which is the upgrading of Stud Road. As I said earlier, it has already been upgraded and traffic flow is at times down to 51 kilometres an hour. The road cannot be widened further unless the government proposes to wipe out some creches and nurseries. When I asked the Minister for Transport to give a commitment about Stud Road he ducked for cover. The local paper says it is an immediate priority, but we need to know what that means to the Labor government. Former Minister Maclellan said the project was good and that the environment effects statement was appropriate. He had signed off on it — the funds for this important infrastructure road project had been allocated.

The other issue of great concern to many people in the outer east is hospital waiting lists. The former Kennett government had planned to build the 300-bed Knox public hospital. The trash-and-treasure site at the corner of the Mountain Highway and Boronia Road had been purchased for the important project. The new government has axed the project. Its alternative is to provide an additional 96 beds at the Maroondah and Angliss hospitals — a net loss of 200 hospital beds in the outer east, and a significant proportion given the number of beds throughout the state.

What will the Minister for Health do to fix the problem? He has snubbed his nose at an additional 200 hospital beds. The plans for the new hospital were almost completed and included 24-hour emergency and critical-care services, and neurology and outpatients services. More importantly, it would have been a tertiary hospital and would have added to the level of specialist skills in the area. More than a million people live east of Warrigal Road and the new hospital would have meant people would not have needed to go to Melbourne for specialist services. The upgrading of the Angliss hospital will not provide additional specialist services and the people of my electorate will still have to travel to the city to obtain them. I thought Labor Party's policy was similar to that of the former Kennett government of building services where the people are. Once again the Labor government will do a backflip on the issue. I would also like to know where the extra 20 or 30 beds at the Angliss hospital will be built.

My information is that there is no room left unless a whole heap of local houses are purchased and

bulldozed to build a wing. The same applies at the Maroondah Hospital. The opposition will await the outcome with great interest.

Mr Perton — It will probably be a long time.

Mr WELLS — The honourable member for Doncaster has pointed out the time it will take. I am reminded of the promise to the people of Frankston East, who were conned or perhaps misled.

Ms Campbell — Sore loser!

Mr WELLS — The people of Frankston East were promised that 64 hospital beds would be opened after the minority Labor government had won the election. They are now looking at three or four years before the planning stage is complete and longer before the opening of those beds. The promises about the Angliss hospital and the Maroondah Hospital will leave the promises made about the Frankston Hospital for dead.

The other promise made to the Wantirna electorate by the minority Labor government was to build a police station at Rowville, which is interesting because an enormous police station at Knox services a wide area. It includes administration facilities, and many police officers work from that station. The opposition will watch for the result of that promise with interest. The residents of Rowville wanted a larger police presence, which does not necessarily mean a police station. If a home is burgled or a person is assaulted people want a policeman to come quickly in a car. The honourable member for Knox and I were pushing for at least one car to be permanently stationed south of Ferntree Gully Road. Perhaps a question about the time frame or money to be committed to that project can be asked in the adjournment debate or questions without notice.

As I travelled around the electorate during the election campaign I noticed that only a few of the main arterial roads were not duplicated. The Minister for Roads and Ports in the former coalition government, the Honourable Geoff Craige, made a commitment to duplicate the balance of High Street Road, triplicate part of Burwood Highway and duplicate the small section at the end of Stud Road. The money was allocated and the opposition will watch with interest as to whether the Minister for Transport will proceed with those projects. If they go ahead all of the main arterial roads will be duplicated which, considering the amount of traffic carried on the roads and the amount of industry and business in the area, is necessary.

I turn now to the home opportunity loans scheme (HOLS) program. While not taking anything away from the Labor win, which was a good one, that was a

real con in the Frankston East supplementary election. The Victorian Borrowers Association handed out literature with the message 'Shame on Kennett'. They forgot to mention that the previous Labor government introduced the HOLS program. The Minister for Housing has committed to consulting with that group. I cannot wait to hear both the financial arrangements and her declaration for those people who were conned by the HOLS program when the previous Labor government was in power.

I thank the people in my electorate of Wantirna, my election team and Liberal Party colleagues for the enormous support given to me in the last election.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Davies) — Order! Before calling the honourable member for Seymour, I remind members that this is an inaugural speech. It should be heard in silence.

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — I ask you, Madam Acting Speaker, to pass on my congratulations to the Speaker. I know that he will be effective in his important and challenging position.

It is with great pride, together with a sense of humility, that I deliver my inaugural speech to the Victorian Parliament. Along with many new members, becoming a member of Parliament has been a goal that I have worked for over many years. I know that the privilege of speaking before the Parliament as the representative for the electorate of Seymour is due to the dedication and hard work of many people.

My colleagues on this side worked tirelessly over the past few years on the problems expressed by the people of Victoria and raised those problems in the Parliament and in the broader community. They went out into the community and listened to what the people wanted from their state government. That process has resulted in the Labor Party's range of new solutions to many issues of our time. Those solutions won the support and confidence of the majority of Victorians at the state election.

I am deeply appreciative that my wife, Gail, wholly supported my efforts as the Labor Party candidate for Seymour while I was at the same time the full-time principal and teacher at the Flowerdale Primary School. The election win in Seymour is due in large part to her organisational, communication and administrative skills combined with the commitment and sacrifice that she, along with my son Lachlan, were prepared to make.

I thank my campaign director and friend, Andrew Allen, who supported me the whole way through the campaign with his great range of skills and his ability to

listen and work as a team member. I also thank the central ALP campaign committee, the Seymour campaign committee members — they were a great team — branch members, colleagues, family and friends who all believed in the Labor Party's ability to take a once-safe Liberal Party seat and turn it into a marginal Labor seat. We all share in what seems to most political experts to be a remarkable victory.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to the people of the Seymour electorate for entrusting me with their vote and hence allowing me to represent them in the Victorian Parliament. My job now is to represent the whole electorate. I know that with the Labor Party's commitment to regional and rural Victoria the electorate will become an even better place to live in during this term of government and into the future.

At the recent state election the people of the Seymour electorate voted for a fair go — a fair share in the prosperity of the Victorian economy. Labor promised \$170 million for rural and regional infrastructure development funds that will see all of Victoria prosper, not just Melbourne, and will deliver a better quality of life to all the people. It will do that by providing infrastructure projects and strengthening the government's focus on developments in rural and regional areas. It is great to see that we have appointed a Minister for State and Regional Development and established a department to support him in utilising the fund in a way that will revitalise our rural and regional economies.

The sprawling electorate of Seymour was formed for the 1992 election. I acknowledge the first member, Marie Tehan, who was committed to the electorate and the state as a whole as a government minister. The electorate runs above the northern suburbs of Melbourne, and further north past Heathcote in the north-west and Yea in the north-east. It includes the townships and communities of Whittlesea, Kinglake, Healesville, Yea, Seymour, Heathcote, Broadford, Kilmore, Wallan and many more, none of which are large. The surrounding districts of Seymour and Healesville each have populations of approximately 10 000. The remaining town populations and rural communities vary from fewer than a hundred to no more than a few thousand.

The electorate is diverse both geographically and demographically. It includes small rural farming communities in towns such as Yea and districts such as Highlands. As well, there are urban developments on the outer fringe of Melbourne such as Wandong and Wallan. The beauty of the electorate never ceases to astound me and its potential has been recognised as a

major tourism destination. The Toolangi State Forest, Kinglake National Park, Trawool Valley and the beautiful hills and valleys of Strath Creek and Flowerdale provide as pleasing sights to the eye as one could hope to find. All the features are close to Melbourne and are enjoyed by an increasing number of people who visit for day and weekend trips. The features are also appreciated by the many people who have chosen to move to the electorate, commute daily to their employment in Melbourne and at the same time enjoy the pleasures of a country life.

Tourism is fast becoming one of the major industries in the electorate, with a major asset being the wonderful vineyards that are producing high-quality wines that are enjoyed not only by Australians but are exported to many countries around the world. The electorate is smattered with wineries at Dixons Creek, Murrindindi, Avenel, Seymour, Flowerdale, Kilmore and Heathcote. Many jobs are created by the wineries and the government needs to provide as much support as possible to ensure that this important and relatively new industry continues to develop and prosper.

The Healesville Sanctuary is another tourism industry in the electorate. It is highly acclaimed and internationally renowned. It also carries out the important role of providing breeding projects for Australia's endangered species while providing education for our youth about natural fauna.

The electorate has a diverse range of industries including intensive horticulture and larger sheep and cattle farms. We have a large confectionery factory, a horseshoe factory, forestry and a value-adding timber industry. The army base at Puckapunyal has become a refuge, initially for Kosovars and presently for East Timorese. The electorate has a wonderful future with other major industries already established, including the horse racing industry, which is a very important employer in many towns. I thank the Minister for Racing for his enthusiastic support, which was shown by his recent attendance at the Seymour Cup.

Kilmore International School, which I had the opportunity to visit recently, is providing export-earning dollars to the local and state economies by attracting students from Asia to study in Australia in a quality-education institution. It provides 75 important jobs for Kilmore and the surrounding districts.

Many people from around the electorate asked me as the Labor candidate about the large size of the electorate and the different communities of interest that exist. I have been asked regularly, 'How could we have anything in common with people over the other side?'

For example, Heathcote is part of the Greater City of Bendigo and Healesville is in the Shire of Yarra Ranges. What I found from listening to thousands of people while doorknocking their homes, on the phone, at street stalls or on the railway station platforms was that the major needs and issues of the people were consistent across the electorate.

The common issues included the need for 24-hour policing, or even a police presence. During the election campaign Labor promised to start fixing the problems by building a police station at Kinglake, where police currently can take up to 45 minutes to arrive. The surrounding Kinglake area has a population of around 4000 people who have suffered from a great deal of neglect over recent years. There has been no recent infrastructure development to service the needs of a growing population. While Kinglake might seem close to Melbourne it can be quite isolated because it has a poor public transport service and there is a need for a full-time doctor and a police presence to enhance the community's feeling of safety. I am pleased that the government will be able to start helping the community by building a police station.

The people of Kilmore and areas of the southern part of Mitchell shire will also have an improved police presence, with Kilmore police station to be upgraded to a 24-hour station. It will cut down police response times at night, helping people to feel safer in their homes at all times.

Large class sizes of more than 30 exist in primary schools in the electorate. Like other rural and lower socioeconomic areas, it has unacceptably high dropout rates of students who are leaving secondary schools far too early. With the right basics, including a higher literacy rate helped by cutting class sizes to no more than 21 for grades prep, 1 and 2, and the provision of sufficient resources to provide a curriculum that will encourage less academically inclined students to stay on at school, the government can begin to address this serious problem. Students who finish their education have higher long-term employment prospects and are likely to participate more fully in society.

It is my experience as a primary school teacher and principal that children who have not attended kindergarten are generally disadvantaged because they do not have the experiences kindergarten provides to prepare them for school. I am pleased that the government will be putting more money into kindergartens and providing a subsidy to help lower-income families to send their children to kindergarten for this important start to their educations and lives.

Honourable members need to recognise that a high-quality education is the one major opportunity that the state can offer its citizens. Education provides people with the opportunity to choose how they want to live their lives and the skills to be able to benefit and participate to the full in the community. I am pleased that the Labor Party has promised to start addressing the problems that exist in the education system in its first full term of government.

Another major issue that spans all areas of the electorate is employment. The past seven years has seen many public sector jobs, especially in local and state governments, and more recently in federal government, taken away from the community and not replaced.

Forced amalgamations of councils and compulsory competitive tendering have been major causes of job losses. The towns of Healesville, Yea, Seymour, Heathcote, Pyalong and Kilmore all used to have shire offices. Those towns are now serviced either by shires based outside the electorate or by the Mitchell shire. Our only shire office is in Broadford. Seven different shires cover parts of the electorate of Seymour.

I am pleased to see the Bracks Labor government's policy to introduce one-stop shops. I will be pushing for the introduction of those state and local government agencies to provide for constituents the services that have been lost through the amalgamation of local councils and the rationalisation and privatisation of state government bodies.

Compulsory competitive tendering has seen the jobs once undertaken by local people go to large contractors operating from centres outside the local community, resulting in fewer and less secure local employment opportunities. I am pleased that our policy to abolish compulsory competitive tendering will allow local government to choose the level of services that are tendered out and be able to offer the best possible services within the community using the local knowledge of duly elected councillors and their staff. The policy was developed by the Labor Party after listening to local councillors and officers — many of whom have expressed to me their relief at what they call this 'very sensible policy'.

Privatisation of essential services such as gas and electricity along with the amalgamation and corporatisation of the water industry has made many workers redundant and once again led to the loss of jobs. The sacking of teachers and nurses has led to jobs being lost right around the electorate. The resultant lowering of morale in the work force has created a

looming crisis as country schools and hospitals find it difficult to attract people to fill vacancies.

The rule of thumb used by business people I know is that for every new job a further three or four new jobs are created. We have seen austerity measures taken to reduce debt for the state but no incentives for industry to locate in our areas — to put back what has been taken away. Labor won the support of country people at the state election with sensible and cost-effective promises to help address some of the employment problems we face. By providing targeted and much-needed funds through the Regional Infrastructure and Development Fund the Labor government will be able to once again thrive and prosper.

The promise by Labor to provide significant assistance — \$2.3 million — from the Community Support Fund to build the Seymour heated indoor pool showed its commitment to providing the quality of life to country people that is enjoyed in larger centres. The rule change concerning the distribution of moneys from the Community Support Fund will allow country areas to reap the full benefits of funds that have been taken away from our community by the introduction of gaming machines. Labor Party policies will improve the quality of life for all Victorians.

One of the most important aspects of Labor's platform is the reintroduction of consultative, open and accountable decision-making processes. A more democratic state that is inclusive of all Victorians is important in the making of decisions that all members of our community may own and benefit from. The restoration of the Auditor-General's powers and independence and the introduction of laws to allow the independence of the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions will ensure that right and proper processes of scrutiny are allowed.

I am pleased to be on this side of the house where public information will be made more accessible through improved freedom of information legislation which will become a tool to ensure open and effective government in which the people can be confident that their best interests are being served by those in whom they put their trust. Parliamentarians and the public service serve the people, not themselves, or the limited interests of the big end of town. The proposed legislation will help address some of the less democratic laws that now exist in our state.

My parents' involvement with the Australian Labor Party and their sense of social justice for all instilled in me a social conscience that I apply to the way I think and do things.

After seeing the effects of the lack of compassion shown by the Kennett government, I found myself feeling frustrated by a powerlessness to do something about a situation that I felt was disgraceful. As a teacher, I saw many of my friends and colleagues pushed into the humiliating, even degrading, 'pool' labelled as — even if not true — the least effective teachers in a school and the school system. As jobs were slashed, class sizes blew out and morale sank to levels I had never expected to see. There was no care, no counselling, no support and no dignity for those people, just the pressure to take a meagre voluntary redundancy package.

When the opportunity came to stand for Labor in the safe Liberal seat of Seymour I grabbed it, because I knew it was my chance to stand up for other people and for decency — the hallmark of the Bracks Labor government. The position of Labor candidate empowered me to make statements I was unable to make because of the threat and zealous application of teaching service order 140.

Although I have always been interested in politics, it was this scenario that lit the fire in the belly. That fire gave me the belief that if I worked hard enough I could win the seat of Seymour and help bring about a more decent society — a society that cares about all, not just the few with their ideology of big money, trickle-down economics and the privatisation of community-owned assets; a society that works towards taking everybody with it and giving everyone the opportunity to participate fully through a decent education that reflects the needs of our rapidly changing society; and a society that promotes feelings of personal safety and security along with the confidence of knowing that if you are sick or injured, there is an ambulance or hospital bed for you no matter the size of your wallet or who you know.

I am confident that Labor Party policies will help provide workers with a greater sense of security and justice if they are injured at work. Jobs as well as job security are of great importance to the quality of life of the members of our community.

The restoration of the common-law rights of workers and victims of crime is a necessary ingredient for a fair and just society. Nothing irked me more than the knowledge that a politician who had his feelings hurt could sue using the state's money while a loyal and hard-working employee, injured for life, had his or her self-worth, leisure-time pursuits and ability to fully contribute destroyed with no recourse at all.

As a member who is privileged to be part of this Parliament it is my aim to represent all the people in the Seymour electorate and all Victorians effectively. I look forward to the challenges ahead, and I am proud to be part of a government with a platform of governing for and listening to the concerns of all Victorians. I thank the house for its attention.

Mr LUPTON (Knox) — I have a great deal of pleasure in joining the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. Firstly, I thank the people of Knox who at the 1999 election returned me to Parliament for the third time.

Mr Langdon — It made the paper!

Mr LUPTON — It did, too. Over the past seven years the situation in the Knox electorate has been one of continual change. In that period residents have seen roads, schools and the general environment improve to an amazing degree.

In the decade between 1982 and 1992, when I was a councillor of the City of Knox, the previous Labor government basically spent no money on roadworks in my electorate. That was one of the things that made me stand as a Liberal Party candidate in 1992.

During the decade under Labor, the residents of Knox saw roads started but never finished. The High Street Road extension, which was to run from Stud Road through to the Burwood Highway, stopped short of the highway because the government ran out of money. The road remained unfinished for a couple of years. It was only when BP Australia wanted to build a service station on the road that the money for the completion suddenly became available.

The honourable member for Wantirna mentioned that in 1992 the single-lane roads that ran around our electorates, which abut each other, were in a deplorable condition. In the seven years of the Kennett government Dorset Road, Stud Road, the Burwood Highway and Ferntree Gully Road have been improved to an amazing degree. It reached the stage where people were coming into my office to say that no matter where they went in Knox, road construction work was going on.

Mountain Highway, which has now been duplicated through Bayswater and out to Dorset Road, Boronia, is an extremely busy roadway bordered on both sides by heavy industry. Prior to the Kennett government coming to office the highway was a two-lane road with no kerbing. It is now a beautiful four-lane highway.

Burwood Highway used to drop from three lanes to two in the vicinity of the Knox City shopping centre,

remaining that way right through to Scoresby Road. It is now a three-lane highway all the way from Stud Road to Scoresby Road. If the Kennett government had been re-elected it would have made Burwood Highway a six-lane highway from Scoresby Road through to Ferntree Gully Road, so that people could travel from Knox City shopping centre right through to Upper Ferntree Gully on a six-lane carriageway. I hope the minority Labor government will ensure that funding is made available to fulfil that dream, because that extremely busy road is dangerous the way it is.

During the election campaign many promises were made and everyone was throwing money around like a man with no arms. The people of Knox were fortunate that funding was committed for road upgrades. If the government had been returned, High Street Road would have been duplicated at a cost of \$3.8 million, and Kelletts Road would have been duplicated between Stud Road and Taylors Lane at a cost of \$3 million. Under the former government, Wellington Road, which carries an enormous amount of traffic east-west, was duplicated from Stud Road right through to Waverley Park. However, as a result of housing development to the east of Stud Road the volume of traffic in the area is unbelievable. From 6.30 in the morning traffic on Wellington Road moves at a snail's pace all the way through to the part that is duplicated.

The Kennett government would have put \$2.6 million into duplicating Wellington Road between Stud Road and Taylors Lane. That would have made it more accessible for the people of the area. The people who use Wellington Road, which turns into the Monash Freeway, come from as far away as Belgrave. Wellington Road is the only road that takes local motorists all the way through to Brighton. They are some of the commitments the Kennett government would have kept had it been re-elected.

After the Kennett government came to power in 1992 I visited each primary and secondary school in my electorate. At that time there was a \$600-million maintenance backlog in schools across Victoria. For example, the end wall of one of the buildings at Mountain Gate Primary School was held against the main building by a bolt, the spouting was non-existent, the barge boards were rotten, and the paint had peeled right back to the bare wood or the primer. Some schools in my electorate had not had a coat of paint in 20 years.

A long campaign was undertaken to bring the maintenance of those schools up to standard, and each school in the electorate of Knox has seen the benefit of it. However, there is still a long way to go. Recently I wrote to the Minister for Education, asking her to give a

commitment to complete the outstanding maintenance works as determined by the previous government.

Fairhills High School was to receive some \$51 000; Ferntree Gully Primary School was to receive some \$29 000; Heany Park Primary School, \$22 000; Karoo Primary School, almost \$31 000; Mountain Gate Primary School, which is the school that had a wall that was falling down, some \$195 000; Wattleview Primary School, \$144 278; and Yawarra Primary School, some \$417 000. Those schools require maintenance, not to the extent that they would be like the Taj Mahal but to the extent that they will be modern and comfortable for students. The proposal was not over the top. Those schools were neglected for 10 years, and I believe the schools maintenance backlog is now something of the order of \$160 million.

I will mention some of the other capital works that were planned for schools in my electorate. Park Ridge Primary School, which is about eight years old, has a staff room and a library that you cannot swing a cat in. Some 911 students will attend the school this year — next year the enrolment will increase to just under 1000. The staff amenities at the school are deplorable. An agreement was made and permission was granted for \$850 000 to be spent on upgrading the school's facilities.

Wattleview Primary School, which I mentioned earlier, was to receive another \$800 000. Students travel from everywhere to attend that popular school because it provides such a great academic curriculum. Just under 570 kids are enrolled at the school, and they need additional facilities. It is in a large catchment area, so it requires additional funding to provide the facilities required. It is getting to the stage where the school is looking at setting up double-storey portable classrooms because it is running out of land.

Heany Park Primary School, which was to receive another \$500 000 to upgrade capital works, is another school with an increasing student population because it is located in a growth area. The school, which has proved to be extremely popular, was planned by the previous Labor government and opened in 1993. Student numbers are growing continually, and the principal and the school council have requested an investigation into the possibility of establishing another primary school in the area because they can see that enrolments will crack the 700 to 800 mark in the next couple of years. If the school had the classrooms to accommodate that number of students there would not be sufficient room for playgrounds.

Education has been a high priority of mine. The amounts I have referred to are not instances of pork-barrelling, they are the amounts the previous government thought were necessary to ensure that the education facilities in the electorate of Knox were adequate.

Other commitments made by the former government include a paramedic response centre in Rowville. Rowville is a town without a heart, because there is only a shopping centre. The shopping centre, if you could call it that, used to consist of a service station, a milk bar and a fish and chip shop, but since then the Stud Park shopping centre has been built a kilometre or two up the road and has become the de facto centre of Rowville, but it is locked up at night. The population of Rowville has increased from about 3000 to between 30 000 and 35 000, so it requires a paramedical centre to cater for its needs.

The previous government established a Country Fire Authority (CFA) station in Rowville because the growth in the area meant that it could not be supported by the Scoresby fire station. The old Rowville fire station operated by the CFA was located in a dead-end street, which made it difficult for fire trucks to leave the station to attend fires. Often the vehicle from Boronia — the main vehicle called upon for all fires in the Knox municipality — would get there first because the Rowville truck could not get out of the station. The new fire station was built by the Kennett government and is working well.

I was shocked and disappointed to learn that under the minority Labor government the Scoresby freeway project, which I launched in 1990 as mayor of the City of Knox in a proposal entitled 'Let's get Scoresby rolling', has been discarded. The proposal that the Scoresby freeway be extended from Ringwood to Frankston would have provided an enormous lifeline for that whole area.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr LUPTON — I note the interjection from the Labor Party, but I point out that when during the last session of Parliament the honourable member for Mitcham gave the house a lecture on Stud Road he said that it extended to Ringwood. Stud Road does not go within 6 kilometres of Ringwood, which the honourable member for Mitcham should know because it is in his electorate. The honourable member for Melton should not come into this place from the other place and try to tell me about roads, because he would not have a clue.

The road I am talking about runs from Ringwood to Frankston, and it is essential that the project go ahead. The reservation is in place and the people in the community have planned for it for years. An environmental impact study has been completed, and the project should be completed. The new government's decision to wipe off the project straightaway is hasty, and I hope it will review the situation in the future.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr LUPTON — You and I are going to have fun, Don.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Davies) — Order! I ask the honourable member for Knox to address the Chair.

Mr LUPTON — The next issue I will address is the commitment to establish a new police station in the area. The Cain–Kirner governments closed three police stations in my electorate — at Boronia, Ferntree Gully and Bayswater. The fight over the closures was long and protracted.

The previous Labor government erected a Taj Mahal opposite Knox City Council chambers and leased it at \$675 000 a year for 10 years — \$6.75 million for a building we will never own! It was supposed to be the police headquarters.

The community of Boronia took up the challenge. The people argued and fought tooth and nail. First they fought a Labor government, a fight that cost the former member for Knox his seat. In fact, they took on all the members of Parliament with nearby electorates, including the former members for Wantirna and Bayswater. Then they took on police command. I was as popular at police command as a rat under the chookhouse — they did not like me at all!

We took them on, and eventually we won, because the community believed it needed a police station. After arguing with all the authorities including the politicians and everyone else the community was delighted when a police station was eventually built at Boronia.

Now the Labor Party is talking about building a police station at Rowville. Although I fought for a station at Boronia I have problems with the building of new stations in some areas. One problem is that before a police station is fully operational it must have a staff structure including so many senior sergeants, so many sergeants and so many senior constables.

If sufficient police manpower resources and motor vehicles are available the force can do a good job to ensure that the area is patrolled. It is not necessary to have police stations everywhere — and certainly not 24-hour stations. I do not have a big problem with the idea of building a police station at Rowville, but I do not believe it needs to be a 24-hour station.

Additional infrastructure drains resources. Police officers tend to ensure that keeping a police station open is a first priority. Cars out on the road come second. Then, if there is a football match at Waverley, for example, or at the MCG, the coppers are dragged out of the area and there is no-one left out on the street. That is my concern. I believe additional police resources should be allocated to the Knox area to provide an adequate service to the community.

I turn now to the matter of drugs in the community, particularly in the Knox area. I have concerns as a parent, as a grandfather and as a member of Parliament and former member of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee. I hope the government reinstates that committee so it can address the drugs situation in Victoria.

The Knox City shopping centre in my electorate is becoming a haven for druggies and dealers, and the quantity of drugs around there is a sorry sight for the men and women of the community who want to shop at the centre. People now tend to avoid the area. There are problems even in my own town, Boronia. As I mentioned in an earlier debate, last weekend four people overdosed in Boronia, one of whom died. The town is 32 kilometres outside the city, yet drugs are being traded, distributed and swapped on street corners. It is easier for a kid to get drugs illegally at a local school than to buy cigarettes in a shop. We have a real problem.

I trust the government and the opposition can adopt a bipartisan approach to solving this problem, which is devastating our society.

Syringes being discarded by irresponsible people after they have shot up will cause more and more problems. Restaurants these days have blue lights in the toilets to make it harder for the druggies to find a vein. What a sorry situation!

The former Kennett government allocated \$20 000 to an organisation called Focus on the Family for a project known as 'How to Drug Proof Your Kids'. That was a big step forward. I hope the new minority Labor government will be prepared to follow that program through and see if anything further can be done.

Evidence from overseas collected by members of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee indicates that the nuclear family as a unit is a very important factor in preventing drug abuse. I believe if the family unit is intact children can be kept away from drugs.

Anything we can possibly do to eradicate the drug menace from our society is worth attempting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Davies) — Order! Before I call the honourable member for Sunshine I remind the house that this will be his first speech, and I ask that he be heard in silence.

Mr LANGUILLER (Sunshine) — It honours me to have you in the chair, Madam Acting Speaker.

I congratulate Mr Speaker on his election to that high office. I have known him for many years and am confident of his impartiality and sense of duty, both to the Westminster system and to the people of Victoria who have chosen to have their views represented in this chamber by a number of political parties and by Independents.

It is a great privilege for me to be able to speak to the house as the elected member for Sunshine. I am proud to have been elected to represent the interests and ideals of the people of Sunshine.

I thank my colleagues, both in the Australian Labor Party and in my election campaign committee, for their support and encouragement. I also congratulate the Premier and Leader of the Australian Labor Party in Victoria, Mr Steve Bracks, on having a vision for all Victorians.

I have had the privilege of being associated with the Australian trade union movement since I came to Australia from Uruguay in 1974. I thank the Australian trade union movement, and in particular John Halfpenny, Jim O'Neal and the late Jim Raulston, who gave me their support and guided me through the always complex Labor struggles in Victoria.

I also have fond and enduring memories of the Victorian no. 1 branch of the Health Services Union. It gave me the opportunity to develop, under the previous Labor government, a most comprehensive occupational rehabilitation agreement in the health industry.

I am delighted to see that the Bracks government is committed to installing legislation that will lead to preventing injuries and deaths in the workplace, and the comprehensive and meaningful rehabilitation of injured workers and adequate and fair compensation for them and their families. I also welcome the reintroduction of

the fundamental common-law right of injured workers to sue their employers for negligence.

Together with thousands of Latin Americans, I came to Australia following the bloody coups d'état in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay. I pay tribute to the pioneer work of Gough Whitlam, the Reverend Dick Wootton, Jean McLean, Brian Howe, Don Chipp, Cyril Primmer, Andrew Theophanous, Billy Davis and the late Alan Missen, all of whom supported me and the human rights struggles and pro-democracy movements in that continent.

I take this opportunity to say gracias in my native tongue, Spanish, to all those Australians who have fought for democracy and the Latin American solidarity movement. Saludo al pueblo Australiano, al movimiento de solidaridad Latino-Americano, y particularmente a los combatientes por la democracia en el continente de Artigas y Bolívar.

As a young man, I was inspired by the former President of Chile, the late Salvador Allende, because the have-nots of that country saw issues of health, education and housing being genuinely addressed by a government that was committed to meeting their needs.

Together with the sections of the international community that are committed to bringing about justice, I look forward to the trial and subsequent incarceration of the former Chilean dictator, Augusto Pinochet. I am a republican, but I must commend the House of Lords in the United Kingdom for their principled decision regarding the former dictator.

One never becomes a member of Parliament without the help and support of many people. At the risk of omitting many valuable friends and colleagues, I especially thank Carlos Baldovino, Theo Theophanous, Jorge Ladowsky, Luis Larrea, George Seitz, Fernando Moya, John Saunders, Cesar Piperno, Alejandro Astudillo and the Capar family for their support and friendship. I also thank my many friends in the City of Brimbank.

I must thank Steve Conroy, Greg Sword, Marsha Thompson, Martin Ferguson, Ian Jones and Gareth Evans for believing in me. I am honoured to have had their support.

When I arrived in Australia, my family and I settled in the western suburbs. The Midway Migrant Hostel in Maribyrnong was our first home. At the time I did not speak English, but I was fortunate to attend Flemington and University high school evening classes, where, due to the determination of the teachers and some humble effort on my part, I eventually entered the Footscray

Institute of Technology, where I gained a Bachelor of Arts degree.

I was privileged to be a student of academics with a strong sense of social commitment, such as Don Watson, John McClaren, John Sinclair, Harry Van Moorst and Hiro Take. That period of schooling was undoubtedly the turning point in my life.

Today, I am proud to stand before this house as the first Uruguayan-born person to be elected to a Parliament outside Uruguay. I believe people have a fundamental right to sustenance and should have access to a quality health system and education. These basic principles have driven me throughout my many years in the Labor movement.

Sunshine is a diverse community made up of people from more than 100 nationalities. They include people from Greek, Irish, Turkish, Italian, English, Maltese, Somali, Eritrean and Latin American backgrounds, among many others.

We have the oldest Greek-Cypriot church in Australia, and the only domed mosque in Victoria is currently under construction. The Sunshine rail reserve grassland is considered to be of national significance, as it contains the last naturally occurring plant called, not surprisingly, the Sunshine orchid. Few electorates can boast this cultural, environmental and ethnic diversity.

In the City of Brimbank, of which my electorate is part, there are 184 Aboriginal cultural and archaeological sites. Two areas — Koroit Creek in St Albans and that part of the creek that extends to Deer Park — are considered to have high cultural and archaeological importance.

As a former union official I am proud to represent the people of Sunshine, who have a long and proud history of commitment to a fair society. The McKay workers were instrumental in the 1907 Harvester decision of Justice Higgins which established the premise of a fair and reasonable minimum national wage.

I am committed to the protection of Sunshine's proud history and heritage. Like the rest of Australia, Sunshine has a diverse work force of people with skills, knowledge and experiences who share in the global-knowledge economy. The community of Sunshine has traditionally worked in partnership with government, business and unions.

In the western suburbs we are proud to have our local university, Victoria University of Technology, a centre committed to academic excellence. VUT has highlighted the economic and social benefits of using

the linguistic, cultural and gender diversity of all our people, which assists Australia to participate in a global-knowledge economy. I acknowledge the work of Bertone and Esposito in articulating the benefits of productive diversity so well.

I am proud to be part of a Labor government that has the conviction and courage to move forward progressive social agendas in Australian society. We are proud to have a record number of women in cabinet and parliamentarians from regional Victoria, as well as a significant number of members who speak English as a second language.

I am committed to the process of reconciliation, and together with many parliamentary colleagues I look forward to the time when the Parliament honours itself with indigenous representatives.

I draw to the attention of the house the situation faced by people with disabilities and their carers in our community. One in five Australians will experience a disability at some time in his or her life. People with disabilities have rights and must have the same opportunities as other Victorians. The economic and social costs to a family caring for a person with a disability are high. However, the economic and social costs for the state will be even higher if we do not provide them with a fair share of resources. The Howard government has continuously shirked its responsibilities to the states and territories on disability funding.

The electorate of Sunshine is home to many people with disabilities and to their carers. I have met mothers, fathers and children who face the constant struggle of their daily lives with remarkable courage. The history of disability rights and government social policy development in Australia is similar to the story of human rights struggles throughout the world.

In the 18th and 19th centuries people with disabilities were incarcerated or thrown into asylums. The homeless, weak and abused were lumped together and hidden from the rest of the community. The 20th century has seen some positive developments in the care and treatment of people with disabilities. However, opportunities to learn, become educated, find employment and be adequately housed are still limited.

The fundamental issues for people with disabilities are the same as for other citizens: they are simply about universal human rights. We all deserve access to affordable and suitable housing, personal and support services, pathways into education, training and

employment, and public safety, as well as access to government decision-makers.

I will work with the public sector, the government and the community to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities and to promote opportunities and pathways, from early intervention through to schooling, training and employment.

The policies of the Kennett government were consistent with developments at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development level for the distribution of wealth throughout society. Under the Kennett government the rich became richer and the poor became poorer. While Victoria attracted a AAA credit rating for its economic performance, income distribution became like a roller coaster: it fell dramatically in areas of low socioeconomic status but increased obscenely in areas of high socioeconomic status.

One in 7 of my constituents is unemployed, compared to 1 in 25 in areas such as Eltham. Unemployment in Sunshine is more than double the national average. That is why I am so proud that the Labor government has made a commitment to target employment growth in areas of need.

Income is falling in areas of low socioeconomic status and increasing in areas of high socioeconomic status. For example, the median weekly household income in Sunshine is one of the lowest in Victoria and is less than half of that in Kew or Brighton. It is obvious that employment opportunities are not evenly distributed across Victoria. Male employment in finance, business and community services is concentrated in areas of high socioeconomic status. That type of employment has increased in the more well-to-do areas.

The widening gap between the rich and poor and between regional and metropolitan Victoria confirms my belief that, if anything, today there is a greater need for government intervention in some areas in order to balance out the injustices that are inevitably created by an excessively deregulated market economy.

Conservative governments have operated on the ideological assumption that everything that is private is always good and everything that is public is always bad. They aim to replace the public with the private and the citizen with the customer. The ideological direction is premised on measuring public activity only according to the extent that the private corporation could replace it.

Governments and the public sector are instruments that should be utilised to equalise imbalances and to

guarantee essential services and basic needs such as public health, transport, education and housing.

While undertaking research for my inaugural speech I came across some notes I had taken as a student at the Footscray Institute of Technology. They record a memorable passage from John Maynard Keynes that I believe is still relevant today:

The outstanding faults of the economic society are its failure to provide for full employment and the arbitrary and inequitable distribution of wealth and incomes.

This unmet challenge must still be addressed by society as a whole.

A healthy and democratic government must be transparent, accountable and open to public scrutiny. Independence and the separation of powers ensure the democratic functioning of our society. The government is about a broad and inclusive vision for all Victorians. Labor believes a fair redistribution of resources will lead to better services, schools, hospitals and roads in regional Victoria and an improved environment.

We also believe we can all help each other in these aims. In Sunshine's case we have the industrial experience to contribute to the further development of Victoria. There is much work to do, but the future looks bright for Victorians. The agenda is clear: we need to create jobs, and Labor is committed to that.

This will be done through a comprehensive Victorian industry plan, a new employment deal for young people, youth recruitment targets, traineeships, examining post-compulsory education as a response to skills shortages and targeting unemployment in hard-hit communities such as Sunshine.

Labor will invest in the social good. We must ensure all communities, including Sunshine, get their fair share. We will improve hospitals, education and community services and will deliver better community safety. We will do this in partnership and in consultation with business and unions, and we will do it by maximising the use of the public sector.

The outcome of the last election showed that people judge the performance of governments on a much broader basis than the relative significance of financial ratings from credit agencies, important as they are. In doing so, the people asserted a fundamental democratic principle: that government should also be judged by the efforts it puts into serving all of its citizens.

I have a firm belief the Bracks Labor government will be returned with an increased majority. We should not

forget an important lesson from a great Australian, the late H. G. 'Nugget' Coombs, who said:

... the objectives of public policy are the health, security and lifestyles of the members of the whole of society.

I thank all of my extended family who are present in the public gallery: my brother Julio, my uncle Nelson, and especially my parents, Julio and Nelly, from whom I inherited a value system based on a commitment to social justice. I thank my children, Natasha and Sebastian, who, with their youth and love of life, make my life worthwhile. Constantina, my partner and soul mate, has always been there for me. To all of them and my many other supporters time does not permit me to mention, I say thank you and gracias for their patience, understanding and support throughout a long political journey — one that has never been short of challenges and excitement.

Mr LEIGH (Mordialloc) — I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the address-in-reply debate and to say that I am delighted, as always, to be re-elected as the member for Mordialloc. Honourable members are in a unique position because there can only ever be 88 members in the chamber at any one time. I thank my family for putting up with many of the things that go with being a member of Parliament. I thank my staff and the many volunteers who have helped me over a considerable period. They have put up with much but since 1992 have continued to support me.

History will judge the former Premier, the Honourable Jeffrey Kennett, as one of the greatest premiers Victoria has ever had. People do not realise the mess Victoria was in in 1992 when the Kennett government came to power. The former State Bank of Victoria was about to have a run on it, and there were numerous other disasters that the Kennett government inherited. Victoria was an economic basket case. In this state government was regarded as a poisoned chalice, but over the past seven years the Kennett government has rescued the economy and left it in far better shape. If the \$20 billion that got lost in the 1980s was available and had not been wasted the former government could have done much more. In 1992 the state was in a terrible mess.

Unfortunately, in 1999 the Kennett government suffered the consequences of dealing with the enormous difficulties facing Victoria. I hope for the sake of Victorians that the Labor Party has learnt the lessons of history and will not repeat its mistakes. My prediction is it will go the same way as a previous Labor government.

The Governor's speech referred to the spending of money, but there was nothing about how to grow the economy. It is important that governments grow the economy to create real jobs. The funny figures of the 1980s created phoney jobs paid for by taxpayers. The government is now adopting a program of spend and spend again. As a member of the opposition I will do my utmost to keep the government on the straight and narrow.

Over the years there have been many claims and counterclaims made about the Kennett government. I remind honourable members of the \$670 million maintenance and major works backlog for Victorian schools highlighted by the Auditor-General. Problems ranged from windows damaged by the rain to ceilings and roofs full of dust which prevented upstairs rooms being used because of the dust falling down in the summer months. It was a disgrace. During the seven years of the Kennett government the Cheltenham East Primary School was allocated \$225 253; that excluded physical resources management system (PRMS) money and other funds that were due to be made available to it. The Cheltenham Secondary College received \$694 883, and a further \$900 000 was allocated to it for a new technology centre. I hope the Bracks government will keep that commitment, because it was not pork-barrelling. It was needed to upgrade a good school.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LEIGH — Members of the government think everyone should be judged in the same way they judge themselves. The opposition does not operate that way and never did.

Mr Cameron — You are in a class of your own.

Mr LEIGH — You will find out about it shortly. Dingley Primary School received \$85 130 for maintenance and upgrade programs during the past seven years. Under the PRMS grants the school will probably lose another \$300 000 that the Labor government will not approve. That is a major maintenance allocation for work required to be done. Kingston Heath Primary School received \$20 294, but it is a solid brick school and there are other works to be examined. Kingswood Primary School received about \$108 000, Le Page Primary School received \$521 000, and Mentone Autistic Special Development School, which is moving to a new site in the Bentleigh electorate, received \$2.592 million. That regional school is one of the schools that really needed to be upgraded. It had a significant backlog of work to be done and required urgent maintenance. Mordialloc

Primary School received \$300 000. During the Labor years the school was left to rot. It was a disgrace. I would not send my children to the school because of its physical condition.

My children go to one of the local state primary schools. I cannot wait to see the Minister for Education use the state system to educate her children. If it is such a terrific system, why do people like the minister not allow their own children to attend state schools?

Parkdale Secondary College received in excess of \$2 million; Parkdale Primary School received \$415 000; Parktone Primary School received \$230 000, and Spring Valley Primary School received \$300 000. Those figures total more than \$8 290 000. So much for not doing things in the electorate!

The Bracks government made a big deal about funding the Dingley bypass, which is terrific. The cost of the bypass is \$165 million, plus \$10 million for other serious roadworks. However, the government's commitment for the next three years is just over \$30 million. The government will take the bypass from South Road and Warrigal Road through to Old Dandenong Road, continuing the traffic chaos created in the 1980s when the Labor Party was last in government.

Ms Robyn McLeod, my opponent at the last election and a member of the Labor Party administrative committee, has worked hard to defeat me for six and a half years. After that time I can almost say I know her as well as my wife, although not quite. She was somebody paid by Emily's List to work against me, and she spent considerable money, time and effort. Fortunately the electors were not misled either by her claim to be a local, even though she comes from the federal electorate of Higgins, or her pretence that she was vitally interested in the community. When she lost she did not have the courage to appear at the declaration of the poll.

I know what it is like to be beaten. When I was beaten by Peter Spyker, a former member for Mentone and a former Labor Minister for Transport, a photograph of us having a beer appeared on the front page of the *Moorabbin Standard*. We each acted in the interests of voters, and I had a responsibility to show the community that as the Liberal Party candidate — —

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr LEIGH — You seem to have lots of them doing the same. Ms McLeod was a woman member of the Victorian administrative committee of the Labor Party — one of its wonders.

Ms McLeod claimed that in the 1996 election I committed to the construction of the Dingley bypass, which I did. However, the Labor council of the City of Greater Dandenong and the Kingston City Council, which consists mainly of Independents, wanted Westall Road done first, at a cost of \$37 million. The money for the Dingley bypass was transferred to the Westall Road project, and construction is now under way.

During the election campaign the Labor Party promoted the lie that I had not kept my commitment. However, Cr Phil Reed, a Labor councillor of the City of Greater Dandenong who now works for the Premier, went against his own party. The City of Greater Dandenong and I worked together to get Westall Road under way. What did Cr Reed do? He attacked it!

Phil Reed, who is now one of the advisers on the Scoresby Freeway, is in a unique position. On the one hand the government has cancelled that project, but on the other hand he is a councillor of a city desperate to get the freeway under way, as are the other councillors of the ALP-controlled council. However, the Bracks Labor government has said, 'Forget it'. That will be a test for the Bracks minority Labor government — although we know the de facto Premier of Victoria is the honourable member for Gippsland West.

The government has chickened out. Robyn McLeod and Jenny Lindell, now the honourable member for Carrum, committed to the construction of both the Dingley bypass and the extension of the Mornington Peninsula Freeway. The freeway is 600 metres from a six-lane major roadway. In the 1980s the Labor government built the wrong road! The government is now proposing to construct a freeway that will be 600 metres from a major arterial road. It will not happen. In reality South Road will run into Boundary Road, and that will be the Bracks government's Dingley bypass.

According to Vicroads, it is estimated that constructing the Dingley bypass through to Boundary Road will increase the traffic on Heatherton Road by up to 40 per cent compared with an estimated decrease of up to 40 per cent if the road is extended to the Springvale Bypass. It is also estimated that constructing the bypass through to Boundary Road will increase the traffic on Boundary Road by up to 20 per cent compared to an estimated decrease of up to 20 per cent if the road is extended to the Springvale bypass. Traffic on Centre Dandenong Road would be unchanged compared with an estimated decrease of up to 50 per cent if the road is extended to the Springvale bypass. If the bypass is built properly Dingley will get its village back.

The honourable member for Carrum made much about bringing the Mornington Peninsula Freeway to Aspendale Gardens residents. She will not get it.

Mr Robinson interjected.

Mr LEIGH — She is like the honourable member for Mitcham, who has made a few promises I will come to shortly.

There will not be an extension of the Mornington Peninsula Freeway unless the government builds it and introduces tolls on it. Perhaps the Premier will toll it? The opposition certainly will not. The government will not build a major highway some 600 metres away from another one. Under the Labor government residents of Aspendale Gardens will get an increase in traffic through their area. I am waiting with bated breath for the honourable member for Carrum to get the bulldozers in and keep her election promise. I want her to find the \$250 million she committed to her constituents. I think I will be holding my breath for a long time.

The minority Labor government did not expect to win office. It made commitments that it cannot keep because it never thought it was going to be elected. People are running to the government and saying, 'But you promised us this'. It will be interesting to see what happens. Some of Labor's candidates who are now in this place obviously have not got together to talk about the number of promises that were made. They will involve a large amount of money.

As someone who has served in this house as a backbencher and frontbencher in opposition and as a chairman of all-party committees, I am honoured that my colleagues and leader have chosen me to be the shadow Minister for Transport. It is sad the honour is not reciprocated in the type of person chosen as Minister for Transport.

Government members interjecting.

Mr LEIGH — The right to vote is the most sacred thing in a democracy, probably even above money. What one does with a vote is critical. For all the failings of former Cain government ministers, all they did was lose money. I intend to do my level best to make sure the Minister for Transport and every Labor member of Parliament who promised a road, bridge or bypass — if they are here for three and a half years — honours every commitment he or she made. Government members will not want to honour their commitments because they do not have the money to do so. I will make sure that the commitments are honoured or that the members concerned are exposed for what they have

not done. The government has inherited a great set of circumstances, but the amount of money currently in the Treasury will not be sufficient to fund the pre-election promises Labor made to gain office.

The test for government members is: who really runs the government? Labor has already brought down Kim Beazley's advisers. The opposition is not sure whether it is the Beazley state Labor government or the Bracks–Beazley government. The government is currently advertising for advisers; and some of its advisers are public servants. The main adviser to the Minister for Transport is a public servant, not a real adviser. The minister has public servants whispering in his ears about what they want. Government members are currently controlled — until they get in some of their mates.

If the Labor party knew it would gain office, why did it not have all its advisers and policies in place from day one when it took over, as the former Kennett government did? It was not ready. It knows that, and so do we. This will be a repeat of 1979 to 1982, with one exception: that time we won by one seat, this time Labor won by an agreement with a group of three people — the Independent faction of the Labor Party. I will be doing my level best to make sure the Labor government does not waste money in the same manner as the previous Labor government. I will expose the government for what it really is.

In closing, the best line so far has come from the Premier, who said on 3AW that he is not a socialist. I presume a few people are asking what he and his government are.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — Deputy Speaker, honourable members and comrades, the Labor Party had a fantastic election result on 18 September, and one of which Victorians can be proud. I remind honourable members about the election results in this house and the other place. Victorians now have a compassionate and caring government with a heart, and fantastic members to boot. In my region we got a terrific replacement for the previous member.

Earlier the honourable member for Mordialloc said his opponent did not turn up for the declaration of the poll. The ex-member for Tullamarine did not turn up either. He did not have the courage of his convictions. He could spew out his guts to the *Age* after suddenly having the courage to pour the bucket on Jeff Kennett, yet he could not turn up to the declaration of the poll. The new honourable member for Tullamarine will be a fantastic member for many years to come.

I turn to the result in the electorate of Gisborne. Fancy the former government trying to impose on that electorate a person who lives some 70 or 80 kilometres away at Buninyong — a person who used to arrive in a white ministerial car, sign the books, get back into his car and return home. They wanted to impose him on the people of Gisborne, but they saw through that. What a fantastic result!

The Liberal Party threw everything at the new honourable member for Ballarat West. It put up Judy Verlin, mayor of Ballarat, against her. The Liberal Party wanted to win the seat but could not because the quality of our candidate far surpassed that of the candidates put up by the Liberal Party or the National Party. Another fantastic result in Ballarat East demonstrates the quality of Labor Party people in this house.

Today we heard the honourable member for Ripon give his inaugural speech. There were some great things about attending campaign meetings in the seats I have just talked about. One of my favourite electorates was Ripon because the Friday night campaign committee meetings were held at the Maryborough pub or at John McQuilten's winery down the road. They were terrific, successful meetings and we knocked off the sitting member.

What a fantastic result for the honourable member for Bendigo East, who stood against a sitting member who was a minister in the previous Kennett government! The honourable member for Bendigo East will do a fantastic job representing her electorate.

I remind the house of the new Labor Party members. I start with the honourable member for Seymour, the honourable member for Narracan and the honourable member for Geelong — and what a fantastic result he achieved against a Liberal Party minister. Although the honourable member won by only 16 votes he got there, and that was the fantastic part about it. The Labor Party won the upper house seat of Geelong Province with the Honourable Elaine Carbines. We won the Assembly seat of Oakleigh. We also won Frankston East — another fantastic result. The Kennett government was saying that the election result of 18 September was not real — 'They didn't mean to kick us out' — yet the result was fantastic and worth the wait.

The Labor Party won the seat of Carrum, another fantastic result, and Chelsea Province, with the Honourable Bob Smith. We cannot forget Gippsland East, where an Independent has taken over a former National Party seat.

Let me talk about the National Party, because it has some real problems. It is a party in decline and its members have some serious thinking to do. I will demonstrate why. The relevance of the National Party and its support from country Victorians has been plummeting. Look at the primary figures for the National Party from 1992 until now. I will go through them in a moment.

I will go down to the micro level with the seat of Shepparton. On a two-party preferred basis the National Party is favoured against the Australian Labor Party at 62.1 per cent of the vote.

That sounds terrific — really good! It means that the National Party is going well. However, in the seat of Shepparton the National Party received 39.94 per cent of the primary vote, the ALP, 24.62 per cent, and the Independent, 35.44 per cent. If the ALP had given its preferences to the Independent the honourable member for Shepparton would not be here today. The National Party primary vote was way down. What a collapse — from 65.98 per cent in 1996 to 39.94 per cent in 1999!

A further analysis of the past three elections shows that in 1992 the National Party got 204 525 primary votes, or 7.83 per cent of the formal vote; in 1996 it got 184 419, or 6.69 per cent of the vote; and in 1999 it got 136 040 votes, or 4.85 per cent of the vote. So its primary vote has fallen from 7.83 per cent down to 4.85 per cent! It would be lucky to field a cricket team.

National Party support has collapsed for a number of key reasons. One is that the Liberal Party is poaching National Party seats. That strategy has been put in place over a long period by none other than the Honourable Mark Birrell, Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council. His view of the National Party is that its seats are there for the picking — and that is what the Liberal Party has been doing.

In the federal seat of Murray the Liberal member, Sharman Stone, has taken over a National Party stronghold. Craig Bildstien, the Liberal Party candidate, took the seat of Mildura from the National Party in 1992 — and I could go on. A predator out there called the Liberal Party is taking over National Party seats.

Country Victorians do not trust the National Party anymore. They do not believe in the National Party because it does not listen to its constituents. Why would the vote have collapsed from nearly 8 per cent to 4.85 per cent if that were not the case?

The National Party has the job in front of it if it wants to survive into the next millennium. I wish National Party members all the best, but that is up to them.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr NARDELLA — Yes, they do need it. I want to thank a number of people for my election as the honourable member for Melton, and I will start with my wife, Lyn. As every honourable member knows and understands, any partner of a politician has a difficult time. It does not matter what side of the political fence politicians are on, if they do their jobs properly they are hardly ever home, so I thank my wife. I also thank my mum and dad, who came to Australia from Italy back in the 1950s — and may I say that they are very proud of their son.

I thank Mr Peter Mitchell, who is the Victorian ALP state organiser. In my inaugural speech in the Legislative Council I forgot to name him.

An Opposition Member — Shame.

Mr NARDELLA — Yes, it was a great tragedy! However, I now thank Peter for being my official campaign director and a great mate and supporter in the party.

I thank the rest of my family, Lorelle and Shaun Scarlett and grandchildren Teagan, Jayden and Kyal. I thank Mr Nik De Santis, who was my campaign director; he is a great friend and someone who has taken on a lot of hard work for me. I also thank Mr Kevin Davis, the president of my campaign committee; John and Jane Cassar; Leo Johnson; Graham Procter; Richard Lidders and Adam Lidders, who is my treasurer; Albert Tracey; Rob and Marion Martin; Neil Spurrill; Brendan O'Connor; Peter Taylor; Ian Jones; and Frans Timmerman and Mia Vitue. I also thank Pat Cook, who has acted as my mentor and personal friend over a long period.

How could we forget the former member for Melton, David Cunningham, and his jokes? I intended telling one of David's jokes, but I did not want to be kicked out of the house. David was the first and only member for the seat of Derrimut, which was the precursor of the seat of Melton, and everywhere I go he is held in high regard. The work he did for individual constituents and for community groups within the electorate is unsurpassed. I will have to aim high if I am to match the standard of the work David did in the community. He helped his constituents at every opportunity, and I wish him all the best in his retirement. I understand he got himself elected to the executive of the retired members association, so I am sure he will be kept busy.

I will touch on a number of issues facing the Bracks Labor government, one of which is the services and support available to young people with dementia or

disabilities resulting from head injuries. In some serious and sad cases people are not able to cope with or care for their loved ones due to their own illness or incapacity. Sometimes those young people are placed in inappropriate settings, such as in hostels or nursing homes with older people where they are not able to cope.

One of the challenges the government will face in the next millennium is dealing compassionately with people who are in those types of situations. One of my friends, Murray, for whom I was best man and whom I have known since form 1 at Sunshine Technical School, unfortunately has dementia, even though he is only 40 years old. People in situations like the one Murray and his family are in find it extremely difficult to cope. That is one of the issues Parliament needs to deal with.

The other point I will touch on, which is again on the theme of looking after disadvantaged or vulnerable people, is protecting the residents of retirement villages. Honourable members are probably aware of instances, and some will have raised them in the house, in which people go into retirement villages, find the accommodation is not suitable for whatever reason, and then have difficulty getting out. The government cannot rely on market forces to protect those people in their twilight years. I want to work with the government to see what can be done for them.

Honourable members, whether in government or in opposition, face a number of other challenges over the next few years. It will be a matter of maintaining government policy, maintaining a vision of where we want our society to go and maintaining our commitment to an open government that cares about the people it serves.

The communities of Melton are terrific. Last Friday night I went to the local heavy metal concert which was put together by the young people in Melton. My earplugs are still in my pocket! The first band was not too bad but the second one was fantastic. Under the Gleam scheme young people work together to arrange the bands so that they can have fun and socialise in a safe environment.

Melton has more than 10 per cent population growth a year. It is a young community. During my term in Parliament I want to deal with the following issues in the electorate. A pipeline is required to join Western Water and Melbourne Water so that the region's water supply is secure and safe. The Honourable John Anderson, the federal Minister for Transport and Regional Services, has delayed funding for the Hopkins

Road overpass for a couple of years. It is a project that needs to be undertaken and I will keep him accountable to ensure that it is put in place quickly. There are safety issues at the Rockbank Primary School, which is on the Western Highway, and at Leakes and Troups roads and the Western Highway at Rockbank. Anthony's Cutting is another area that needs to be upgraded as does the duplication of Melton Highway. I will concentrate on the economic and employment development of the region as well as maintaining the Victoria University of Technology site and its courses.

I am proud to be part of the Bracks Labor government. Minority or not, when honourable members were asked to put their hands up, the vote was 44 to 42. Compared with the Legislative Council that is a fantastic result. I thank honourable members for listening to me today.

Mrs PEULICH (Bentleigh) — Mr Acting Speaker, I congratulate you on making the batting team of the temporary chairmen of committees. With your many years experience in local government I am sure you will do a fantastic job. Speaking personally, I can say that the experience is wonderful. I also congratulate the Speaker on two significant achievements in his life: one on becoming for the first time the father of a girl, and the second on being elevated to the high office in Parliament as the first Speaker from a non-English-speaking background, which reflects the tolerance of diversity some honourable members have referred to within Australia and the social justice both parties have been committed to and of which the Liberal Party has a proud tradition.

I congratulate honourable members on both sides of the house on being elected to the Victorian Parliament. It is a proud achievement for me as I am sure it is for everyone else here. I welcome the honourable member for Melton to the house. His inaugural speech in this house was a mixture of a rollcall and a television election review. Had we seen that on television I am sure it would have rated poorly.

Mr Langdon interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — We probably wouldn't. Perhaps it would appear on Channel 31, where we have all had the opportunity to appear, including the honourable member for Clayton.

I am delighted to be returned by the people of Bentleigh for my third term. Despite the number of opponents and the sweetheart deals between the Democrats, the Labor Party and the Greens, I came within 40 votes of winning in my own right. Given the circumstances I am proud of that achievement. Bentleigh has always been a

marginal seat. The honourable member for Oakleigh held the seat between 1988 and 1992. Bentleigh is a litmus seat that picks up the trends often in advance of many other seats. I also note that on three occasions the Labor Party has held the seat by lesser margins than that which I currently hold it, so I look forward to building on what I see as a strong personal return.

I thank my constituency for the faith it has placed in me and my capacity to represent the community and to provide strong and dedicated service, as I have given over the past seven years building on my preceding local government service. I thank my campaign team, my local party members and the many supporters to whom I am indebted and owe the deepest gratitude for their help and support, not only in the election campaign but also in the many preceding months and years. I thank members of my family, especially my husband, Savo, my mother, Nena, my son, Paul, my brother, who is ordinarily not a political person, and my niece and nephew.

As usual the campaign in Bentleigh has had its drama. Some honourable members may have heard about the organised theft of 38 of my billboards on a single night. We lost 56 billboards in total.

Mr Perton interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — I understand a white van was observed doing a nocturnal pick up but it was certainly organised. It is a reflection of the modus operandi that has existed during every election campaign that I have fought. It is unfortunate because its intention is to intimidate local residents so that they are frightened of showing their support for their preferred candidate by displaying billboards in their gardens. That is gagging at the grass-roots level. Before honourable members interject at the mention of the word 'gag', I indicate that I will comment on that better known 'gag' in a moment. The actions of my political opponents locally were counterproductive because the coverage resulting from the organised theft led to many requests from people who wanted my billboard in their garden. We could not keep up with the demand, particularly my husband who had to construct and erect the boards. He was miffed. Unfortunately, we had to resort to providing night watchmen, all volunteers, to ensure the remainder would stay in place.

Mr McArthur — Who would knock them down?

Mrs PEULICH — One can only conclude they were not political supporters but opponents, perhaps those who graffitied my front fence with a swastika. They are obviously people who do not appreciate my

background. Those actions deny people the right to demonstrate their support for a particular political candidate in our democratic and diverse society.

There were two significant factors in the election campaign. One factor — and obviously the opposition will discuss this internally — was the failure to expose the smoke-and-mirror act of the Labor Party, which was given the legitimacy of being incorporated in the speech of His Excellency the Governor on the opening of the 54th Parliament.

Another important and significant factor was the front page run by the *Herald Sun* about the gag of back benchers. This was a turning point in the campaign and effectively removed from office six of the nine members who were featured on that page. I put that on the public record, not only in my own interests, because it caused certain distress to my family, particularly my 15-year-old son who attends a government school, but also out of respect for the members who lost their seats, some of whom were hardworking and will be sorely missed.

The reality is that front page was a fabrication. The use of quotation marks — I am an old chalkie, an old English teacher — especially in journalism, indicates direct speech — that the person has uttered the words that have been directly attributed to him or her. The problem was that five of the people featured on the front page to whom I spoke were not spoken to personally by the *Herald Sun*, so the use of quotation marks around the words 'No comment' was the sort of journalistic licence one does not expect from what should be impartial reporting of political events. If the words underneath the photographs had been 'No response' — I was not in my office to take the call at the time, I was doorknocking — it would have been fair and accurate reporting.

It is very sad that such a misuse of the media has cost the coalition government and some hardworking members of Parliament their seats.

I have spoken with the political editor of the *Herald Sun*, who advised me that a request for a retraction would need to be subjected to a legal process. My purpose in raising the issue was to put it on the record, because my 15-year-old, who was 14 years old at the time, came home from school the day it appeared in the newspaper and said, 'Mum, today was the worst day of my life'. I asked him why and he answered, 'Because you were featured on the front page of the paper' — of which I was not aware — and added, 'Everyone is saying you are gutless'. I take pride in my integrity, my hard work and my speaking out both in my political

career and in my private and professional life. I will put the point aside, but it is important to place it on record in *Hansard*.

The minority Labor government is an accidental government led by an accidental Premier. He is a nice bloke, so I do not mean it as a personal imputation on his character. The government is a smoke-and-mirrors act that conjures up images of a greater democracy, but Victorians will quickly realise that although the Labor government may be different in style, the differences in its policies are a conjurer's show based on a number of illusions.

As a member of the opposition I look forward to the Brack Pack, as we affectionately call it on this side of the house, unveiling the details of its plans and policies. I am sure when Victorians see the details they will more understand the sleight of hand of the conjurer, and I am confident that Victorians, particularly those in the bush, will be disappointed.

Time and again we have heard about how the coalition government killed off democracy. As a person who lived under a communist regime, I must say it is a careless and injudicious use of words.

What have we seen so far in the rejuvenation of democracy in Victoria? Backroom deals being stitched up with the support of the Independents, who have time and again committed themselves to the view that this house is the supreme decision-making forum and that all important decisions should be made on the floor of the Parliament. However, that view was the first to bite the dust. Although many details of the deals have been released, many have not. I believe the voters of Victoria deserve to know the facts and the details of the backroom deals that resulted not only in the formation of a minority Labor government but also in the adoption of the sessional orders, which I believe two of the Independents would not have supported unless some sweeteners were offered. The opposition did not see the legislative program until today, but when we did we saw it included only bills of repeal — hardly innovative or indicative of proper preparation.

The government has talked about being committed to improving the relationship among members in the house, yet we have seen a number of examples of abuse of the conduct of the house with coalition members being subjected to the arrogant ranting of the Minister for Transport, and I will not mention which minister referred to members of the opposition as sycophants and parasites.

Mr Hulls — Me!

Mrs PEULICH — Yes, it was you. At least you owned up! I have always believed the Attorney-General was relatively honest, and I am delighted that he has confessed to the ditching and the fluffing of the deal outlined in the Independents charter — the commitment to improving the relationships among members of this house.

The sessional orders introduced by the minority Labor government could have been used as an opportunity to improve on the Parliamentary sitting hours. We heard much about family-friendly hours, but we are sitting longer hours — another ditch!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs PEULICH — We are all working harder, but many of the female government members had no knowledge of the details of the sessional orders — perhaps the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment did, but many did not. They either abrogated their responsibility of scrutinising the actions of their frontbench or they were rolled by the boyos, the Brack Pack, the four boys who are running the show, one of whom is sitting in the house at the moment.

The mean-spirited changes to condolence motions will mean that we will no longer hear the sorts of gracious and generous comments that were made about the two Labor members who passed away, because honourable members will not have the opportunity of moving condolence motions in the house — the Speaker will merely announce a death. That is particularly mean spirited. It is pathetic that government members could not agree that sessional orders should include the opportunity for the respective leaders of the political parties to make a 3-minute speech to recognise a member's life and work in Victoria as a member of this place.

We heard the Labor Party talk about democracy, but Labor's notion of democracy is selective and narrow. The commitment to parliamentary reform outlined in the Independents charter has obviously been watered down substantially, particularly given the removal of private members' bills. The provision for private members' bills in the sessional orders, with the ALP being the gatekeepers, is the worst possible example of parliamentary patronage. Government members spent the whole of the last term of the previous government criticising it for parliamentary patronage, so it is an even clearer example of hypocrisy.

I will now refer to some of the Bracks government's election pledges, which can be exposed as the illusions

of a smoke-and-mirrors act. I will deal firstly with the ALP's promise to restore funding to education. The illusion is that education is underfunded, but the truth is that historically the funding allocated to education under the two most recent budgets of the Kennett government were record highs.

Ms Kosky interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — Get your facts straight. A further \$750 million is in the kitty to play around with.

The government has tried over the past two days to discredit the financial achievements of the previous government, but no-one could possibly believe the Labor government on that. The government is finding bits and pieces of waste, but it has already squandered \$5 million in paying out public servants. The government has targeted public servants as somehow being politically tainted or not kosher.

The illusion in education is that the government preaches self-management, but it does so only when it comes to condom machines. When it comes to self-governance via a three-year funding agreement with schools it says, 'No you cannot have self-management'. That is appalling hypocrisy.

The Minister for Education — the prima donna of the show — will now punish the schools in the self-governing program and bring them into the fold. The lie being perpetrated is that those schools are somehow education traitors and defectors. That is a sad reflection on the Minister for Education's stance on this important initiative. The lie is about hiding the payback to Australian Education Union (AEU) mates, who campaigned vigorously in most of the marginal seats.

The illusion is about caring about the quality of learning and teaching, but the capping of class sizes has now been deferred for three to four years. Most of the children who were supposed to benefit from that will have graduated to secondary school by the time it happens. They will not benefit from smaller class sizes, despite the government creating the impression that it would cap class sizes quickly. As well, the government ditched LAP tests, which were overwhelmingly supported by parents in school communities. Why did it do that? To appease the AEU, which opposed the tests despite their being the only method of assessment and the only way of establishing comparative quality control.

The government creates the illusion of poor retention rates, but retention rates in Victoria are the highest in Australia. It creates the illusion that Labor cares about

schools, but everyone knows where the minister sends her children to school.

Labor also creates the illusion that it has solutions to problems associated with medium-density housing policies. However, the Minister for Planning will defer his policies for 12 months. It also creates the illusion of having solutions to problems with waiting lists for hospital emergency departments. I am sure the honourable member for Malvern will have a field day in chasing every ambulance, as did the present Minister for Health when he was in opposition. He knows there are no easy solutions to those complex problems.

The minority Labor government creates the illusion of being different from the Kennett government, which it branded as a one-man band. But whom did we see on the Labor stage during the election campaign? The honourable member for Williamstown, now the Premier, who used so many pronouns one could only have concluded that his was a one-man show. That is extraordinary for someone who is supposed to be a self-effacing or humble person.

Labor will cost Victoria investment, jobs and its sound financial position. It will cost the state efficient and effective service delivery. The smoke and mirrors used to win the election will be exposed as illusions. Some of the achievements over the past seven years in the Bentleigh electorate include: \$12 million additional funding to the schools serving my electorate; a saving of more than \$30 million a year in rates to Glen Eira ratepayers as a result of council mergers; an allocation of \$1.4 million to extend facilities at the Bentleigh Bayside Community Health Centre; the upgrading of every railway station in the Bayside network, with premium stations established at Bentleigh and Moorabbin; and, as the statistics show, a reduction in crime in the district. The opposition intends to study future trends closely.

The single greatest contributor to impoverishment is unemployment. In 1992 in the Bentleigh electorate the rate of unemployment was 12.5 per cent; it is now less than 6 per cent. I look forward to reporting on the indicators to the 55th Parliament when I track the achievements of the Brack Pack, the Labor minority government. I am confident that the mirror will crack — and then seven years of bad luck will follow!

Ms BARKER (Oakleigh) — It is with much pleasure that I speak in the debate on the motion for an address-in-reply to the speech of His Excellency the Governor which outlined the programs and policies of the Bracks Labor government in this, the 54th Parliament. Through you, Mr Acting Speaker, I place

on record my congratulations to Mr Speaker on his appointment. I am sure he will carry out his duties with impartiality, wisdom and, most importantly, commonsense.

I am pleased and honoured to have been elected to represent the Oakleigh electorate. I am proud that the residents of the electorate responded to my long and extensive campaign. I did a lot of doorknocking and spent nearly every Saturday morning in the shopping centres, talking and listening to people. I tried to make sure I was accessible at all times for that purpose. The people responded to the programs and policies outlined by the Labor Party by electing me with a two-party preferred swing of just over 4 per cent — not just the 0.9 per cent swing the Labor Party needed to have my seat returned to it. I fully recognise the trust the constituents of Oakleigh have placed in me and I look forward to working with and for them in the coming years.

Mr Perton — You are probably as surprised as they were.

Ms BARKER — I am not, actually. The electorate shares its name with the suburb of Oakleigh, in which I live. Unfortunately, the City of Oakleigh, which has a long history in Victoria, no longer exists following its breaking up by the previous government and its amalgamation into the cities of Monash and Kingston. Fortunately, however, a group of dedicated residents in the area commit their time and energy through local community groups, particularly the Oakleigh Historical Society, of which I am pleased to be a member, to preserving and maintaining the significant history of the area.

The first issue I bring to the attention of the house concerns the old Oakleigh courthouse and police station precinct. That historical site has become a focus for local residents who, quite rightly, have resolved that they want to see the site protected, upgraded and, most importantly, maintained as a community facility. I am happy to work with them towards that aim not only in my role as the local member but as a local resident. I live not far from, and am interested in, the precinct.

The two buildings have been included in the Monash planning scheme amendment L51, which is a heritage overlay scheme. The previous government, through the Victorian Government Property Group, applied to a panel which had been constituted to hear objections and proposals for and against the planning amendment. The government representatives stood before that planning panel and asked that the site be removed from the heritage overlay scheme. The local residents believe the

only reason for that stance is so the site may be sold and the buildings ultimately demolished.

The site has been of significant interest to Oakleigh since 1888. The original shire offices were located there from 1888 to 1919. A plaque in the footpath at the front of the building attests to the historical significance of the site. The courthouse was built in 1934 at a cost of £2600 — real estate prices have certainly soared since then!

The building was last used as a magistrates court in 1994. The police moved from the site of the old police station to a new site in Atherton Road in 1998. Unfortunately, since then all the buildings have remained unoccupied and I am unsure of their internal condition. But the residents are dedicated to ensuring that this important site is maintained in community ownership.

The police moved from the old station to a new complex in Atherton Road in 1998. I acknowledge the building of the new police complex; it was an important achievement for the Oakleigh electorate. I also acknowledge the capable leadership of Senior Sergeant Mike Jenkins of the Oakleigh police. I certainly believe police should work in good conditions. However, there also needs to be enough of them to do the work. In Oakleigh there is a shortage of at least six officers. I look forward to the fulfilment of the Bracks Labor government's commitment to increasing police numbers by 800, which should ensure sufficient police officers are available to properly service Oakleigh.

While mentioning the importance of the Oakleigh police station and the need for more police in Oakleigh, I place on record the important issue of the retention of the Murrumbeena police station, which was on the former government's list for closure. The residents of Murrumbeena have made it clear they do not want the police station closed. Under the commitments of the Labor government no more police stations will be closed. The Murrumbeena police station will remain open.

However, the same cannot be said of the Commonwealth Bank's commitment to the community because it has decided to close the last remaining bank in the Murrumbeena shopping centre. Despite my meeting with bank representatives and asking them to consider the impact such a closure would have on local residents, the bank has said its decision is irreversible. Perhaps the bank should realise the community will not tolerate such autocratic decisions. I hope to be able to work with the residents of Murrumbeena and, most

importantly, traders at the shopping centre to try to ensure local banking facilities are not lost.

As I have indicated, my campaign for the seat of Oakleigh included a great deal of getting out and talking to and meeting with people. There was hardly one time when I was speaking to people that the issue of decent health services — or the lack thereof — was not raised with me. On many occasions the issues raised were distressing.

I find it hard to cope with the idea that in what I thought was a decent society we can say to an elderly lady living on her own on a pension — managing quite well but with a serious hip problem — that the major public hospitals in the region, Sandringham and Monash, had a two-year waiting list and a four-year waiting list. It is extremely distressing that people have been put in that situation. In the finish we were able to have the elderly lady reassessed and to get her into hospital a little bit earlier, but I worry about all the other people out there in similar situations whom I have not met. I think it is obscene.

A 41-year-old woman, a nursing sister and someone who knew what was going on and who had recently recovered from breast cancer, went to Monash Medical Centre because she was suffering from severe nausea and dizziness. She thought that Monash, as a major teaching hospital, would be able to diagnose her condition and help her. Unfortunately, however, after spending some 18 hours there, half of that time sitting in the emergency waiting area without being seen, she was told they could not diagnose her problem. She was sent home.

I recognise that the staff of hospitals work very hard and under extremely difficult conditions. They do the best they can, but they cannot do any more than they are humanly capable of. Our public health system has been demolished and demoralised by the previous government. You cannot have a decent health system if you take 10 000 jobs and \$900 million out of it.

The Bracks Labor government recognises the size of the task ahead in restoring confidence and pride in our health system. I look forward to the coming four years, during which we will reopen 290 hospital beds and redirect \$18 million from the health network bureaucracy, a level of bureaucracy that is simply not required.

Most importantly, the Bracks Labor government will review public hospital casemix funding. We will stop the revolving-door approach of hospitals whereby so many people have been put out too early and have

ended up being readmitted, often with worse health problems than they had before. That is something else that has to be done.

In the Oakleigh shopping centre one Saturday morning a local resident said to me, 'Our health is the most important thing. If you have good health you can cope with just about anything, but if you have a health problem and do not know where to go to get it fixed everything else gets so much worse!'. I agree with her. If you have good health you can cope with just about anything.

I, along with many others in this place, believe in a strong and well-resourced public education system. Unfortunately, there is only one government secondary college left in the Oakleigh electorate, Monash Secondary College in Clayton North. We did have a secondary college at Murrumbena on a very good site, but that site was sold off and is being redeveloped for housing.

A government member interjected.

Ms BARKER — Yes, it was a good school.

A number of parents have approached me about the difficulties and problems they now face in transporting their kids to secondary schools.

We do, however, have a number of excellent non-government schools. I pay tribute to the principals and staff of Sacred Heart Girls Regional College, Salesian College and the Oakleigh Greek Orthodox College, all of which provide excellence in secondary education. The present Minister for Education, in her former capacity as shadow minister, visited both Sacred Heart and the Oakleigh Greek Orthodox College, and I was pleased to introduce her to Mrs Josephine Gray at Sacred Heart and Mr Ivan Papadopoulos at Oakleigh Greek Orthodox College so she was able to view the excellent work both schools are doing.

The primary schools in the Oakleigh electorate, both government and non-government, are great schools, but many of them require urgent maintenance. The Bracks Labor government has made commitments to Amsleigh Park, Oakleigh Primary, Sussex Heights Primary and Hughesdale Primary, and those commitments will be met. The Bracks Labor government will also honour a commitment, announced by the previous member for Oakleigh, to provide \$386 000 for the Glenhuntly Primary School for a multipurpose room, canteen and toilet facility, all much needed. There are, however, some difficulties with that announcement by the previous government. I have seen a letter from the previous minister stating that the money will be used

for the purpose as announced, but the regional office apparently has a different idea. I have given my commitment to the school that I will work towards ensuring the money that was committed is used for the purpose originally announced.

Many times during my campaign I was asked why I did not visit schools and publicise the many problems and concerns they had. I told them I did visit the schools — indeed, I visited almost every school in the electorate, many twice — but I could not tell anyone I was there, publicise my visits or speak out about issues I knew concerned those schools.

An opposition member interjected.

Ms BARKER — I could not do so because the previous government had placed an order on teachers, nurses and public servants that prevented them from speaking out. They could not even say I was on the site. It is abhorrent in a democratic society that someone of a different political persuasion from the government of the day cannot attend a school publicly and openly and say what issues and concerns are being raised at that school.

An opposition member interjected.

Ms BARKER — It happened in the Oakleigh electorate. It may not have happened where you are, but it did happen where I was, and it is disgraceful.

Not only did the Kennett government gag teachers and nurses, it attacked and muzzled the independent watchdogs of government: the Auditor-General, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Equal Opportunity Commissioner, to name just some. The previous government may not have realised that its autocratic attack on the independent watchdogs of government was also an attack on the basic rights of the people of Victoria.

An opposition member interjected.

Ms BARKER — You might say 'Oh!', but when you take away the right of people to speak openly and freely and to know what is going on you are taking away something basic to a democratic society.

I am proud to stand on the government benches and know that at the very top of the Bracks Labor government program is the restoration of the Auditor-General's independence, the Freedom of Information Act and the independence of the Director of Public Prosecutions. We will deliver open and accountable government — I think they call it democracy!

I refer briefly to a problem not outlined in the Governor's speech but which is, I believe, of immediate relevance in the Oakleigh electorate and in many other electorates. It is the commitment of the Bracks Labor government to work to ensure that our young people do not become a lost generation. I welcome that commitment and look forward to better access by young people to employment, training and housing, and therefore hope in their future.

However, I point out that there is an ever-increasing number of mature-age unemployed men and women who are not being given the opportunities they deserve. Many of them, mostly in the 45 to 55 age group, have spent all their working lives raising families and giving their children the best possible start in life. Now, unfortunately, for a number of reasons, many have been retrenched and face unemployment and loss of real hope of ever working again unless something is done. I recognise it is not just the state government that can address this problem; it is both a state and a federal matter. I believe very strongly that those people have contributed to the state and to the nation. They have much more to contribute and deserve the right to a fair go and an opportunity to be treated with respect and dignity.

The road back to state Parliament has, for me, been fairly long — seven years! — and difficult. I would not be here today if it were not for the support and hard work of many people. To the hundreds of local branch members and supporters who have letterboxed, letterboxed and letterboxed until I thought they could do no more — but they did — I say thank you very much for all your hard work and assistance.

During the campaign I was overwhelmed by the number of people who rang me and wanted to help. Some were people I had not had any previous contact with, people who wanted to put up garden boards, do letterboxing or work on polling day. They were so determined to win Oakleigh they just kept on ringing. It was fantastic!

I thank the Honourable Joan Child for remaining such a true and loyal friend to me. She is a very respected member of our community. Despite her long years of retirement she is still the secretary of her local branch and continues her commitment to the Labor Party. I thank both the Honourable Simon Crean and Anna Burke, the federal member for Chisholm, for their continual support and advice. I also thank the National Union of Workers, the CEPU and the Victorian branch of the Labor Party for all the support and work they have put into helping me win the Oakleigh electorate.

I thank my campaign director, Damian, and Rachel, Phil and Stephen for the many 18-hour days of hard work they put in on my behalf.

I am particularly blessed, Mr Acting Speaker, to be back here after seven years. It has been a long time, and I have been involved in politics for a longer time. Political involvement often places great strain on one's family life. For my whole life, however, I have been blessed with a wonderful family. My mother and father, Pat and Cyril Allford, still live in Tasmania, where I come from — not quite overseas, but sort of — and have remained very enthusiastic about my efforts to enter state Parliament. I grew up in the same little town as Michael Field.

I thank my extended family, the Barkers and the Miller clan, my children, Michael and Kirsty, and my daughter-in-law, Jacquie Evans. Thanks does not seem enough. They are always there with their support, love and encouragement.

To my husband and best friend, Jim, thanks is certainly not enough. His love, support, encouragement and patience have on many occasions been the things which have kept me going. I know we will continue the path together.

I have been elected to represent the people of the Oakleigh electorate, and I intend to do that with much enthusiasm, commitment and endeavour.

Mr PERTON (Doncaster) — It gives me great pleasure to follow the honourable member for Oakleigh. On the first occasion on which I gave a maiden speech the honourable member for Oakleigh followed me a week later, so it is only appropriate that I follow her today.

Firstly, I wish to say what a pleasure it is to be responding through the address-in-reply to the speech by the Governor, Sir James Gobbo. The Governor has done a fantastic job in representing the Crown as the head of state in Victoria, but he has done so in a way that makes him the symbol of the people. He comes from a non-English-speaking migrant background. It is interesting that both the honourable member for Bentleigh, who preceded me, and the honourable member for Oakleigh referred to the fact that our new Speaker also comes from a non-English-speaking background. That background also characterises some of the new members of the Liberal Party.

It is with great pleasure that I listened to the inaugural speech of the honourable member for Bulleen, born in Greece, a very successful member of the Australian community, and someone who gave such great service

to Victoria in his work as an adviser to the Premier and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The new honourable member for Warrnambool was born in Holland and came to this country as a young migrant, making a great contribution to his community that has been recognised in his election in Warrnambool.

It also gives me great pleasure to follow in this debate the new member for Bennettswood, an old friend of mine who was a president of the Young Liberal Movement, as was the new deputy leader of the Liberal Party, the Honourable Louise Asher. Another former president of the Young Liberal Movement is the new member for Silvan Province, the Honourable Andrew Olexander, bringing to six the number of former Young Liberals now serving in this Parliament. It is a great tribute to the Young Liberal Movement, which ought to be proud of the impact it has had in this Parliament.

There are other new members of the Liberal Party in this house: the new honourable members for Polwarth, Evelyn, Kew and Hawthorn. All in all, the membership of the Liberal Party in this house, man for man and woman for woman, is much better and more talented than that of the Labor Party. Indeed, it still comes as a shock to a large part of Victoria that there is a Labor minority government.

I notice the honourable member for Gippsland East in the chamber. I am not sure that his constituents were happy with the decision he has made, but as a Liberal Party we have to live with that decision and we are committed to providing the best possible process of policy development so that the community will have confidence in the next election and re-elect the Liberal Party to the government benches. The opposition will work very hard to hold the government to account on the promises it made both during the election campaign and in the charter.

I am very grateful to the electorate of Doncaster for showing its confidence in me again.

Mr Hulls interjected.

Mr PERTON — I thank the Attorney-General for his vote of confidence as well. There was a very strong vote for the Liberal Party in Doncaster and in the neighbouring seat of Mitcham, which was lost to the Liberal Party in a by-election not long before the state election. What was interesting to me after the change of government was the continued strong commitment to the Liberal Party by the people of Doncaster and those in the eastern suburbs, and their gratitude for the work that was done.

Melbourne and the eastern suburbs are part of a global city and a global economy. As other members of the Liberal Party have said, between 1992 and 1999 the coalition government turned Victoria around from a national joke to a state in which there is great pride. Most of us probably heard the joke in Sydney and elsewhere: what happened in Victoria back in 1992? About \$2! Time and again as one travelled to Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane and other parts of the country one saw people looking with envy at the economic success of this state. However, the coalition lost the election, and the Liberal Party is working very hard with regional and rural communities, understanding the message that was delivered to us, understanding that we need to deliver the policies and initiatives that those communities want so they will elect us in the next election. I commit myself as the shadow Minister for Conservation and Environment and the shadow minister for multimedia to that task.

In the remainder of this speech I will look at the record of the Liberal Party in government between 1992 and 1999 to set a benchmark now, because in terms of information technology (IT) and multimedia industries Victoria is a world leader. Whether it is referred to in Bill Gates's latest book, *Business and The Speed of Thought*, whether it is recognised in awards by Japanese business journals or whether it is stated in the views of the G7, Victoria is a leader and has been a leader. Therefore the obligation on the Labor Party is not just to deliver an ordinary performance in IT and multimedia but to be held to the same account that the Liberal Party was held to — the best in world practice.

Sitting suspended 6.30 p.m. until 8.03 p.m.

Mr PERTON — Prior to the suspension of the sitting for dinner I was saying that I commit myself to the task of being the shadow Minister for Environment and Conservation and shadow minister for multimedia.

I was pleased to receive an email from a friend in the United States, who wrote:

Incidentally, there are some powerful analogies drawn between your two areas — environment on the one hand and IT on the other — in the book by James Boyle *Shamans, Spleens and Software*. Basically he argues that what IT needs is a vision, like the vision that enabled hunters, conservationists, birdwatchers all to realise they had a common passion.

In my maiden speech on 25 October 1988, which is reported at page 53 of *Hansard*, volume 302, I said:

No-one on this side of the house doubts my commitment to conservation. I am a member of two of the peak conservation groups in Victoria. I say to members of this Assembly and to the community of Victoria that the best record in conservation

is held not by this Labor government nor by the federal Labor government, but by the Hamer government in Victoria and by the Fraser government.

The national parks legislation as it now stands was essentially set up under the leadership of Sir Rupert Hamer.

Sir Rupert Hamer was not the first Liberal to be involved in the conservation movement. For instance, historical records show that the great Liberal Prime Minister Alfred Deakin dealt with conservation issues as early as 1908 and invoked customs law to help protect native species.

Mr Mildenhall interjected.

Mr PERTON — I thank the honourable member for Footscray, because I am inspired not just by Deakin but by the great Premier Dick Hamer, who on the day after his election said:

We will be less materialistic and more interested of things of the spirit.

All other development and growth is negated if we destroy the surroundings in which we live.

A couple of years later, Dick Hamer, in an article that appeared in the *Herald* of 15 November 1974 said:

We have an obligation to preserve the natural heritage, and we are moving ahead as fast as possible in this area.

He went on to say:

Then there are the conservation organisations geared to protecting wildlife and the fauna — as well as the environment against pollution. The picture emerging is one of increasing conservation and increasing numbers of reserves set aside for people to enjoy.

Certainly at the state level, it is the Victorian Liberal Party that has a proud record in the area of conservation and environment. Indeed, the environment protection legislation stands again as a tribute to the state Liberal Party's efforts in this area. At a federal level it was the Liberal government that introduced the Antarctic Treaty Act of 1960, abolished whaling at Albany, proclaimed the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, prevented sand mining on Fraser Island and proclaimed Kakadu and Uluru parks.

In Victoria, I have already had the pleasure of meeting with a number of the conservation and environment groups, all of whom are ready to work with the opposition in holding this government up to very high standards.

It is sad that in the address by the Governor, Sir James Gobbo, environment issues take up a mere three paragraphs. Regardless of whether that is a function of

the laziness of the minister or the surprise felt by the government in its election, the speech is shallow indeed in its commitment to the environment. In his speech, the Governor says:

The government's environmental agenda will make Victoria a better place to live. It will build the principles of ecologically sustainable development into the process of decision-making across the whole of government, and strengthen environmental monitoring and reporting requirements.

If that is what the government is going to do, this opposition will certainly hold it to very high standards in meeting that promise. Members of the Liberal Party come to the task of opposition with a good record, not just during the term of the Hamer government but also during the term of the last government between 1992 and 1999. National parks and reserves have been extended and the Yarra Ranges, Terrick Terrick, Chiltern, French Island and Lake Eildon national parks have been created along with the box ironbark forests and woodlands. There has also been the addition of two new state parks and the inclusion of thousands of hectares of new open space in existing parks.

The last government established the Good Neighbour program to eradicate pest plants and feral animals in parks and other public land. It introduced a renewed and comprehensive capital works program for beach renourishment, boating facilities, sewer upgrades and pollution controls to improve water quality along the Victorian coastline.

Some 25 000 hectares was added to Victoria's parks, and Parks Victoria was created as a single agency in 1997 with a dedicated focus on the protection and management of Victoria's outstanding network of national wilderness, state and regional parks and bays and sanctuaries. That is one of the most confusing promises of the Labor government — that is, that it will wipe out the very successful Parks Victoria organisation and replace it with two other agencies. That move has confused the conservation movement.

I guess it surprised the conservation movement when the Labor Party came to government, so it is only now coming to grips with the elimination of Parks Victoria and its replacement by two other bodies. The opposition will keep a very close eye on the government to ensure that the abolition of Parks Victoria is not just a means of increasing the amount that goes to bureaucratic interests while reducing the resources available for the care and protection of parks and native flora and fauna.

The opposition will take a consultative approach in preparing its policy. When doing some research with respect to my work I came across a very early article

describing the ascent of the then Senator Chris Puplick as the Liberal shadow minister for the environment at the federal level.

The article reports that on that occasion Senator Puplick figured it would take him a year to get his policy thinking on the environment finalised, and that he said, 'We've got time, and we've got to get it right'. That is very much the case with my working with the environment movement and with industry to ensure that the protection of the environment goes hand in hand with sensible economic growth. I look forward to the challenge, with the help of my colleagues and some goodwill from the community towards the Liberal Party, now surprisingly in opposition.

In respect of multimedia, as I said prior to the dinner break the Labor Party will be held to the absolute highest standards.

Mr Hulls interjected.

Mr PERTON — The Attorney-General says he is happy to be so held. The problem is that the government has started badly. As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, Alan Stockdale was the first minister for multimedia anywhere in the world. There were many firsts, which gained a lot of attention around the world. What has gained attention around Australia is the fact that this government does not have a minister for information technology (IT). The Minister for State and Regional Development says, 'I am the one'. However, the reality is that the rest of the country sees a government without an IT minister or multimedia minister as not being part of the game.

In an article in the *Australian* of 26 October entitled 'Beattie casts eyes over Victorian IT', author David Hellaby says:

Queensland cannot believe its luck. The decision by Victoria's new Bracks government to do away with the multimedia industry and replace it with a parliamentary undersecretary is seen as incredibly naive. The lack of a specific minister was what held back the development of the IT industry in Queensland, while Victoria made multimedia its own under the Kennett government.

I would think that after spending some time at work in the field the minister and the Premier will ultimately reverse that decision and work out that if they want to continue the world-leading work of the Liberal government they will need to concede that they need a multimedia minister or a minister for IT.

What did the business sector think of the Liberal government's IT policies? Today one of the managing directors of one of the major corporations sent me a

summary via email. When he thinks of the Victorian Liberal government he thinks of an encouraging and welcoming environment for investment, a government that had a deep understanding of business needs and an outstanding use of IT in schools for learning and administration. Bendigo Senior Secondary College is as good as it gets world wide. I see the honourable member for Bendigo East in the chamber. It is a proud heritage that I hope she does not lose and her government does not destroy.

The businessman went on to say in the email that the former government made great progress along the road towards a connected society, particularly in education and doing business with government, establishing Victoria as the standout leader in the region in the development of the information economy, working with the federal government on the development of soft-touch enabling legislation, and ensuring business and government embarked on the information economy development journey together.

One of the great matters of pride for the Liberal government was the fact that Jeff Kennett and Alan Stockdale personally attended every multimedia task force meeting. I asked the minister, 'Will there be a multimedia task force? Will the multimedia and IT industries meet with someone who is not an IT minister, or will they be encouraged to work with a Bracks government at all?'. The confusion about whether Multimedia Victoria will be allowed to continue with its work are among the issues that bring this government's likely record in IT and multimedia into question.

In the Governor's speech the IT and multimedia industries are relegated to a single sentence. I find that remarkable when the revolution in business, government and education through multimedia and IT is so well recognised across the country and around the world. The failure of the government to appoint a dedicated minister and adopt a policy position that is acceptable to the business community is remarkable.

In winding up my contribution to the address-in-reply debate I pay tribute to those who worked on my election campaign. The Doncaster electorate has a very strong Liberal branch network. My electorate chairman, Brenton Rodrigues, who has worked tirelessly over a number of years for the Liberal Party and who worked on my campaign, has been a fabulous and terrific support. I also thank the other people who worked on the campaign, including Jeff Phillips, who did so much of the coordination work; Peter and Pam Taylor; and John Alvarez, who worked hard both in the Liberal Party organisation and in helping me personally

through the campaign. There are too many other Liberal Party people to name. They are people who in the old terms would be small-l liberals. They are dedicated to the Liberal Party vision, are concerned with the environment and are leaders with creativity and vision. They all worked hard in the Doncaster area to hold up the vote so well.

I also pay tribute to my staff, Jennifer Perrin and Jane Woolard, who give such excellent service to my constituents. Members of Parliament spend a lot of time on the road and in Parliament and place much reliance on their staff.

Lastly I thank my very supportive family — my mother, Lilia; my sister, Regina; and other family and friends who worked hard to provide the emotional and spiritual support I needed in what would otherwise have been very tough work. Everyone in this chamber works hard and works long hours. The support of family and friends is important to us all. I am happy to be back here as part of an opposition that will keep the government to its promises and continue to work for the betterment of Victorians.

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — It is with pleasure that I join the address-in-reply debate. I pass on my congratulations to His Excellency the Governor on the delivery of his address. Some years back I spent many an hour and many a meeting with him on the board and subcommittees of Vichealth. I found him as impressive a person in that role and the other community commitments he performed then as he is as Governor of our great state. I embrace his speech and commit myself to playing my part in the implementation of the program he outlined. To do so is incumbent on members such as me. It is hard to believe that I have fought three elections to represent Footscray in this chamber, and that with each election has come an increased responsibility to make a substantial commitment and contribution to the work of this place.

The challenges in my electorate are vast. I regard the Bracks government's program as a comprehensive and robust framework within which I will seek to ensure the challenges are met. I will address some of the major challenges. It would be no surprise to honourable members that the drugs and heroin trafficking issue is a severe, crippling and critical issue in my electorate. It requires a comprehensive effort, as was explained by the Premier and the Deputy Premier in debate this morning.

Prevention, saving lives, getting people into treatment programs and providing more effective policing are the hallmarks of that policy. If ever an issue needed to be

attacked by applying those measures, it is heroin trafficking and the way it is affecting my electorate.

The Footscray business district can be characterised as suffering from economic blight. There are approximately 70 to 80 empty shops. Heroin trafficking takes an enormous economic and human toll. Some of these matters were mentioned this morning — 1000 needles a day going out of the needle exchange program; 900 arrests for trafficking in a six-month period; vigilante groups being formed; and parasites of the type I recently described — a convicted accessory to a double murder — offering themselves as providers of private methadone services. That convicted offender offered himself as a suitable person for bail justices to consider when deciding on bail conditions for young people. Imagine young people being allowed to fall into the clutches of that sort of character!

They are the symptoms of a community in crisis. The features of the program outlined by the Minister for Health are exactly the sorts of things we need. There had been 23 deaths by the end of August — and I do not know what the toll is now. Based on the overseas evidence on safe injecting facilities, that figure could be halved or reduced by two-thirds. That means another 12 to 15 people might still have been alive today.

I see people shooting up in the car park at the back of my office. I see the range of people involved — the very young, the middle-aged and people with young children — many of whom are obviously severely physically affected. There are those who look so distressed that you need to go over and check that they are still alive. It is a distressing daily reminder of the seriousness of the issue. The initiatives outlined by the Minister for Health in the 25-point plan are exactly what is needed.

I had no objection to the Turning the Tide program and the commitments made by the former government. However, in the western region there are no methadone programs available. If a young person, or a person of any age, wants to get off heroin there is nowhere to go in the area from Essendon through to Werribee up to Melton and into the city. That is an indictment of the level of resources and commitment the community is making to fight this scourge. Resources must be made available.

Many honourable members have taken initiatives to bring the community together, but there is still widespread anxiety and fear about the best way to deal with the issue. Education, information, bringing people together, the consultation program and the massive

effort that has been outlined by the minister are all measures I am extremely keen to embrace.

I will also be turning my attention to schools as a matter of urgency. A number of schools in my electorate are physically run down, and five schools were closed either through intimidation or by the direct action of the Kennett government. Some of those closures must be revisited. Maribyrnong Primary School, which was closed at the end of 1992, had approximately 90 students. A large number of housing units are being built on surrounding blocks, and within three or four years thousands of people will be living in the area. It is an indictment of the planning capacity of the former government that the municipal council and the residents association should have to demand that room for a primary school be set aside in the new developments along the Maribyrnong River. I am on the record, as are many local residents, as saying that the closure might make financial sense to the Kennett government for the following two years, but beyond that it was a short-sighted strategy.

One of the key issues in the education system is access to quality education and opportunities. The plummeting retention rates and the loss of many at-risk students from the school system in my area is an indictment of the cutbacks inflicted by the Kennett government. The primary school on Geelong Road lost a third of its teachers — 10 of its 29 teachers — because of cutbacks. They were special-needs teachers who assisted with mother-tongue maintenance and English as a second language.

It is no surprise that eminent researchers such as Dr Nick Crofts now warn that the drug-dealing subculture is becoming impervious to the reach of welfare workers and the education system because at-risk students left the system in droves. Those young people lost their grip on mainstream education. There are 11-year-old dealers at the Footscray market; young people are involved in drug trafficking up to their necks. They were the students at risk because of precarious family and education situations. The students were in need of support and should not have had their teachers and their programs pulled out from under their feet. The community is reaping a terrible harvest in the inner city because of those cutbacks.

The challenges in health are clear. I do not have a reliable estimate of the number of beds, sessions and ancillary services lost at the Western Hospital. The cutbacks to psychiatric services kept coming and it was only a concerted demonstration conducted by the staff, community supporters of psychiatric patients and me that prevented a 15 per cent cut to the number of beds at

the Footscray psychiatric hospital. The former government subsequently closed the hospital and relocated the beds to other areas. The patients of the hospital became the new occupants of run-down, crumbling boarding houses where they were subjected to the risk of exploitation and physical danger. It is those unsympathetic, unfeeling cutbacks that cause the blight and create the challenges for us all.

The other night I directed to the attention of the house policing issues. Because of some fairly dramatic neglect perpetrated by the former Kennett government in my electorate, 32 positions remain unfilled. It is difficult to imagine, when I have painted the picture of the level of heroin trafficking in the area, that there could be 32 unfilled positions in police stations in my electorate. The closure of the Maidstone police station, which was a substantial station, was obviously premature. The construction of the new 24-hour police station at Sunshine was delayed by some years. I give the former government credit for finally building the police station, but to do that the contract to build the station signed by the previous Labor government in 1992 was cancelled and the station was finally completed by the Kennett government and opened in early 1999. The previous government's record in that area has not been impressive.

The absence of a new policing strategy to follow Operation Heywood, which is aimed at heroin traffickers, has left a strategic vacuum that needs to be addressed. The previous government's record also includes police being borrowed from surrounding districts just to keep the second divisional van on the road; the closure of the police ethnic unit; the inability to guarantee foot patrols around the trafficking area; and the unavailability of special duties officers who were assigned to Footscray when special duties assignments were not required in the city — that practice is also in some danger. Therefore, the government's policy of an additional 800 police is the best news my electorate has had for some time.

I embrace and look forward to the establishment of a safe injecting facility in Footscray. As I mentioned before, if we can save people's lives and help get the signs of physical distress and the number of needles away from some of the more publicly trafficked areas and out of sight, the community will obviously have less immediate cause for anxiety. The literature suggests there is a possibility that the establishment of safe injecting facilities may attract the attention of and invite users who would otherwise not come to those areas. In addition to the establishment of a safe injecting facility there is a need for a complementary policing facility to subdue the level of heroin trafficking

and the public signs of the trafficking and its manifestations.

I have also had the honour of being appointed the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier for Community Cabinet Meetings. The Premier is a colleague, a friend and a neighbour — isn't it good to have friends in high places! It is a great opportunity to assist in deconstructing the one-man band apparatus of government. The challenges will include the opening up of the consultative mechanisms and governing in partnership with the community rather than continuing the domination by authority that so characterised the former Kennett government. That will include open and formal relationships with business rather than the under-the-table deals and shady and hidden contracts. Community cabinet meetings will also provide the opportunity for communities around the state to meet with and directly engage in discussion with members of cabinet and members of ministerial offices. The first of those is due to occur shortly in Geelong.

Other challenges include assistance to the Premier to convert the slush fund of the Community Support Fund into a program with integrity, predictability and transparency, where money is not just thrown at yachts to break in half off the San Diego coast, where some sense of allocational equity is introduced, and mountains of money are not distributed on the whims and impulses of a Premier with just one signature on the bottom of an obscure process. These are great challenges at both an electorate and Premier's office level. They will challenge me professionally and personally, but they are challenges I will not shirk.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr MILDENHALL — They are certainly challenges I look forward to for the betterment of my electorate.

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The Attorney-General and the honourable member for Malvern have been here for a long time. They know how to behave, and I expect them to do so; otherwise they can remove themselves from the chamber.

Mr MILDENHALL — As the state improves, so do the prospects for my electorate.

Mr ROWE (Cranbourne) — It is with pleasure that I rise to respond to the Governor's speech. I congratulate the Governor Sir James Gobbo. I also congratulate the new members of the government who have been elected to this house for a short time.

It is also with pleasure that I acknowledge the confidence that the people of my electorate of Cranbourne have shown in me by electing me for the third time — despite the fraudulent attempts of the Australian Labor Party to run a false Independent candidate against me who was still a member of the ALP. The ALP primary vote in Cranbourne was down, and I note the comments of a previous Leader of the Opposition, Mr Brumby, in acknowledging the credentials of the candidate the Labor Party put up against me.

I also acknowledge the support of people in the local Liberal Party, who supported me in the last election campaign and who have supported me for some eight or nine years since my entry into local politics with the former Cranbourne council. In particular I mention one lady, Mrs Joan Reid, who recently attained the age of 80 years. Joan's husband, Len, was the federal member for Holt and also a past member for Dandenong. Unfortunately, Len, who was a fighter pilot in the Second World War, is not very well. Physically he is fantastic, but unfortunately the rigours of high altitude and fast flying against the Luftwaffe has taken its toll and Len is in a home.

Len Reid was a very compassionate, gentle man, as his wife is a very compassionate and gentle woman, and he deserves to be recognised and remembered in the annals of this place for not only his role as a member of Parliament but also as a humanitarian in the work that he did with the people of the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka in particular, with live sheep and cattle exports to that area to try to assist and feed the communities, and also in supporting an orphanage over there.

It is a joy to see the number of young children who may not have survived grow to adulthood and provide a meaningful contribution to their own communities. I pay tribute to Len and Joan.

I thank my electorate chairman for his efforts in putting up with my tantrums as a candidate. I am sure all honourable members understand how fragile we get from time to time. It is only after we have been elected to this place that we have time to stand back and think about the many volunteers who put up with our tantrums. Political parties comprise members of the community who have strong political beliefs. They put in a lot of volunteer hours to ensure we are elected to this place. We are blessed by having so many people who assist in that way and we should express our appreciation of their efforts.

I express my thanks to Peter Poggioli and the team at 104 Exhibition Street which ran an extremely professional campaign.

Ms Gillett — A fantastic campaign!

Mr ROWE — Government members may laugh, but I note many of them were in the Dandenong electorate doorknocking like mad because they thought they would lose that seat. The Labor Party's polling showed what our polling showed — that we were going to win.

The Cranbourne electorate has some 43 000 wonderful people who chose to elect me as their member of Parliament. In numerous newspaper articles the Minister for Gaming said the Labor government would be an open-door government. He said he would assist members of Parliament who represented the cities of Casey and Frankston to obtain the benefits they gained for their communities during the past seven years of the Kennett government.

I cannot let this opportunity pass without expressing my thanks to the former Premier, the Honourable Jeffrey Kennett, who delivered a style of leadership never seen before in Victoria. The Kennett government repaid \$26 billion of Labor government debts. The former Premier promoted growth in industry and confidence in the state. He gave young people something to believe in. That is demonstrated by the fact that the majority of young people aged between 18 and 35 years voted for the coalition.

Mr Hulls — Everyone else got it wrong!

Mr ROWE — Definitely. Unless we have fraudulent Independents, one could say that the coalition would still be in government. I am not reflecting on the honourable member for Gippsland East who is obviously not corrupted and could not be corrupted prior to the election by the Labor Party.

The coalition parties have the runs on the board. The Kennett government delivered to its communities. My electorate has received \$30 million in education grants, more than \$42 million in road funding and \$11 million in health funding for the integrated care facilities in Cranbourne. I do not have anything to apologise for because I have delivered to my communities. If Labor Party members were not capable of delivering to their communities, bad luck.

Ms Gillett interjected.

Mr ROWE — I am sorry that the honourable member for Werribee has difficulty understanding it.

The people of Werribee were so keen to get rid of the CSR facility that their submission suggested it be located at Lyndhurst in the electorate of the honourable member for Dandenong. Phil Reed, an adviser to the Premier, was prepared to allow an increase in toxic waste to be deposited at the Lyndhurst facility. The Labor Party attitude is, 'Not in my back yard or in western suburbs electorates'. It believes toxic waste should be dumped in the eastern suburbs and that the Scoresby freeway should be denied to communities in the eastern suburbs.

The Labor Party has had a whirlwind courtship with the Frankston East community. The honourable member for Frankston East has betrayed the people who voted for him by allowing the Minister for Transport to scrap the Scoresby bypass. Cr Conroy, who, if I am not mistaken, is going to work for the honourable member and has worked for him previously, said in the *Frankston Standard* that he was extremely disappointed in the Labor government for cancelling the Scoresby bypass. The industrial area of Carrum Downs cannot now develop to its full potential. The potential of the western suburbs has been helped by the Western Ring Road but the same opportunities are denied to Carrum Downs, Frankston East and my electorate. The honourable member for Frankston East, the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport, has denied the same opportunities for his constituents.

Mr Viney interjected.

Mr ROWE — The honourable member for Frankston East asks 'What about jobs in your electorate?'. I was instrumental in getting the post office agency to Carrum Downs and establishing the Carrum Downs Bendigo Bank, both of which employ Carrum Downs people.

Mr Hulls — What about the Auditor-General?

Mr ROWE — The Auditor-General is irrelevant to this debate. The Auditor-General does not need a job in Carrum Downs or in my electorate. The previous Auditor-General went to sleep from 1988 to 1991 because he failed to recognise the incompetence and corruption of the former Labor government.

Ms Gillett interjected.

Mr ROWE — I thank the honourable member for Werribee for recognising one of my attributes.

The frivolity should stop, because serious matters need to be addressed. The subject of today's matter of public importance was safe injecting facilities. In my contribution to the debate I drew on my experiences as

the Deputy Chairman of the former Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee. It is disappointing to note that people still have not realised what that committee was talking about. The opposition and the community — certainly my community in Carrum Downs — wants some certainty about what will happen. It is not only a case of setting up 1, 5 or 10 safe injecting facilities. Those facilities must be backed up with detoxification beds and other facilities as well as counselling, including family counselling, and family support. The cost of such support does not add up to \$1.5 million.

The overseas facilities that have been successful have had total community involvement. The main criterion for community involvement is that the programs have been run by local governments. I do not wish to place another burden on our local government authorities as they carry out enough tasks affecting our daily lives. However, I would like to see the government lay out, step by step, the answers to the liability-related questions I asked this morning — for example, what legal and professional liabilities could be incurred? The obligations under international treaties need to be considered before we can put people in harm's way. It is all very well to describe them as safe injecting facilities but many people have said that they are not safe injecting facilities because people are injecting poison into their arms. However, they are safer.

The people who will set up the safe injecting facilities need to have all the answers to the questions being raised by the community before the community will embrace such facilities. A bipartisan approach needs to be taken to establishing safe injecting facilities and the opposition is offering that approach. The opposition is asking only that the government work through the issues and provide the answers.

As I said this morning, I would have thought the Penington committee membership would have included a senior member of the Victoria Police or the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Every other community throughout the civilised world that has introduced such facilities has involved the police in the establishment of the facilities. The main reason that the police have been involved is that they are charged with the enforcement of the laws of the state. Currently under the laws of the state of Victoria the self-injection of heroin or other drugs of addiction is illegal, as is the possession of implements of self-injection and the police must prosecute people who break the law. Those matters need to be addressed and the government needs to bring the police on board, and take them with it.

The former Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee certainly brought the police a long way down the track

from where they were when the honourable member for Mildura, the Honourable Cameron Boardman and I were members of the police force. The Victoria Police are prepared to support the government on a harm minimisation policy. I believe the opposition is prepared to support any harm minimisation policy, providing it is explained to the community and the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed. The opposition is asking the government only to answer the questions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I cannot think of a more appropriate member to hold that office. You have certainly worked hard since your election as the honourable member for Essendon.

I put on the *Hansard* record my congratulations to the Speaker, who has worked equally hard in representing his community since his election. It is appropriate that the Speaker is a gentleman not of Australian birth. It demonstrates the width and breadth of Victoria's community. In the electorate of Cranbourne, Greek, Italian, Dutch and English-born communities are well represented and work together as a harmonious group.

The Parliament of Victoria is a great demonstration to the rest of the world of how to achieve racial harmony, which is also evident generally in our great state of Victoria and our great nation of Australia. One of the greatest champions of multiculturalism was the former Premier, Jeff Kennett. Again I pay tribute to him as the greatest Premier Victoria has ever had.

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I was almost tempted to move an extension of time for that fine contribution. Government members have not been so entertained in all the days we have sat here. I congratulate the honourable member for Cranbourne, not least for the speed with which he seems to be making the adjustment to sitting on that side of the house. His colleagues might take a leaf from his book.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I add my congratulations to those of other members on your ascension to your current position. It is a credit to your work in this place in the time that you have served as a member. Ultimately it reflects well on the Parliament that for the first time a woman occupies the position of Deputy Speaker.

I extend my congratulations to all new members of the Parliament and in particular to members on this side, of whom there seem to be a rather large number. They have delivered some fine speeches and I am certain they will serve this place well in the years to come.

I place on record my gratitude to the electors of Mitcham, who have seen fit to return me to this place.

At the time of my election in late 1997 I said that I considered it to be a rare privilege to be elected to the state Parliament, and it is no less a privilege to be re-elected on this occasion.

The Governor's address was the culmination of what I consider to be a magnificent campaign by members on this side of the Parliament, in which we enunciated clear statements of principle to the voters of Victoria and placed a clear focus on accountability and transparency for the benefit of all Victorians rather than a select few in Melbourne. Although the results of the campaign might in some instances be seen to challenge the conventional wisdom of the pollsters and others, no-one could argue with the result at the ballot box.

It should be understood by all that the result of the recent election was a rejection of the politics of division, the one-man band and the stultified democracy of the Liberal Party. Had the former government listened to the former honourable member for Mitcham, it might have held on to office.

Mrs Peulich — He never spoke.

Mr ROBINSON — Had the former government listened to the voters of Gippsland West things may have worked out differently — but it chose not to. Honourable members opposite should recall the words of the former honourable member for Mitcham, Mr Pescott.

Mrs Peulich — It is hard to remember him saying anything.

Mr ROBINSON — In his letter of resignation — and this may have been the only time he contributed, but what a contribution — Mr Pescott said:

It has been a long time since I have found the avenues for serious debate within the Liberal Party satisfactory.

If anyone needed a further example of problems within the Liberal Party they need only to consider how the former Premier dealt with his party colleagues in the immediate aftermath of the election. I refer to an article in the *Australian* of 8 October under the heading 'Kennett keeps Libs in the dark', which states:

Jeff Kennett told his MPs yesterday he did not trust them and refused to brief them on his negotiations with the Independents, who will decide which side of politics forms government in Victoria ...

While Mr Kennett called on his MPs to trust him, he declared he could not trust them ...

It has often been said that if a party cannot organise itself it cannot organise the state and is no longer fit for

this side of the Parliament. That is precisely what happened. Members of the former government had the opportunity of listening to the concerns of voters as expressed in the two by-elections conducted during the 53rd Parliament, but — to borrow a biblical phrase — like Herod its heart was hardened and they chose not to.

Now members of the former government will have time to dwell on its shortcomings while they sit on the benches opposite. In the few days since Parliament has reconvened constant reference has been made to a minority government as if that were some form of pejorative term.

Mr Steggall — You are only there by invitation.

Mr ROBINSON — I thank the honourable member for Swan Hill and I congratulate him and his colleagues on the state in which they kept the seats on this side comfortable! They are very nice; government members are enjoying them and we thank you for that. Unfortunately, we cannot return the compliment; the seats on the other side are not so comfortable. Honourable members opposite may think the constant references to a minority government will provide them with some relief, but they are mistaken. Every time they enter the chamber and sit opposite they will ponder what went wrong. For their sins, the government will ensure that they sit on those seats twice as long as we did because the government has committed to the extension of parliamentary sitting days to a minimum of 50 a year.

The change of government represented both a clear preference on the part of Victorian voters for increased accountability and a clear loss of faith in the former administration. The former government had lost touch with community expectations and numerous examples exist, some from my own electorate, which I will touch on.

On 18 September voters in Mitcham and elsewhere clearly repudiated a planning system in which they had effectively been disenfranchised. Demolition permits are a good example of that. Under the deregulated system introduced by the former government the number of demolition permits issued in the City of Whitehorse by its council decreased by some 20 per cent. I raised the concern that with such a significant change the probability was that issues that ought to be brought to the attention of residents prior to the issue of demolition permits would not be raised.

When I raised those concerns in about June the response of the former planning minister was that I was short-sighted and that those concerns were of no

substance. In a matter of only weeks in the lead-up to the election he had a change of heart and declared that the demolition permit system was out of control and desperately in need of reform. In so doing he destroyed the credibility of the former government on that issue.

In the same way the former government's neglect of the significance of streetscapes in the planning process was regrettable and it played a part in the rejection it suffered on 18 September. Nowhere in the Mitcham electorate was that rejection more apparent than in the suburb of Blackburn, which has long been considered a traditional Liberal area. On 18 September the two most conservative polling booths demonstrated a swing to the Labor Party of almost 11 per cent on a two-party preferred basis. Honourable members opposite should give some thought to that. No safe Liberal polling booths now exist in the electorate of Mitcham.

I must acknowledge I could not have achieved that result alone. I put on the public record the role of the former Minister for Planning and Local Government in helping to achieve such a record swing. His contribution should be noted.

In recent days the opposition has created a great deal of commotion over the Eastern Freeway.

Mr Steggall interjected.

Mr ROBINSON — Not unless it runs through Shepparton. The issue demonstrates a lack of credibility on the part of the former government. In handling what was, and still remains, a challenging issue, the former government gave a clear demonstration of its contempt for the concerns of people in the Mitcham electorate.

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr ROBINSON — I have not said that. Although the honourable member for Doncaster prefers the role of teacher rather than student, if he listened he might learn something that will serve him well in his time on the opposition benches.

When the Vicroads short-tunnel proposal was announced it generated some considerable community disquiet because it was thought it might not be costed accurately or provide the environment of the area with the optimum level of protection. Apparently the former government recognised that disquiet and late last year, at the instigation of people in the community, commissioned the Halcrow Pacific group, an independent consultant, to examine other options.

That consultation dragged on and on. Although it should have been completed before the election was

held, it was not. One can only question why that was. At the same time, during the lead-up to the election, the former government was claiming it was committed to further research on longer tunnel options. An honourable member for Koonung province in another place, Mr Atkinson, was publicly declaring that work was ready to begin if he were re-elected as part of a Liberal government. So at one and the same time the former government was promising more work on tunnel options and sending in the bulldozers. I find that incredibly challenging. It would be overly generous to claim that action was too clever by half. It was not clever — just dumb politics.

As I said earlier, the issue clearly demonstrated a lack of credibility on the part of the former government. Given the critical nature of preference flows in the Mitcham electorate at the time of the election, the former planning minister and the Honourable Bruce Atkinson will have my undying gratitude because in a tight contest such inspired spells of ineptitude were greatly welcome. Members opposite will have four years to ponder the contribution of those former members to their current predicament. I look forward to further inspirational spells of ineptitude from members opposite. The appointment of the shadow Minister for Transport is a shining example of a continuation of that ineptitude.

The house heard a curious contribution tonight on roads policy from the honourable member for Wantirna. If I heard him correctly, on the issue of Stud Road he claimed simultaneously that Stud Road could not be further upgraded and that the now opposition had a plan to upgrade it. He said on the one hand the road could not be upgraded and on the other hand they were going to do it anyway. It is very curious logic and a great pointer to the future.

Mr Wells — It has been upgraded.

Mr ROBINSON — Honourable members will read the speech tomorrow and decide whether they can make any sense of it.

It would be remiss of me not to comment on the issue of the Auditor-General. The circumstances of my election to this place guaranteed that the Auditor-General was a key issue at that time, as it was more recently at the general election.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr ROBINSON — I will be generous. I do not think I will remind the house of everything that was said. I have already referred once to the former member's letter of resignation. Voters in Mitcham were

keenly aware of the role of the Auditor-General and were firmly of the opinion that the previous government's changes to that office were not in the best interests of the state.

A few days ago I bumped into the Auditor-General by pure coincidence — not in the way that the Leader of the Opposition bumps into things, but slightly differently. The former Auditor-General is a self-deprecating character who said to me that he is now just a feather duster and no longer will be a public figure in this debate. He is some feather duster! He showed uncommon courage and the Bracks Labor government's commitments to reforming his former office are very much in respect of his legacy to it.

The Governor's address revealed a clear commitment from the government to abolish self-governing schools, which will be greatly welcomed by voters in Melbourne. The previous government chose to conduct its mad experiment at Blackburn High School in my electorate, but not in a way that it had been attempted six or nine months earlier. The experiment was foisted on the school at an accelerated rate by the previous Minister for Education. The process by which the school council was bullied and forced to take on board that option was an absolute disgrace; the school has endured sheer hell for the past nine months. The decision by the Bracks government to abolish the program will be welcomed at Blackburn High School. The government can look forward to healing the wounds of what was a mad experiment that delivered no tangible benefits in the Mitcham electorate.

I comment briefly on regional Victoria in my new capacity as Parliamentary Secretary for State and Regional Development. The election was determined in regional Victoria, with eight non-city seats changing hands — nine if the new member for Gippsland East is included. The antennae of the honourable members for Gippsland West, Gippsland East and Mildura were probably attuned to the mood swings of people in regional Victoria earlier than most of us. The result of the last election means regional Victoria will get a louder voice in the Bracks government. I hope to facilitate that voice in my capacity as parliamentary secretary. I am looking forward to one of my first forays in that capacity with the Minister for Racing. We are going down to Dunkeld on Saturday and I am sure we will meet many people who want to express a view.

Again I thank the voters of Mitcham and elsewhere for their determination on 18 September. The change of government will ensure that Victoria enters the new century as a more united state than it has been for years. It's about time!

Mr KILGOUR (Shepparton) — I welcome you, Mr Acting Speaker, to the house where all the work is done. It was nice to be involved on a parliamentary committee with you for some time while you were a member of the other place, but now I welcome you to the rough and tumble of the lower house in your role as the honourable member for Melton.

I was not in a position to make a contribution to the debate this morning on the drugs issue because of the limited amount of time allocated to it. However, I listened to the Governor deliver his speech on the day of the opening of Parliament when he talked about the government's comprehensive plan to address the tragic problem of illicit drug use by trialling five medically supervised injecting facilities.

As a member of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee in the last Parliament I have spent hundreds of hours looking at the issue. It is complex and complicated and a lot of water is yet to pass under the bridge before much ground is covered. I will comment on the issues dealt with in both the debate this morning and the Governor's speech.

Firstly, on the so-called safe injecting facilities I refer to a discussion paper entitled *Safe Injecting Facilities: Should Victoria have a SIF pilot trial?*, which was put out by the former member for Springvale, Mr Eddie Micallef, whom I came to know pretty well during the time we served together on the committee to which I have just referred. I came to know much of his understanding of the drug issue and his dedication to trying to solve the problems, not only in Springvale but throughout Victoria. I appreciated that he always said that it was too important an issue on which not to show bipartisanship. The paper states, in part:

The drug problem is one of the most complex issues facing society today. There is no simple or single answer to this issue. Illicit drug use affects all communities and every level of society.

One of the principal reasons for looking closely at the experience of safe injecting facilities overseas, which has pertinence to the Australian context, is in their perceived ability to substantially curtail the incidence of death from overdose in the injecting illicit-drug-using community.

The former member for Springvale also said:

... many health workers are concerned that hepatitis C has the potential to be of epidemic proportions.

There are no quick-fix solutions, and anyone who thinks they have all the answers to these problems is deluding themselves, or intentionally engaging in misinformation.

It has been continually stated that the only way forward in the development of drug policy is for decision-makers to have an

'open mind' when examining possible strategies to address the burgeoning problem.

Honourable members should have an open mind to ensure that we get the best information and do what is in the best interests of the people of Victoria in the long term. I support the former honourable member for Springvale in understanding some of the problems he encountered in Springvale. I went to his office and was shown around the Springvale area. I saw some of the horrific situations where people were shooting up drugs in back alleys. Only a couple of days prior to my visit somebody had died of an overdose across the road from his office.

I travelled around Australia and throughout the United States of America with the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee to examine these issues. I also had the opportunity to speak to Dr Ross, a member in the other place, who went to Europe specifically to examine safe injecting facilities. He told me that Germany has many problems about the legality of safe injecting facilities. Holland made a number of expedient changes to its legislation to allow the problems to be handled legally in the community, but when the committee went overseas it was obvious that in many cases the harm minimisation approach was out of control and the use of police and community education was needed to help solve the problem.

Safe injecting facilities are introduced when one is trying to move people from areas where they are injecting — in public, in toilets, in back alleys or inside buildings. But one has to put them somewhere. In some areas of Europe people were bussed out of town to areas where not so many people were involved in drug use, but that did not work. Generally the facilities have to be in close proximity to the areas where drugs are being sold and used on the streets. In Frankfurt it was decided to put smaller facilities in close proximity to one another rather than having a large facility in one particular area.

The honourable member for Glen Waverley referred to putting safe injecting facilities in close proximity to each other. In Frankfurt a couple of facilities were located in the red-light district. I am not sure whether the honourable member for Morwell knows about red-light districts, but when I walked through one in Holland I could see that they are not districts where one would see the normal family. Many undesirable people frequent the sorts of places we are talking about.

The sad thing about those areas and facilities overseas is that there are always dealers there. They know where the drug users go, so they simply hang about and deal, as we saw in the streets of Harlem when a plain-clothes

policeman drove us around the streets in an unmarked police car. People were dealing on every corner and shooting up under every passageway. Although the United States does not have the same heroin problem as does Europe, it has a problem with smack cocaine, which in the main is smoked and goes straight to the brain. There is a crime problem whenever smack cocaine is in an area.

In Zurich it was decided to establish a needle park — and I invite honourable members to picture that park in Zurich. It was decided to put the drug users in a building at a U-section of the river that runs through a particular park so that they could be supervised. Unfortunately, the gardens around the area became a devastating place. The area had to be cleaned up and the drug users moved on. There are no easy solutions to the problem.

Over the past three years the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee has been doing a lot of work. It produced an occasional paper entitled *Safe Injecting Facilities: Their Justification and Viability in the Victorian Setting*, which includes a number of comments and findings. Some of the findings are:

There are few interventions other than safe injecting facilities that are specifically suited to comprehensively deal with the range of harms arising from public street injecting.

It was interesting to hear the honourable members for Knox and Cranbourne this morning state clearly, as did the former Premier, that they had changed their minds after conducting a proper study of the use of drugs, including injecting. Members of the committee have visited drug rehabilitation centres across Australia and throughout the world. As I said, some members of the committee travelled to Europe and some to America. We looked at Hait-Ashbury in San Francisco, where drug use started. We walked over people who were drugged out of their minds. We saw the worst of the American drug situation at the needle exchange in West Oakland.

Some time ago similar debates about needle exchanges were held. I was against the proposal to set up needle exchanges until I became a member of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee and gained a good understanding of the problems.

Committee members also visited the executive office of the White House and spoke with President Clinton's advisory team. They said to us, 'Why are you Australians here talking to us about drugs? You lead the world in the way you treat the incidence of HIV by providing needle exchanges'. It was interesting to hear

those comments from people who are looking to Australia as the leader in addressing the drug problem.

A trial of safe injecting facilities must be conducted, but they carry a tremendous burden. One of the key findings of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee was:

Safe injecting facilities may be effective in dealing with the harms of street injecting, (particularly public nuisance), but only if they are properly targeted, and sensitively managed in the context of community consultation and education.

In my contribution this morning I did not say there are certain potential dangers and possible disadvantages in implementing safe injecting facilities. The extent to which those disadvantages arise and the balance of costs and benefits for safe injecting facilities as an ongoing form of intervention would be best implemented through a controlled trial. We must bring the police on board and talk to them about how we would conduct such a trial. Legal factors must be taken into consideration in implementing such a trial. Full consideration and resolution of any legal issues must be complete before we undertake a trial in this state.

Dr Penington and his committee will have much work to do to ensure that they consider all the legal ramifications. I wish the committee well in its deliberations.

At this stage the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee has been suspended. I hope that we will have the opportunity to continue the work we have been doing and to present a final report.

I turn to a matter raised by the Governor in his speech on the day he opened Parliament. I noted with interest that the government announced plans to negotiate with the New South Wales and federal governments to return 28 per cent of the original flow to the Snowy River. All honourable members have a fairly good understanding of the situation the Snowy River is in. It depends on who you are talking to as to how much water they believe needs to flow down the Snowy and out into the sea and what the requirements are. I am interested to see how the honourable members for Gippsland East and Mildura will fight for the water that would normally flow down the Murray River to the people in the Swan Hill area who benefit from it.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr KILGOUR — The water used to flow down the Snowy River but has been redirected. It is vital that irrigation facilities in Victoria get as much water as they can in a year. Victoria has to be careful about what happens to the flow down the Snowy River. If it is

increased many farmers will not get their water entitlements and many will face hardship because they will not be able to water their crops or whatever they need to feed their cattle. I will be interested to observe from where the water to provide the Snowy with 28 per cent of its original flow will come, if that is to occur.

I was pleased to see a promise of increased funding for community health programs. Shepparton has a wonderful community health program that supports the local drug community by providing drug workers. Shepparton needs a one-stop shop where people can address a whole range of health issues. The government has said it will support country Victoria. I will look forward to seeing what it can do to support community health programs, particularly the one in Shepparton.

I am also interested in the suggestion that class sizes will be cut to 21 or fewer for prep to years 1 and 2, which will require an extra 650 teachers. One likes to do one's arithmetic — —

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr KILGOUR — Speaking as one who went to school in classes of 44 students — as the honourable member for Morwell probably did — yet who seem to have done all right, I suggest that if an extra 650 teachers are employed schools will also need a lot more classrooms. I hope those classrooms can be provided so the extra teachers can find places to teach.

An issue that is dear to the dairy farmers in my electorate is dairy deregulation. I am pleased to see the Minister for Agriculture at the table tonight because I know he has been in discussion with members of the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria. I know he has also guaranteed Victorian dairy farmers they will have a vote. I am not sure whether he has worked out which farmers will be able to vote — those who are milking the cows or those who own the properties. However, at the same time the minister should be encouraging dairy farmers to understand that no matter what happens in the future, Victoria is going to have deregulation.

Deregulation is the most important issue for dairy farmers in my electorate. I do not know whether the minister understands that today the big dairy companies can move interstate. At the moment there is a gentlemen's agreement that stops milk from flowing over the Murray River. Victoria does not stop its wheat, canola or any other of its primary products from going over the river, so the big dairy companies will ask why we stop milk. Honourable members can bet their lives that in the life of this government dairy companies will

take Victorian milk to New South Wales, Canberra or Queensland. There will be automatic deregulation.

However, if that happens dairy farmers will not have the support they are going to get from the \$700 million that will flow into their pockets if deregulation happens now, either as a pension over eight years or as an up-front payment. That up-front money will help many farmers decide whether they want to get out of the industry. They will take the money and sell to the neighbour next door who needs a bigger farm so he can milk more cows and take a strategic role in the industry in the future.

I urge the Minister for Agriculture to say to dairy farmers, 'Wake up to yourselves! Get on with the deregulation while you are offered the money, because if you do not you will do it without the money and we will lose somewhere around \$700 million'. That would be bad for Victoria and bad for my electorate.

I hope that the minister takes that advice on board. He should listen to the industry, the big cooperatives and the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria. He should not take notice of just a few people who are frightened of change. Victoria has seen much change in the industry over the years, but as the industry said to the former government, it will be done either with support or without it. Most dairy farmers in my area want that support so that they can make decisions about what they want to do in the future.

I look forward to the dairy farmers voting to ensure they will be able to make their own decisions in the industry and that the industry gets what it needs. When the result of the vote comes out I am sure we will see that the majority of dairy farmers have a full understanding of how they will benefit from the package. However, the government will give them the opportunity to make the decision they need to make for the future.

The dairy industry has a great future. I hope dairy farmers have a full enough understanding of the situation to ensure they get on board and support the Victorian Farmers Federation, the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria and the big cooperatives, whose only interest is in the future benefit of dairy farmers. That will ensure that Victoria has a great dairy industry to take it through into the new millennium.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your elevation to the position of Speaker.

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — I take pleasure in being part of the debate on the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. I enjoyed the Governor's speech

and the outline of the business program far more at the opening of the 54th Parliament than I did at the opening of the 53rd Parliament, when I was first elected. It was a great relief to honourable members who had been in opposition since either 1996 or 1992 to have an opportunity to see some of the reforms they had talked about for so long and debated so hard come to fruition.

I also take the opportunity to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to the Chair. Essendon has a large population of Greek origin, and I know they will be very proud of your elevation. The Minister for Agriculture will be pleased to know I also thank my caucus colleagues for their support in my appointment to the position of Chair of Committees.

The Parliament is a very different place from when I was elected in 1996. Apart from the fact that we were unfortunately sitting on the other side of the house, there were then only 29 members of the Labor Party. It is a great pleasure — and those of us who were here before the election have spoken about this since the election — to have so many more Labor members on the benches. I congratulate all the new members, particularly those who won seats from the Liberal Party.

I have been most impressed while listening to the inaugural speeches by the talent that has come into the Labor Party at this election. I wish them all well, not only for this sessional period but for the many sittings they will be part of in the future.

Mr Hamilton — And the Independents.

Mrs MADDIGAN — Indeed; I am getting round to the Independents. Don't worry, I have not forgotten them.

In Essendon, unlike in some areas, the election was fought on very fair grounds and was an enjoyable experience. I congratulate the Liberal candidate, Mr Ken Saunders, on his election campaign. I wish him well in his political future, particularly if it continues outside the seat of Essendon.

An honourable member interjected.

Mrs MADDIGAN — In whatever party he chooses to join. The Minister for Agriculture referred to the Independents. It is a great pleasure to be part of the team working with the three Independent members, two of whom — the honourable members for Gippsland West and Mildura — I already knew well from the Chookhouse. It is very pleasant to work with them and the new honourable member for Gippsland East

towards a more democratic Parliament that will be far more open than under the previous government.

I have no doubt that the Labor Party and the Independents will work together to fulfil all sections of the charter that was agreed to by both parties. I am surprised — and it is a rather sad reflection on the Liberal Party — that its members think some secret or hidden deal has been done, that something strange has gone on behind closed doors. It is a sad reflection on the way they operate if they assume one cannot be open and have an honest agreement, that the only way a position of uniformity can be arrived at is from some dirty deal. That is an indication of some of the things that happened during the Kennett government. Today the Minister for Transport mentioned new aspects of the City Link project and I have no doubt we will hear many more as debate continues through the 54th Parliament.

Many events during the opposition years caused great stress not only to my community but also to many Victorians. I shall mention a couple of those that will be changed under the Bracks Labor government. As a former librarian, the compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) program comes to mind because of my experience as a councillor with the City of Essendon, before it was abolished by the Kennett government.

I am pleased to welcome the second librarian in Victoria's history to be elected to the Legislative Assembly — the honourable member for Gisborne. She is the second of many librarians we will see elected. I was also pleased to note another librarian was elected in the other place.

I was working at Footscray public library when CCT was introduced. I had the misfortune of going through the whole process with the library and saw how destructive it was, not only in reducing the level of services to residents, but also for staff members and the way they worked together. We knew at some stage some members would lose their jobs. The process led to competition between staff to try to retain their jobs, rather than all working in the same direction to achieve successful outcomes for the community. That was destructive and I know other librarians had similar experiences.

In retrospect it is humorous to note that when CCT was introduced the Kennett government spoke highly of the opportunity for private operators to run libraries. Technilib was spoken of highly by the former government as a private organisation that would show libraries how to run efficiently, based on the government's view that private employees can always

do things better than public employees — a notion that has been proved wrong time and again. It is ironic that Technilib, which was to show public servants how to run public libraries, went bankrupt within three months of the beginning of the CCT process because it was not able to compete with public employees in local government who ran libraries and prepared cheaper programs for libraries.

A great deal of money has been wasted on an unnecessary process that has resulted in fewer professional librarians working in libraries with resources no longer available to people. It was a destructive process. During my time working with the community and Labor Party policy committees, it was one of the things that communities everywhere sought to finish. Applying a process such as CCT to library, community and human services totally misunderstands the nature of those services and what the community wants from them.

Victoria will now have a great deal more of open and accountable government. It is interesting to note that the previous government considered itself the leader in information technology. However, at the same time that we listened to its views on multimedia it was, through the process of privatisation, removing information sources from most Victorians. One of the most obvious examples was the State Electricity Commission of Victoria. Honourable members might recall that the SECV was often criticised, and often with good reason. The reason people were able to criticise the SECV was that they knew what it was doing. Under the public accounting responsibilities of the SECV, it had to provide not only an annual report but also three-monthly and six-monthly reports on what it was doing. If it made a mistake we quickly knew about it. When it did well we knew about it too.

The privatisation of electricity companies, particularly when owned by overseas companies, as they all are, has meant the report available to us now ends up as a small paragraph in an American report commenting on the whole operation of the company. The access of Victorians to information about whether electricity companies are run efficiently has gone. We do not know what is happening. We do not know what the staffing levels are. Even though the previous government attempted to provide some sort of watchdog over it by opening the Office of the Regulator-General, it provided so few funds for that office that it was incapable of carrying out its functions. The office knew that because it had so little money, particularly in its legal budgets, it was in no position to take action.

I apologise for my voice. I know it is terrible that I have been Deputy Speaker for about three days and am about to lose my voice.

Mr Robinson — So long as you are not losing your marbles!

Mrs MADDIGAN — I thank the honourable member for Mitcham. I hope I am not losing my marbles but I suppose time will tell.

An issue that politicised many Victorians concerned the attacks on the Auditor-General's office. A public meeting was held in Essendon about the Auditor-General. My residents — whom I love dearly, especially since they elected me with an increased margin at the last election — are not keen to attend public meetings at night in the middle of winter. We tend to say when we have a public meeting in Essendon that by the time we have counted off the Liberal Party members and the Labor Party members, normally there are not a lot of people left in the hall. The meeting in my electorate about the Auditor-General was attended by more than 200 people. It was peculiar in that I did not know most of the people there. That was a real indication that this was an issue that had attracted the interest of people who normally do not have strong political views. It brought people out of their houses because they were concerned about it.

Since the election many people have stopped and asked me — mainly in Puckle Street where my office is and where everybody who lives in Essendon turns up sooner or later — when we will bring back the Auditor-General's powers. I am pleased that within the first two sitting weeks of this parliamentary session the Auditor-General's bill has been introduced. It will provide pleasure and relief not only to the residents of Essendon but also to other communities.

The City Link project is one my residents have suffered for some time. The only good thing they say about it is that at least Transurban has not got it right and so has not been able to charge tolls yet. They do not mind how long it takes before the contract is right and Transurban finally works out the glitches in the system. They are enjoying their free travel. Their concern is, as they will freely say, as will the residents of Tullamarine and other places, that as soon as the fees go on they will go off. That is when the problems for the Essendon electorate will really start. The newly elected member for Tullamarine and I, and the residents along that corridor, have expressed concern about many issues relating to City Link, some of which will continue for many years.

An illustration of the arrogance that lost the election for the Kennett government is a comparison between the Eastern Freeway and the Tullamarine Freeway, particularly the western link.

One can sympathise with the residents of the western areas of Melbourne and of Essendon who use the freeway when one sees the noise walls, vegetation and plants adjoining it. Not only are they stuck with industrial-strength concrete walls but they are being asked to pay the highest toll — \$1.01 per section — for an unattractive road that was actually paid for 20 years ago when the freeway was built. Now the local residents and freeway users face problems because of traffic noise, noise pollution and other such matters.

It is fair to say that the residents of my electorate have nothing to thank the previous government for as a result of the City Link construction. The people living close to the project showed their resentment of the intrusion of the new freeway in clear voting patterns at the election. The consultation process with residents prior to City Link's construction broke down completely.

Another area of concern in the electorate was the appalling planning policies of the former government in areas with little land available for development. The *Good Design Guide* — or the Greedy Developer Guideline, as it became commonly known — concerned residents not only because of the changes in government policy it contained but because the guidelines were not prescriptive. They were like a moveable feast in that developers could agree with the guide when it suited them; otherwise they could say, 'They are only guidelines; we need not follow them'.

My constituents look forward to the better planning policies of the Labor government which will return powers to local councils. Stronger guidelines will benefit developers and residents, creating less uncertainty and resulting in fewer cases going to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal because of the Labor government's good planning policies.

I congratulate some of the resident groups that grew up in my area. Many residents were forced to become instant town planners when their streets were threatened with unsightly developments. Two of the groups — the Strathmore anti-multiple development (SAD) group and the Essendon residents rejecting over development (ERODE) group — have been advocates for planning and assisting residents to find more appropriate developments for their localities.

Hospital services are major issues of concern in Essendon. As the honourable member for Oakleigh

said, it is distressing to have elderly residents who are waiting for simple operations such as hip replacements to be told they may face delays of up to two years because their operations are classified as elective or non-urgent surgery. The fact that their surgery is classified as non-urgent does not mean they are not in considerable pain. It is outrageous that 80 or 90-year-olds cannot leave their flats for two years because they cannot walk. It is unacceptable for residents to have to suffer in that way. Their lifestyles are therefore ruined.

Finally, I thank a number of people. In my inaugural speech I acknowledged the great help and support of my husband, Bill, and my daughter, Mary. I am pleased to say they have survived the first three and a half years; they are still there and I hope they will still be there at the end of another four years. I greatly appreciate the support, particularly of Mary, who is young but has ended up with many household tasks that I am sure she would prefer not to do. I acknowledge the support of my hardworking campaign committee and the hard work of Labor Party supporters in Essendon.

Honourable members may be surprised to know Essendon does not have many Labor Party members, despite what the Liberal Party thinks. We could not have run a successful campaign there without the help afforded us by people who were concerned about their communities. Many worked with and for me and for other Labor members specifically in response to their concerns about the Auditor-General, health and education.

I also acknowledge the work of my two well-known staff, Kerrin Clark and Karen Sherlock, who were of great assistance to me. Unfortunately, they did so well and perhaps I trained them so brilliantly that they have both moved to better jobs. I look forward to working with my new staff in the future.

Essendon is a great seat for me to represent. Even the Liberal Party members in Essendon are nice people. Essendon has an excellent community spirit with a low mobility rate. In some ways it is like a country town. We all know each other, the community works well together and I appreciate the work of many volunteers. I very much appreciate the fact that the electors have given me the opportunity to represent them for another four years.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr RYAN (Gippsland South).

Debate adjourned until next day.

Remaining business postponed on motion of Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Gaming).

ADJOURNMENT

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Gaming) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Knox hospital

Mr WELLS (Wantirna) — I raise a matter of concern for the attention of the Minister for Health regarding health services in the outer eastern region. I hope that if the minister is unable to respond to my concern tonight, the house will receive a sincere answer in the not-too-distant future.

The heart of my concern about health services is that the Knox public hospital project will not now proceed. The problem is that the proposed hospital, which was to have been built on the old trash and treasure market site, the land having already been purchased by the former government, was to have had 300 beds; it would have been a huge hospital. It was to have had 24-hour emergency services and critical and intensive care facilities. It was to have had heart and respiratory services, specialist neurosurgery and cancer services, outpatient services and teaching, training and research facilities. Those important features of the proposed hospital meant that specialists would have attended the hospital to perform complex and difficult surgeries.

But the project will not proceed and the people in the outer east will need to travel to city hospitals for health services. That is contrary to the way services should be provided for people in the outer east.

The alternative suggested by the Labor Party prior to the election was for an upgrade of the William Angliss and Maroondah hospitals. However, the problem with that suggestion is that the upgrades would result in only an additional 96 beds in the outer east. The Knox hospital was to have had 300 beds; therefore, the Labor Party solution means the outer eastern suburbs will have 204 fewer beds than would have been available had Knox hospital been built. That will place extra pressure on health services, particularly in Wantirna, Knox and Bayswater. The cancellation of the Knox hospital construction means specialist services will not be able to be provided at Maroondah. Therefore, local residents will suffer from the lack of those facilities. I hope the Minister for Health takes my comments on board and can address the matter, in particular to find — —

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

Port of Geelong

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — I ask the Minister for Finance to raise with the Minister for Ports in the other place the safe movement of vessels through Corio Bay in Geelong and, specifically, the proposal of the former government to withdraw marine control responsibilities from Geelong port. The four major responsibilities of the marine controllers at Corio Bay are: firstly, to ensure the safe movement of ships in the port; secondly, to ensure the safe berthing of vessels; thirdly, to inspect vessels, and fourthly — and most importantly — to respond to shipping incidents.

The role of the marine controllers is vital for the port, the bay, the environment and the economic wellbeing of Geelong. The importance of the role is demonstrated by the 300 oil tanker movements and approximately 100 vessels carrying vinyl chloride monomate, a carcinogenic chemical, in Geelong each year.

In Geelong there are five marine controllers that provide a 24-hour, 365-day-a-year service. The previous government's proposal which currently stands is to remove the marine control responsibility from the port and place it with the new control tower in Melbourne.

I ask the minister to investigate the issue with the objective of ensuring that shipping movements within Geelong remain safe as they have for the past 120 years.

Geelong: water sports complex

Mr PATERSON (South Barwon) — I direct a matter to the attention of the Premier. As he may be aware, the proposal for an international water sports park in Geelong has been around for many years and the former government, with the support of the City of Greater Geelong, committed \$9.4 million to completion of the project.

The mayor of the City of Greater Geelong has written asking for clarification on the current status of the project. He has particularly asked for the opportunity to discuss the matter with the Premier before a final decision is made, as he believes there may be local issues of which the Premier may not be fully aware concerning both the planning stages and the project.

The project has a great deal of support in Geelong. At the recent state election, candidates supporting the project — the Labor candidate and I — polled about

90 per cent of the primary vote, though the Labor candidate reduced the Labor vote from that obtained in the previous election.

It would be of great assistance if the Premier came to Geelong — I understand the cabinet is soon to meet there — and visited the Belmont Common to see what is proposed. He might realise what an exciting project this is.

One of the claims of the Labor Party when touting for government was that it would listen to local government. The City of Greater Geelong has voted six to three in favour of proceeding to the next stage of the project, which is the planning stage requiring about \$240 000, which was committed by the previous government. It is hoped that the present government will honour that commitment. Historically the six councillors of the City of Greater Geelong have been supportive — —

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

Echuca: vocational education training

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — I ask the Minister for Education to intervene in a matter concerning funding for a vocational education program. I recently met with representatives of the Echuca and District Vocational Education Training Management Program Group, which runs the vocational education training (VET) program in the Echuca, Kyabram and Cohuna area.

It services Echuca Secondary College, Echuca High School, Rochester Secondary College, Cohuna Secondary College and St Joseph's College in Echuca. This year some 80 students participated in the program, which is very successful and which received \$52 700 in funding from the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation this year. Despite increased enrolments for next year and a reduction in its costs, the funding for next year has been reduced to \$35 000 — a cut of \$17 700.

Each student is already paying semester fees of \$125, and given that many of the students have to travel considerable distances — for example, some students who travel from Cohuna have a round trip of more than 150 kilometres, which means someone has to drive them and stay in Echuca while they are training and then drive them home. Increasing the fees is not a viable alternative because it would preclude many of the students who most need the program.

The VET program is excellent, and it meets the needs of a significant number of students in country Victoria.

A high proportion of the students who undertake the VET program go on to full-time employment or further study — I understand the figure is more than 90 per cent.

I note the government has said it will provide a considerable amount of additional funding for vocational education and training, and as a matter of urgency I ask the Minister for Education to, firstly, see what she can do about funding the gap of \$17 700 to enable this excellent program to continue next year, and secondly, place pressure on the federal government to provide additional funding from the national student traineeship program.

Sunraysia Rural Water Authority

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — I ask the Minister for Environment and Conservation to intervene in a matter I have raised on a number of occasions over the past 18 months. The responses of the former Minister for Agriculture during adjournment debates have been most unsatisfactory.

Earlier this year I became aware that the former chief executive officer of the Sunraysia Rural Water Authority had misused his corporate credit card by obtaining a series of cash advances. On 13 May I raised the issue during the adjournment debate and received another inadequate response from the former Deputy Premier. That response was a refusal to acknowledge any wrongdoing or to censure the authority for failing to adhere to the corporate credit card guidelines. I subsequently submitted an FOI request seeking all documents relating to the cash advances, but some five months later I have still not received a response.

In addition, an appalling management structure has allowed an alleged internal theft of water to the tune of \$250 000, with another \$500 000 in doubt. The water service committees that relate to the Sunraysia authority have had enough and wish the authority to be managed in such a way as to lift its service delivery. In the eyes of the water service committees the performance of the Sunraysia Rural Water Authority and the questionable ability of senior management indicate that an independent performance review is urgently needed. The capacity of directors to implement the necessary reforms is in doubt, and the environmental considerations are significant.

I ask the minister to inquire into all the activities of the Sunraysia Rural Water Authority and the suitability of the current chairman and board members. I do not question the capacity to serve of all the board members, but some have failed to listen to the water service

committees, whose serious concerns have until now been ignored. Furthermore, some of the appointments were questionable on the basis that appointees seemed to be political sycophants.

Moorabbin court complex

Mrs PEULICH (Bentleigh) — I raise for the attention of the Attorney-General the Moorabbin court complex proposal. The proposal, which involves the possible location of a Magistrates Court at the administrative complex of the former City of Moorabbin, has been pursued for some time by the Kingston City Council, the honourable member for Mordialloc, the former honourable member for Carrum and me. The building is now owned by Kingston City Council.

The Department of Justice did a feasibility study on the concept, which concluded that the building could be modified for use as a Magistrates Court; that a court would be an appropriate use of the building; that its geographic location is well suited to a court, being midway between the city and Frankston; and that, in the judgment of the department, a need for such a complex will exist within about two years.

Some negotiations have taken place between the Kingston City Council and the department, and the project was facilitated by the former Attorney-General. I am not sure of the current status of negotiations.

I ask the Attorney-General to brief himself on the proposal, which was certainly well supported by local members of the ALP, local traders and the traders association, and the Kingston City Council, which has both Liberal and Labor councillors. Generally it has been viewed as a good concept that could work towards rejuvenating the local shopping strip and provide access to a Magistrates Court that is accessible from both Nepean Highway and Moorabbin railway station. The building is certainly well placed. It has an adequate two-level underground car park and is secure. Anyone familiar with it would agree that it has an outward appearance appropriate to a court.

I would appreciate the Attorney-General apprising himself of the proposal, which I hope he will find meritorious. I hope he will facilitate the department's negotiations with the Kingston council to bring to fruition a project that seems to have strong bipartisan support and widespread community support from traders and members of the local community, as well as support from members of the legal fraternity.

Pines Preschool Centre

Mr VINEY (Frankston East) — I draw the attention of the Minister for Community Services to the continuing plight of the Pines community as a result of the cuts to and closure of the Pines Forest kindergarten. The minister may recall that in my inaugural speech yesterday I described the process by which the failed Kennett government choked and starved the Pines Forest kinder to the point where the committee was forced to close it in second term. That occurred under the management of the former Minister for Youth and Community Services, who now leads the other side in this house.

I commented in my inaugural speech that the then government demonstrated a complete lack of understanding about supporting the Pines community. The former government was driven by ideology, which led to its failure to look after the interests of the Pines community. The Leader of the Opposition, when a minister in the Kennett government, said in the house on 25 March, as reported at page 200 of *Hansard*:

... the Pines Preschool Centre will be able to continue to operate when it has 21 enrolments, and even if the number drops to 15, it will be funded for the second term.

The preschool closed when there were 17 enrolments. I met the principal of the Pines Forest Primary School last Friday. He informed me that the school was keen to take over the management of the kindergarten last year and communicated that fact to members of the failed Kennett government, but they did not listen. They did not listen then, nor did they listen to the community in the election campaign. That is why former government members are now on that side of the house.

Despite the school's interest in taking over the management of the kindergarten, the government closed it in the second term of this year. Has the Minister for Community Services received a letter from the school offering to reopen the kindergarten next year? The Pines community would welcome such an attempt. I would like to know if the minister can see any chance of restoring that vital service to the community — a community completely ignored and sold down the river by the failed Kennett government. It is an important issue to that community and one that we on this side of the house can represent. That is the community I stand for. It is what motivated me to be in this place.

Mornington Peninsula Freeway: extension

Mr LEIGH (Mordialloc) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Transport a matter regarding the

Labor Party's commitment to fund the Mornington Peninsula Freeway and the commitment of the Labor Party and its local candidates to the Mornington Peninsula Freeway connection, which is separate from the Dingley bypass. I quote from an authorised press release from Labor candidates and the then shadow minister for local government, roads and ports, during the election campaign, which states:

Labor recognises the importance of both the Dingley bypass and the Mornington Peninsula Freeway to the long-term future of the south-east suburbs.

I also have a copy of a letter dated 7 August 1998 from the federal member for Isaacs, Mr Greg Wilton, who referred to a speech he made that he said was:

... part of my continuing attempt to place pressure on the state government to address this issue and to fund the extension of the Mornington Peninsula Freeway through to South Road.

To add to that, the mayor of the City of Kingston recently wrote to the Premier, reminding him that in the lead-up to the election the Labor Party had added the Mornington Peninsula Freeway to its list of road-building commitments. This \$250 million project will in effect be about 600 yards from a six-lane major roadway.

According to information Vicroads gave to the former Minister for Roads and Ports in another place, all the residents of Aspendale Gardens — where the member for Carrum campaigned so efficiently and effectively — will get if Labor does what it proposes is a 20 per cent increase in traffic!

The mayor said the Labor Party committed \$250 million; Aspendale Gardens residents said it; and the official Labor Party spokesman said, 'Here is another \$250 million for road funding added to the rest'. I call on the minister tonight to tell us one way or another. Forget the Dingley bypass for a moment. Will the Labor government agree to complete the Mornington Peninsula Freeway? That is what the opposition wants to know. Is the cookie jar worth \$250 million to you to keep the honour of the honourable member for Carrum?

Hazardous waste committee

Ms GILLET (Werribee) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment and Conservation. I ask the minister to consider the reinstatement, resurrection or re-embodiment of the hazardous waste committee established by the failed former Kennett government. The committee was

chaired by the previous member for Bennettswood, Mr Geoff Coleman.

At the time of the state election the committee was very close to delivering details of its findings. Unfortunately the state election interrupted the deliberations of the committee and it was not able to report. Although the committee was a belated attempt by the former government to address the real issues surrounding hazardous waste, it was, nonetheless, a very important first step so that the Victorian community could address those issues. I know the new Minister for Environment and Conservation is vitally interested in finding real and sustainable solutions to the issues surrounding hazardous waste, and I look forward to her consideration of the re-establishment of that committee so that the Victorian community can take its first steps towards taking our environment seriously and ensuring that we all have a safe future.

The findings of the committee are absolutely critical to helping us establish some ground rules so that the sorts of debilitating and unnecessary activities that have taken place in our communities in the past, such as the toxic dump in Werribee —

Mr Delahunty interjected.

Ms GILLETT — My colleague in Tullamarine has experienced the same difficulty.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms GILLETT — I look forward to the minister being able to advise the house of her consideration of the re-establishment of the hazardous waste committee before anybody else experiences the problem.

Point Nepean: army land

Mr DIXON (Dromana) — I raise with the Minister for Environment and Conservation the Norris Barracks at Point Nepean. Last year the federal government offered the former army land occupied by the Norris Barracks to the state government, which carried out a number of studies of the area, including an examination of the condition of the assets. It did a complete audit of the risks, studied the heritage values of the area and undertook a flora and fauna study. It also studied the condition of the infrastructure, especially the roads and services, and considered the options for the future use and management of the land.

Since that study was completed, the Kosovar refugees have used the area as a safe haven. The last refugees moved out of the area on Friday last week, so the area is now empty. There are three main sections to the land

in question: a large area of natural bushland, the coastline surrounding the former barracks and the historic and heritage buildings that made up the old quarantine station. There are also a number of former army barracks buildings and quite a large residential area just inside the entrance near the Portsea township.

I understand the reports that were commissioned have been completed, and I ask the minister to announce this government's intentions for the future of the land. Some action needs to be taken soon, as the buildings have started to deteriorate. Some 400 refugees lived there for a number of months, and because the buildings are close to the beach they will continue to deteriorate. A number of constituents are very interested in the future of the area. Some are conservationists and others are looking at some opportunities to use the land for tourism projects. We are all looking to the minister to make some sort of pronouncement as to the future use of the area.

City Link: tolls

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) — I ask the Minister for Transport to look into striking a fairer deal for country motorists, particularly in my electorate and the electorates along the entire Calder corridor, who have to pay the unfair price of \$7 for a day pass to enter their capital city.

I acknowledge that the former government struck a secret deal that saw the state tied to tolls for 34 years. The deal means that country motorists face a \$7 day pass and a \$14 pass if they wish to stay overnight. Motorists from the Mildura and Wimmera electorates surely cannot travel to Melbourne and back in one day and so are faced with a \$14 impost — just to drive into their capital city.

There has been confusion in my electorate about the cost of day passes, particularly about whether they will go up to \$7.70 when the John Howard–Meg Lees GST is introduced from July next year. The matter was raised with me on a number of occasions during the election campaign. It is a serious issue for people in my electorate of Bendigo East and along the Calder corridor, because they are the ones who will be slugged with the \$7 day pass. This discriminatory tax on country motorists is yet another example of how the Kennett government turned its back on and ignored the concerns of country people.

I ask the Minister for Transport to examine the issue as a matter of urgency for motorists in my electorate and other areas of country Victoria.

Responses

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Environment and Conservation) — The honourable member for Mildura raised with me issues concerning Sunraysia Rural Water Authority and the misuse of corporate credit cards. He has persistently raised the issues in this house and with the former minister. Unfortunately they have not been resolved or clarified to the satisfaction of the honourable member or of local residents, including people involved with the authority. The previous government refused to provide the answer and to clear up the issues. The veil of secrecy has weighed heavily on all concerned, and allegations and concerns are still coming forward.

The honourable member said that members of the water service committees of the authority have raised with him various concerns, including concerns about the urgent need for an independent performance review, concerns about the ability of senior management — which they say is questionable — and concerns about the capacity of directors to implement the necessary reforms. I will examine the matter and consider what options I have, and I will advise the honourable member as soon as I am able to do so.

The honourable member for Werribee raised with me an issue — dear to her heart, I think, following the great success of the Werribee community in opposing the toxic dump the previous government had planned to force upon that community — concerning the hazardous waste management committee established by the previous government following the enormous rebuff from the Werribee community, which so resolutely opposed the first proposal of the former government.

The bipartisan committee was set up by a former member of this house, Mr Geoff Coleman, who took the chair, and a former member of another place, Caroline Hogg, who, along with a wide range of representatives from various groups, was a member of the committee. The committee set out to establish the ground rules for the management of hazardous wastes. It undertook wide-ranging community consultation and received a large number of submissions. Unfortunately its work was not completed. I will examine how I can give effect to the work of that committee so it is not all lost.

Finally, the honourable member for Dromana raised with me the Norris Barracks at Point Nepean, which were offered to the Victorian government by the federal government. The honourable member outlined a range of studies that have been undertaken. They include an

audit of risks — which I think all members would want to examine carefully, given the history of use for various military purposes — and studies of what must be considerable heritage values, flora and fauna values, and infrastructure.

The last of the Kosovar refugees have moved out and the premises are now empty. They are surrounded by a natural park and front a wonderful coastline. It is a stunningly beautiful area that certainly deserves consideration. I will advise the honourable member after considering the matter.

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I am pleased to address the issue raised by the honourable member for Bentleigh, and I thank her for directing the matter to my attention earlier today. I have not had an opportunity to be thoroughly briefed by the department on the issue, which concerns the Moorabbin court complex proposal. The honourable member seeks the location of a Magistrates Court at the premises. She advises me that a feasibility study was undertaken. I have not seen that study, but I am prepared to look at it. As the honourable member knows, access to justice was one of the government's platforms during the election campaign, and it is an area I am keen to work on.

A whole raft of matters will be considered, including the reinstatement of compensation for pain and suffering for victims of crime and the restoration of common-law rights for seriously injured workers. I also intend to try to ensure that no community legal centre is forced to close or amalgamate. As the honourable member for Bentleigh would know, the former government planned to amalgamate and/or close a number of community legal centres. That decision was based on false economy and would have resulted in the volunteer base of many community legal centres simply moving away.

The honourable member for Bentleigh would also know that her proposal has come to the fore because of the former government's decision to close the Prahran court. I was vehemently opposed to that decision, but life goes on. I believe it was a bad decision because the Prahran court had much expertise in a range of areas, including drug rehabilitation. However, the Prahran court has been closed, and it is virtually impossible to undo some of those decisions.

I would want to look at a number of courts around Victoria, some of which are in regional and rural areas, to see whether they need upgrading before the government would look at building new courts. I have already asked my department to provide an audit on priorities for Magistrates Courts to establish where the

urgent work needs to be done. I will be in a better position to evaluate the proposal once I have seen the feasibility study and have looked at the demographics of the area to ascertain whether a court is required.

From brief discussions with the honourable member for Mordialloc I understand the nearest major courts to the area are at Frankston and Dandenong. The matter raised may well be on the drawing board in due course, but I am not prepared to give a commitment at this stage. I will look at the documentation and get back to the honourable member for Bentleigh.

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — The honourable member for Rodney raised a concern about vocational education and training programs provided via the Echuca and District Vocational Education and Training Program Management Group for students from five secondary colleges in his electorate. I am delighted that the matter has been raised by the honourable member.

The provision of vocational education and training is in its embryonic stage in Victoria, but it is immensely successful and popular. There has been a fivefold increase in demand. The honourable member for Rodney is quite right when he states that students able to avail themselves of those courses in secondary schools do well in obtaining employment. The work of Professor Richard Teese has confirmed that assertion.

It is with pleasure that I refer to the Labor government's policy on providing vocational education and training in the Victorian certificate of education in secondary colleges and the technical and further education sector. As the house will recall, the government pledged a massive \$65 million over four years for a new approach to post-compulsory education and training. It wants to offer clear pathways and meaningful choices to students so they can stay in the education sector and avail themselves of vocational education and training opportunities. The review of post-compulsory education is being driven by my colleague and good friend the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment. This is an innovative approach and I think Victoria will be a leader in this area. There has been a fivefold increase in the demand for vocational education and training in this state, and with a pledge of \$65 million over four years Labor looks forward to being able to address some of that need.

The honourable member for Rodney specifically raised the question of the \$17 000 shortfall that the Echuca and District Vocational Education and Training Program Management Group faces. He also correctly

said that much of this funding is the responsibility of the federal government. I have to say that the former Kennett government was negligent in not pressing the federal government more fiercely and firmly to sign the Australian National Training Authority agreement, which I believe expires next year.

This government, again driven by the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment, will be pressing the federal government to live up to its responsibilities in this area and to enter a partnership with the Bracks Labor government so that we can answer the need for this fivefold increase in demand. I look forward to passing this information to my colleague and to the minister replying to the honourable member in detail.

Ms CAMPBELL (Minister for Community Services) — It is with pleasure that I am able to answer the matter raised by the honourable member for Frankston East. Thank goodness for the Frankston East community and the Pines in particular that we have a member who will conscientiously raise issues like this! This is the third time I have made a contribution during an adjournment debate regarding the Pines Preschool Centre. Earlier in the year when the honourable member for Frankston East was a candidate he told me on a number of occasions that the preschool was in trouble and that he needed the support of the government. The preschool was not achieving the required result on its own. I raised the matter in the house on two occasions, and still the then minister would not listen.

It was no surprise to the honourable member for Frankston East, or the Pines preschool, or for that matter the Pines Forest Primary School, to learn that the former Minister for Youth and Community Services, now the Leader of the Opposition, said, as reported in the *Age* on 19 October, 'We didn't listen'. Well, golly, gosh, what a revelation!

The good news for the Pines area is that in the Labor Party's election platform and now government policy is the fact that it is investing heavily in preschools, particularly for areas such as those raised by the honourable member for Frankston East, where there is a high health care card take-up. The Labor Party has provided in its policy a fee subsidy of an extra \$150 per preschooler for low-income earners.

I have given instructions to my department to consider the letter from the principal of the Pines Forest Primary School and to work with the Pines community to make sure that so far as humanly possible every effort is

made to obtain enrolments and establish a committee so that there is a preschool in 2000.

I give an assurance to the honourable member for Frankston East that the children's services officer in the Department of Human Services southern region will, as a top priority, do everything possible to get a committee up and running.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — The honourable member for Geelong raised for the attention of the Minister for Ports in another place a matter relating to the removal of marine controllers by the Victorian Channels Authority in the port of Geelong. I will refer the matter to the minister and ensure that she responds to the honourable member directly.

The honourable member for Bendigo East raised with me this long-running problem of the inequity of City Link day passes for people in country Victoria. This is not the first time the honourable member has raised the issue. As a new member of Parliament she has been a tireless campaigner in bringing issues affecting her constituents to the attention of the public.

On this issue the honourable member is concerned not just for the people of Bendigo but for those living in north-west Victoria. She believes there are anomalies and hardships felt by people living in country Victoria, particular in communities at the end of the freeway systems that are funnelled into the tollway. People in the north-west of the state from Bendigo to Mildura are funnelled into the Tullamarine Freeway and have to pay tolls. It is equally true of people living in south-east Victoria. The people of south Gippsland and in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, because of their geographic location, are channelled into roads going into the toll section of the existing freeway — in this instance, the Monash Freeway.

It is no accident that the previous government designed the approach roads to the tollway to deliberately entrap and snare motorists and force them to pay extravagant tolls.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr BATCHELOR — The shadow Minister for Transport laughs. He thinks it is funny that tolls will have a deleterious economic impact on motorists. Perhaps if he were closer to reality and had his feet more firmly on the ground he would comprehend the harshness of the tolls. As a member of Parliament receiving a significant salary he is laughing at people who have to pay tolls.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Mr BATCHELOR — If the honourable member for Mordialloc had listened to his electorate he may have been on this side of the chamber earning additional salary. He chose to ignore the community, as did the honourable member for Warrandyte, who demonstrates by his comments how resentful he is at being tossed out of ministerial office.

I do not mind having a reputation for sticking up for the motorists of Victoria. That is one thing the honourable member for Mordialloc never has had and never will have. He does not care about the people who will have to pay the high tolls. He just wants to come into the Parliament and scoff, laugh and scorn. I want the record to show that when the honourable member for Bendigo East raised those matters the shadow Minister for Transport, the honourable member for Mordialloc, laughed. He does not care so long as he has the opportunity to sit back and laugh at the people who will suffer from the harsh economic impact of the tolls.

The honourable member for Bendigo East has asked me to consider the matter. The impact of the tolls on country Victorians must be understood. In effect the tolls, particularly through the imposition of the day-pass system, are an entry fee and an exit fee for people who live in country Victoria. If they want to do business in Melbourne, visit relatives or go to a hospital, they will have to spend some time in the city. If people stay overnight they will have to pay \$7 to come into Melbourne and \$7 to go out.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr BATCHELOR — The honourable member for Mordialloc continues to interject. He knows it will be a painful experience for many country people, but he finds that humorous! I assure the honourable member for Mordialloc that people who live in country Victoria do not find amusing the prospect of paying an entry and exit fee when coming to Melbourne.

The tolls were an important concern of Labor Party candidates in the last election campaign. It is interesting to observe that the candidates who stood up and opposed the tolls, expressing their concerns at the inequity and harshness of the tolls, were those who were elected. Those in country Victoria who did not stand up for country motorists are no longer here. Those who, like the honourable member for Bendigo East, took a principled stand prior to the election and stood up for motorists, are here. I congratulate her and encourage her to continue her efforts in exposing the harshness of the tolls. I am sure her hopes will come to fruition.

The honourable member has asked me to consider the matter, and I will do that. The government will take up the matter with Transurban and point out the difficulties the fees impose on country motorists. Firstly, the monetary amount is too high. Secondly, the tolling arrangements are restrictive. As I have said before, people who want to come to Melbourne must indicate their intention in advance and the day pass operates for only a short period. If members opposite were trying to look after the interests of motorists and to encourage them to come to Melbourne — the reverse is true — and if they were trying to encourage tourists to visit country Victoria, a pass that extends beyond midnight of the day on which a person first travelled the tollway would be under consideration — say a two-day or 48-hour pass. The concept of a 48-hour pass is beyond the comprehension of the honourable member for Mordialloc. He is obviously incapable of formulating a policy that looks after the interests of country motorists.

I will take up the issue and get back to the honourable member for Bendigo East and other members of the chamber, including the honourable member for Mildura, who have raised similar concerns with me because they want to look after country motorists.

The honourable member for Mordialloc raised with me a matter relating to the Mornington Peninsula Freeway. It was interesting to hear his comments. During his adjournment request he made a revealing remark. He said, 'Forget the Dingley bypass', which is a \$30 million road and is important to people who live in the south-eastern suburbs.

As the shadow Minister for Transport the honourable member for Mordialloc is the spokesperson on roads for the Liberal Party — and presumably the National Party, too. How the National Party can tolerate having this man as its spokesperson on roads, I do not understand. Perhaps the Leader of the National Party, who is walking out in disgust, will be able to articulate why the National Party is prepared to tolerate this unfathomable arrangement. Nevertheless, the honourable member for Mordialloc said the opposition would forget the Dingley bypass.

Mr Leigh — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I specifically asked for an answer on the Mornington Peninsula Freeway, not another roadway. The Minister for Transport is not specifically answering the question.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. The minister's response was relevant to the transport matters raised by the honourable member for Mordialloc. I ask the minister to continue.

Mr BATCHELOR — I assure honourable members and the people of the south-eastern suburbs that the Bracks Labor government will not forget the Dingley bypass.

The government gave specific commitments on the Mornington Peninsula Freeway, which it will honour. It will commence a long-term program to ensure that both the Dingley bypass and the Mornington Peninsula Freeway are constructed. The government's commitment was specific. As a first step — —

Mr Leigh interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Mordialloc shall desist.

Mr BATCHELOR — The Labor Party gave a specific commitment that as a first step it would provide \$30 million for the development of the Dingley bypass between Warrigal Road and the Springvale bypass. The application of funds from the Better Roads levy will be encouraged to increase the money available for that project. The staging of future developments will be determined following a review of the options for carrying traffic from the Mornington Peninsula Freeway through to the Monash Freeway.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Gaming) — The honourable member for Wantirna referred to the proposed Knox public hospital, which the previous government failed to deliver because of consistent and inherent delays. He asked the government to breach a clear and unequivocal election promise that unsigned contracts for privatised hospitals would not be considered.

In the eastern suburbs there are legitimate concerns about the availability of adequate bed numbers. The government has examined the issues affecting the Angliss and Maroondah hospitals. I will pass the honourable member's comments on to the Minister for Health, who will respond at the appropriate time. The issue is important to people in the eastern suburbs. Unlike the former government, the Bracks government will not experiment with ideological issues. If those ideological issues had not been pursued Knox may now have a hospital!

The honourable member for South Barwon — —

Mr Paterson — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I raised a matter concerning the Geelong International Water Sports Park for the attention of the Premier while he was in the chamber. The Premier listened to the question in its entirety and then scuttled out. I seek your

guidance, Mr Speaker, as to whether his cowardice will be tolerated.

The SPEAKER — Order! On the point of order, it is customary for matters to be raised in the adjournment debate and for ministers to be present and answer them. However, there have been many precedents in the past where the minister at the table has answered for ministers who are not in the chamber.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — Obviously the honourable member for South Barwon is sensitive. I recall, while sitting on the other side of the house, many ministers and the former Premier walking out while members were contributing to adjournment debates.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I will not allow the minister to proceed to debate that matter. I have already ruled on that, and I ask the minister to deal with the matter raised by the honourable member for South Barwon.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — The honourable members for South Barwon and Wantirna want the government to break a clear election promise that it will not fund the water sports complex. Debate on this matter has continued in Geelong for more than a year, and there should be no doubt about Labor's position on the issue. Labor said it would not fund — —

Mr Paterson interjected.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — The honourable member for South Barwon says that I, as the shadow minister for sport at the time, said that a Labor government would not fund it but that the Premier, as opposition leader, did not do so. The Labor Party in opposition was unequivocal. It said the money could be better spent on other facilities. Labor is committed to all of its policies, including those stating that it will not commit itself to particular projects.

The opposition wants Labor to behave as the former coalition government did for years: not listening, telling the public it would do something and then doing something else — for example, saying there will be hospitals in Knox and Berwick but not establishing them by the time of the election. The present opposition has not been listening.

Labor members have been listening. We have consulted the Geelong community. It has been an extremely controversial issue in Geelong, but despite this difficult decision the community came down on the side of Labor by electing a Labor upper house member of

Parliament, returning the honourable member for Geelong North and electing a Labor member for the seat of Geelong. The community has endorsed Labor's position.

The only people who are not listening are those who continue to propose this project, which did not go through the proper processes in the past. Labor will be looking at other ways to help the Geelong community rather than putting money into a project that is not necessarily seen as being viable in the long term.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 10.58 p.m.

