

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

11 November 1999

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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¹ Resigned 3 November 1999

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Thursday, 11 November 1999

The SPEAKER (Hon. Alex Andrianopoulos) took the chair at 12.05 p.m. and read the prayer.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Connecting Victoria

Mr BRUMBY (Minister for State and Regional Development) — I wish to make a ministerial statement. I emailed a copy of the ministerial statement to my counterpart, the honourable member for Doncaster, some 2 hours ago.

Connecting Victoria — the Victorian government's strategy for information and communications technologies

Introduction

This is an historic day for the Victorian Parliament. First, because this is the first major ministerial statement of government policy made in the Victorian Parliament for six and a half years; and second, because the Bracks government is today committing to a major information society strategy, Connecting Victoria.

Connecting Victoria is our strategy for growing the information and communications technologies (ICT) industry and for sharing the benefits of these technologies across the entire Victorian community.

Today, Victoria faces a challenge of great magnitude. In moving to a knowledge-based society, we — the government, the Parliament and the Victorian community — have a choice. We can let new technologies further divide our society into winners and losers — the information rich and the information poor — or we can harness the potential of the technology to develop the whole state and maximise opportunities for all our citizens.

This ministerial statement is about a strategy for connecting all Victorians. It is about positioning Victoria as the nation's ICT leader. It is about building Victoria as a knowledge economy.

We recognise the previous government for its work on information and communications technologies; we are well placed today as a high-tech centre of excellence. But the previous government's efforts focused too heavily on international firms at the expense of local industry. They did too little for small businesses and home businesses. They forgot about country Victoria entirely. The Bracks government will use these

technologies to build a prosperous and fair society for all Victorians.

As Minister for State and Regional Development, Victoria's most senior economic development minister, I will make it my personal responsibility to maintain Victoria's national leadership in this area. The information society agenda is no longer separate from the main economic and social agenda — it is mainstream.

Today I shall outline six major strategy elements that support the government's goal to grow the ICT industry and to share the benefits of these technologies across the whole of the Victorian community:

1. Building a learning society
2. Growing the industries of the future
3. Boosting e-commerce
4. Connecting communities
5. Improving infrastructure and access
6. Promoting a new politics.

These are just the start. More will follow over the coming months, as the government further develops specific initiatives to be implemented over the life of the Parliament.

1. Building a learning society

We will create Victoria as Australia's leading learning society through increased attention to lifelong learning for all Victorians.

Successful economies are built on the abilities of their people. Bill Gates, for example, agrees. Chapter 8 of his book *The Road Ahead* is titled 'Education: The Best Investment'.

Last century the visionary Education Act of 1872 put literacy and numeracy within the reach of all Victorians through free and compulsory schooling, opening up educational and job opportunities for all. Today ICT policy and access are just as crucial to Victoria's future.

Information technology literacy is a fundamental skill for the knowledge economy. The challenge is to build a ballast of people in Victoria who are IT savvy.

The government's education policy will ensure a long-needed and substantive increase in resources across all levels of the education system, as outlined in Labor's policies prior to the recent election. This will include:

building a culture of lifelong learning so skills are continually upgraded;

assisting schools to properly resource the IT needs of all their students and local communities;

expanding IT training opportunities in Victoria's TAFE system and through vocational education and training in secondary schools;

helping everyone who wants one to obtain an email address.

In 1989, a decade ago, as chairman of the then federal Parliament's Employment, Education and Training Committee, I was responsible for the landmark report on technology in schools entitled *An Apple for the Teacher? Choice and Technology in Learning*. Today I am delighted to see that many schools throughout Victoria are shining lights in their use of technology to improve learning outcomes.

I will give some examples. Apollo Parkways Primary School is one of the few 'Apple Classrooms of Tomorrow' in the world that Apple Computers is funding in order to research the effects of learning technologies in the classroom. Ararat Community College has set up a cyber Internet cafe so that the local community can access the Internet. Lowanna College in Moe recently held the first Australian school technology conference. Glen Waverley and Ballarat secondary colleges are also making great gains through introducing learning technologies into their schools. Bendigo Secondary College has a multimedia centre and library as a focal point of activity, and provides industry-based training through programs with Cisco and Microsoft, in addition to industry and community outreach programs. The Bracks government wants to see more schools like these. We need to go a lot further, and we will go a lot further.

Australia's growing ICT skills shortage is the most critical issue impeding the competitiveness of Australia's and Victoria's ICT industry. The 1999 survey by the industry-led IT and T Skills Taskforce revealed that there is already a demand in Australia for over 180 000 people with ICT skills over the next five years. In the next 12 months alone Australia will need more than 31 000 people with ICT skills. It is anticipated that next year, for example, there will be an unprecedented demand for ICT skills during 2000 with the proposed introduction of the new goods and services tax.

Yet while skilling our work force and the task of investing in education are becoming more important every year, Victoria has been investing less. Under the

Kennett government Victorian TAFE institutes have consistently been the worst funded in the nation and were provided the lowest level of TAFE funding per head of population of any state in Australia.

The Bracks government will underpin Victoria's future industry development with a fundamental commitment to skills development. We will direct more resources into Victoria's TAFE institutes so they can better meet the training needs of Victorians; we will work with industry to ensure that it is geared towards minimising skills shortages and providing a skills base for Victorian industry. Already the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment, Ms Kosky, has announced an additional \$14.7 million over four years to restore a regional funding differential for TAFEs which will enable regional and rural TAFEs to far better address training needs — a very positive initiative.

We will direct a major effort into enhancing the availability of structured education and training arrangements for ICT — real training for real jobs. This means matching training programs with employment vacancies in a systematic manner — from integrated off-and-on-the-job traineeships at entry level for young people, right through to intensive, tailored cross-training programs for adults who wish to transfer from other employment into ICT positions in high demand.

Employers, both ICT companies and the vast majority of others needing people with ICT skills, have a major responsibility to work with the government to ensure that Victoria's education and training programs are vocationally relevant. Wherever practical, programs should incorporate transition to work arrangements so that graduates secure jobs quickly. We can only start to close the skills gaps when government, education and training providers, and industry, work closely and cooperatively together. Accordingly the Bracks government will establish an ICT Skills Taskforce of expert representatives from industry, education and training providers, community and government.

Over the next six months the task force will consult widely and work closely with me in developing practical initiatives for joint implementation with the ICT industry. Specifically it will examine accelerated training programs, TAFE places, skilled migration, and promotion of technology-related business and career opportunities.

Let me make it clear: we aim to achieve results quickly, and we will.

2. Growing the industries of the future

This government will take a strategic approach to developing growing and emerging industries in Victoria.

The information sector is growing 300 per cent faster than the Australian economy as a whole — an extraordinary rate of growth — and globally the ICT share of the world economy has trebled from 4 per cent to 12 per cent since 1983.

Victoria has advantages that let us compete with the best. We have a skilled, multilingual work force and some of Australia's best leading educational institutions. We are among the earliest adopters of new technology. Victoria has nurtured world class ICT companies.

Looksmart, for example, was formed in Melbourne by a husband-and-wife team just four years ago. Its Web search engine is now turning over \$20 million a quarter and is reaching 14.6 per cent of the US Internet population.

This government sees itself as a catalyst to build Victoria as a centre of excellence for emerging growth industries. We have made a strong commitment to boosting research and development and promoting innovation, science and engineering.

We will work in partnership with industry. Together we can create a culture that motivates local firms to take their business to the world. We will bring new international business to Melbourne to help grow our local companies. Multinational Acclaim Entertainment, for example, has created opportunities for Melbourne-based computer game developers. Tantalus Interactive, for example, has produced a South Park computer game under licence for Acclaim. Worldwide distribution would not have happened for Tantalus without Acclaim choosing Melbourne out of 89 international locations for its regional head office location. This contract is a major coup for Victoria and reinforces Melbourne's position as the computer-game capital of Australia.

Let me make it clear that the Bracks government is unashamedly pro-business and pro-investment. We will actively seek and welcome international investment in this state in recognition of the great spin-off benefits that that investment can bring to our local industry. For example, earlier this week I announced that eSign Australia will establish in Melbourne the most advanced digital encryption data centre outside North America — a great investment for this state.

We are committed to preparing sectoral plans to boost the growth of key Victorian industries. Our first priority is the information and communications technologies sector.

Over the next few weeks, I shall announce the new chair of a new Information Industry Advisory Group to oversee development of the ICT sector plan. The advisory group will help us identify priority areas for Victoria within the information and communications technologies sector. That group will ensure we take a strategic rather than an ad hoc approach to developing information industries.

Over the next four years we will also:

- promote the growth of high-tech clusters of firms and research institutions and encourage them to locate in rural and regional Victoria;

- identify ways to expand the availability and uptake of venture capital;

- take a balanced approach to outsourcing of government IT operations, ensuring that Victorian ICT companies have the full opportunity to compete in the marketplace.

3. Boosting e-commerce

The government will promote expansion of existing businesses, particularly in regional and rural Victoria, by promoting technology-enabled export capabilities and e-commerce.

McMahon Global Food has increased revenues by 30 per cent since adopting e-commerce two years ago. This dairy food distributor — based in Gordon, near Ballarat — now exports its products to every continent, except Antarctica. The company has contracts with companies in Algeria, Argentina, South Africa, Russia and Brazil, which generate valuable export dollars for Victoria.

McMahon is not atypical — innovative and progressive regional enterprises are plugging into the Internet and getting acquainted with the benefits of e-commerce. This government plans to assist more businesses to do the same.

The same opportunities are available to Victoria's national and international competitors. We must move quickly to build our own globally competitive businesses throughout Victoria.

Manufacturing businesses in the USA are already taking advantage of major productivity gains from the

use of technology, a national competitive advantage recently highlighted by Alan Greenspan, chairman of the US Federal Reserve Board.

Victoria produces more than one-third of Australia's manufactured goods. We are the manufacturing capital of Australia. New technologies are crucial to the future of manufacturing — in boosting efficiencies, developing new products and new processes and growing international markets.

Our leading manufacturers are using the new technology to:

- design smarter and more efficient supply chain management systems;
- gain access to new suppliers and export markets;
- keep in close contact with clients.

Through the Internet, Lovittools, a Melbourne-based precision engineering and manufacturing company, saved over \$120 000 in purchasing material supplies for just one contract and vastly improved customer communications.

Electronic commerce, combined with lower rental costs and a more stable workforce, gives regional Victoria advantages over metropolitan Melbourne in attracting web-enabled call centres.

The Bracks government's Regional Call Centre Attraction program, announced during the recent election campaign, will market Victoria as an ideal location for call centres and back office business functions. Our goal is clear: to win major gains in employment across the whole of regional Victoria.

Related to the call centre program is our pilot High Tech Towns project. Beginning with Ballarat and Portland, the government will work with industry to establish regional televillages to support teleworking and telecommuting.

Larger firms are already taking advantages of the opportunities presented by new networking, and so are many smaller firms.

New technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for small business.

Aussie Greengrocer is a small but growing company based in Werribee. It allows people to order and pay for fresh fruit and vegetables using the Internet. Aussie Greengrocer, only online for six months, has already recouped its e-commerce investment. The company is

now distributing to towns all over Victoria, not just in western Victoria where it started.

But not enough small and medium enterprises (SME) are using the new technology to build business and enhance competitiveness. The government's message to those firms throughout Victoria is: you are fundamental to Victoria's future, particularly our future as the Smart State, but you are even more important and fundamental to that future if you are connected online.

To grow more smart connected SMEs the government will:

- provide export development services through an online Electronic Export Assistance Centre;
- encourage teleworking and telecommuting;
- identify more ways in which ICT can modernise and improve traditional manufacturing and agricultural industries;
- vigorously promote the use of e-commerce.

The key is empowering businesses by providing them with opportunities to reap the benefits of being online.

The government also will implement the Victorian Tourism Online project begun by the previous government, but it will increase the emphasis on regional operators who have much to gain by being online. The new Tourism Victoria web site will be rich in information about destinations, tourism product and operators in Melbourne and regional Victoria. It will be marketed to the world, as well as to Australians and to other Victorians. It will be linked to all regional tourism and key partner sites, as well as to individual sites. Ultimately it will allow visitors to book and pay for accommodation, tours, attractions, events and services online from anywhere in the globe.

The Victorian Tourism Online project is enormously significant for regional tourism operators — particularly the smaller ones. It will enable them to maximise the reach and exposure of their products to new and existing markets in ways that were previously untouchable and unattainable. The Victorian Tourism Online project is a great example of the way in which the smart application of new technologies can enhance and grow existing business, particularly in more remote and rural locations.

Data and privacy protection are a vital part of promoting e-commerce. Victoria will continue to lead on developing a legislative environment to allow e-commerce to flourish. We will therefore strengthen

the compliance provisions of the proposed data protection bill, and pressure the federal government to install quickly a suitable legal framework to protect personal information in the private sector.

4. Connecting communities

The government will strengthen Victorian communities by getting them connected: building online skills, and providing better infrastructure and access.

The key to making the most of today's opportunities is getting connected and skilled.

The Victorian government intends to do all it can to help everybody plug into the resources of the World Wide Web.

Many Victorian libraries are already online but the Bracks government will do more. We will increase access for multilingual users and those with disabilities and ensure that more useful and user-friendly online resources are available for everyone.

We will continue the Skills.net program for another three years and improve it to empower many more communities to create their own networks and content. Skills.net for Community Groups will accelerate online skills development and use by providing community leaders across Victoria with the necessary tools and skills.

This initiative — outlined in Labor's election platform — will see community outreach officers working across Victoria to identify and establish training and support arrangements for community groups of all kinds.

Over the next three years 40 000 more people will receive training through Skills.net projects targeted at technologically disadvantaged groups, including women, communities in isolated locations, and people from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

The social power of the technology to improve social outcomes is immense. Ben, an autistic child, was introduced to the local Skills.net project and became very excited about how the Internet was able to take him to places such as Disneyland and Segaworld. He has become far more confident and skilled in asking for assistance at the Skills.net centre and this whole process has improved his reading, writing, computer and social skills. Through the help of Vicnet and a local computer distributor, he is also connected at his grandmother's house.

The Victorian government wants Skills.net for Community Groups to help many more people like Ben to expand their horizons.

5. Improving infrastructure and access

The government will adopt a high priority strategic approach to increasing availability and lowering the cost of access for regional and rural Victoria.

Victoria must work with the other states and the commonwealth to secure for all Australians a sophisticated and affordable national communications network.

Our immediate goal is to help deliver better Internet access at a lower cost, especially for regional and rural Victoria. We will:

- help Victorian business to gain access to the world's best telecommunications infrastructure;

- work cooperatively with industry and local communities to guarantee high-speed digital access to information and email;

- continue to support VicOne while investigating ways in which VicOne can be better leveraged to reduce access costs.

We will seek out opportunities to use this government's new Regional Infrastructure Development Fund to upgrade access to ICT in rural and regional Victoria.

On 5 November at the ministerial online council I met with my interstate and national counterparts to discuss how we might influence more equitable outcomes that will benefit community development and boost industry growth.

A number of my state counterparts share my concern that current directions in infrastructure provision will deliver high-tech solutions for the elite few who can afford to pay, when all Australians, especially in rural areas, need access to a reliable and affordable ICT network.

Ministers Yeadon from New South Wales, Mackenroth from Queensland and I intend to establish a tri-state alliance on regional communications. The goals will be to:

- identify opportunities for joint telecommunications infrastructure initiatives;

- identify potential regional nodes for high-performance computers to provide better IT

and telecommunications infrastructure in regional Australia;

better focus the Networking the Nation program to ensure better targeted outcomes for regional IT infrastructure; and

stimulate informed debate on digital TV policy, which has major implications for all Victorians.

The Victorian government understands how important it is for the towns and communities of regional Victoria to regain a voice. Traditional media are experiencing a time of great flux, and the outcome of federal deliberations on free-to-air television, pay television and datacasting will affect media content as well as carriage.

My counterparts in the other eastern states share a commitment to continue working for a strong national focus on promoting Australian content and identity.

We will work with the ABC and other broadcasters to tune in the bush. This government commends The Backyard-ABC Local Online, and will use the ABC-Cinemia multimedia accord and other initiatives to assist additional rural and regional programming projects throughout Victoria.

6. Promoting a new politics

This government will use information and communications technologies to provide new and enhanced services to people throughout Victoria and help us build a new democratic government with consultation and openness as its hallmarks.

Just as we expect businesses and citizens to go online, citizens rightly expect government to go online. We will continue the internationally recognised Government Online program so Victorian citizens can access the government 7 days a week, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day regardless of where they are located, by phone, Internet or public kiosk — and in the future, through television. Fifty-eight services — from ordering a birth certificate to paying the car registration — are online now. We will ensure more information and services are made available in the main community languages.

But computers without people and clicks without bricks are not enough. The government will provide physical infrastructure and community training as well as online applications.

The government will immediately commence discussions with local government to ensure the timely

introduction of Labor's plans to provide Internet access in town halls and council service centres as well as establishing net access centres where Victorians can access information and conduct transactions with government agencies online.

Government is not just about services. It is about fair and transparent processes. This government is a reforming government. We will embrace an open style of politics reasserting the values of representative democracy and promoting active citizenship.

The fact that Connecting Victoria is being announced in this chamber also underscores our intention to bring Parliament back to the heart of politics in this state. The people of Victoria expect their representative Parliament to be the centre of informed debate on key issues. We are treating Parliament with respect and restoring its role of deliberating on major government policies.

Today I am delighted to announce our Democracy Online initiative.

We will refer to a parliamentary committee the issue of how best to use new technologies to open up the processes of Parliament and government to the people of Victoria. The committee will examine options including netcasting of parliamentary proceedings, using the Internet as an interactive consultation mechanism for policy formulation, enabling wide sharing of policy ideas and encouraging public comment on important issues. Parliament Live will further strengthen the position of Parliament at the heart of Victorian politics.

Conclusion

Today's statement is about making ICT ubiquitous. It is about creating the skills that will enhance people's lives. It is about putting technology in the hands of the whole community.

We recognise the importance of the growing information sector. The growth of industries based on other kinds of new technology — such as biotechnology — has great potential to create new wealth, new jobs and solid social benefits.

Through this Connecting Victoria statement we are proud to be creating a social as well as educational and economic agenda for universal access to information and communications technologies. The government is not content to leave this issue to the market and business alone. We believe that governments can promote positive social and economic change, and we are acting accordingly.

Our overall aim is to enhance Victoria's global competitiveness and enrich the quality of life of all Victorians.

Today I have announced a comprehensive information economy strategy. I have announced several new initiatives that will get this government's commitment to all Victorians off to a flying start. They are the establishment of:

1. the ICT Skills Taskforce;
2. the ICT sector Growth Plan and Information Industries Advisory Group;
3. the Electronic Export Assistance Centre;
4. Skills.net for Community Groups to provide training and access to disadvantaged groups;
5. the tri-state alliance on regional communications to improve regional telecommunications infrastructure in addition to Victoria's own dedicated funding for ICT infrastructure, and its Internet access in town halls and net access centres initiatives;
6. Democracy Online.

The government will allocate funds to our information economy strategy as a matter of priority. In addition, we will be making funding available by reprioritising existing programs and better leveraging commonwealth funding for infrastructure development.

Connecting Victoria is the first instalment in delivering on our agenda for Victoria's full participation in the knowledge economy. It will be followed by other major strategies. Our biotechnology strategy is in preparation, as is a comprehensive statement on how we will move forward in innovation, science and engineering.

The Bracks government is committed to maintaining this state's reputation for innovation and transforming this into opportunities for all Victorian citizens.

I commend the statement to the house.

I move:

That the house take note of the ministerial statement.

I am prepared to allow the shadow minister to have equivalent time to respond.

Mr PERTON (Doncaster) — If this is to be the first of the government's great statements on building Victoria's reputation for innovation and producing opportunities for all Victorians, it has failed the test.

The ministerial statement puts forward no new initiatives. The only initiatives expressed in the statement are the policies of the previous Liberal government — the programs implemented under the strong leadership of the world's first Minister for Multimedia, the Honourable Alan Stockdale, with the commitment of the former Premier and the Liberal–National Party coalition.

Multimedia technology, information technology (IT) and online advances are in a revolutionary period. We are in the midst of a revolution that is changing the way we do business, the way we deliver education and the way we operate our democratic institutions.

Last week in Melbourne Dr James Martin said:

It's a total revolution, and you need to be a revolutionary to succeed.

About a year ago the Vice-President of the United States, Mr Al Gore, said:

We are on the verge of a revolution that is as profound as the challenge in the economy that came with the industrial revolution. Soon electronic networks will allow people to transcend the barriers of time and distance and take advantage of global markets and business opportunities not even imaginable today ...

Government has to be flexible in this area, and it must be moving ahead of the pack. The Labor government has inherited a Victorian reputation for being not just second-best but the best in the world. Not only does the government and Victorian business say Victoria is the best in the world in information technology and multimedia, Bill Gates in his latest book, *Business at the Speed of Thought*, refers to Victorian innovation on at least five occasions. A year ago Mr Gates in a speech at the World Economic Forum not only praised general Victorian government policies but pointed out that our electronic service delivery program and our education programs in multimedia were the best in the world.

Not only business people think that. The G7 online committee came to Melbourne to observe and to give praise for what the previous government had done, and Japanese business journalists have continually praised the work of the previous Victorian government.

The challenge for the Labor government is not just to produce any old, ordinary policy for information technology and multimedia; it is to be the best in the world and to be constantly improving, because the standard the opposition will set for the government is not only to deliver what the former government delivered but to take what we delivered and do it better.

The former coalition government set three objectives for its work in multimedia policy. The first was to be a leader; the second was to be an exemplar; and the third was to be a facilitator. The ministerial statement adopts the programs and policies of the former coalition government in example and in facilitation. I think it is sad that the government absolutely fails the test on leadership. Victoria will fail unless the Premier and a dedicated minister for information technology take responsibility for policy in this area.

Why has a ministerial statement been made today?

Mr Ryan interjected.

Mr PERTON — The honourable member for Gippsland South says by interjection that we have just heard the longest press release in the history of man, and he is right. The ministerial statement has been made today because the IT industry is absolutely appalled at the government dropping the ball. The ministerial statement leaves unanswered more questions than are answered.

I will read the statement made by Prins Ralston, president of the Australian Computer Society, on 21 October that prompted the ministerial statement:

To demote the IT and T portfolio at a time when the rest of the world is giving far greater prominence sends a clear message to the industry that this government has not thought through the priorities that are necessary to succeed in the information age. . . . The concept of IT and T functions having to report through the finance department is a throwback to the 1970s and 80s. Certainly in other governments and in the corporate environment, the chief information office reports directly to the CEO.

That is, the Premier himself.

The government was so disappointed by those sorts of statements that the minister called in the computer industry and said, 'Stop complaining. I, the minister, will commit myself'. The reality is that the minister has not committed himself at all.

Mr Robinson interjected.

Mr PERTON — The honourable member for Mitcham, who is interjecting, is not renowned for his computing skills or for his great imagination and insight, yet he is now the acting minister. He is the man who is responsible for the IT and T industries — not the Minister for State and Regional Development or the Premier — despite a 10 per cent swing against him in his seat at the last election. It is not a ringing endorsement!

Where is the honourable member for Coburg? He is the only person in the government who understands IT and has a commitment to IT, yet he has been relegated right out of the field.

Mrs Peulich — That is because he is from the Socialist Left!

Mr PERTON — As the honourable member for Bentleigh has said, factional politics have got the better of the government.

The IT industry finds it stunning and astonishing. Victoria has much competition from around the world — many other states and countries want to get IT and T investments. I refer to an article that appeared in *The Australian* of 26 October and headed 'Beattie Casts Eyes over Victorian IT':

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.

Mrs Peulich — Undersecretary!

Mr PERTON — Undersecretary, a very good description.

The article also states:

The lack of a specific minister is what held back the development of the IT industry in Queensland, while Victoria made multimedia its own under the Kennett government.

But the current Beattie Labor government looked at the economics of the industry, liked what it saw, and appointed a minister who has gone all out to, among other things, snatch the industry from Victoria . . . When the communication and information minister Terry Mackenroth launched the government-sponsored diploma of IT in games development last week the grin on his face was hard to miss.

That is the reality. Victoria was a laughing-stock in the last days of the Cain–Kirner government in 1992, and already in the first month of the Brumby–Thwaites government we are becoming a laughing-stock within the industry that matters most.

Where is the Premier's multimedia task force?

Mr Brumby — You have spoken for 20 minutes, but you have not put forward one policy.

Mr PERTON — The Minister for State and Regional Development has asked me for a policy, but I ask him for a policy.

The minister should answer the question — where is the Premier's multimedia task force? The great success of the IT industries in Victoria was possible because the

former Premier and the then Minister for Multimedia, Alan Stockdale, made it their business to have monthly meetings with the leaders of the IT industry from around the country and overseas.

It was a strong endorsement of the previous government that the managing directors of the major companies in the IT industry from around Australia and their colleagues overseas came to Melbourne to meet with the former Premier, Jeff Kennett, and Alan Stockdale. They contributed their knowledge, skills and enthusiasm to make Victoria a leader in information technology, yet this government has dumped all that. The Premier does not use a computer because he does not know how to use one. The minister thinks setting up email accounts is e-commerce. He has invented the new term 'televillage'.

What is that? Is it where the Teletubbies live? That is quite extraordinary. The minister has no passion, no vision and no sympathy for the industry. His entire ministerial statement indicates that fact. There is nothing new or innovative in it.

The Communications and Multimedia Task Force has gone. Let me make the first commitment on behalf of the Liberal–National Party partnership. On our return to government we will reinstate the Premier's Communications and Multimedia Task Force. It will be attended and chaired by the Premier. Every meeting will be attended by the Minister for Multimedia or his IT equivalent. It will attract the leaders of industry.

We make a further commitment that throughout the period of opposition the Leader of the Opposition, working with me as shadow minister for multimedia, will continue to work with the leaders of the IT industry to make sure that on the return of the Victorian coalition government it will be able to take back the reins of leadership in this field.

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr PERTON — The minister talks of leadership!

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr PERTON — Not much!

Where is there any mention of Multimedia Victoria in the ministerial statement? What is the future of that organisation? Where is the world's best agency, one respected by the British and American governments and constantly called upon from around the world for its advice? It is not anywhere. It is nowhere. Gone!

Mr Robinson interjected.

Mr PERTON — They have just made your office a bit bigger, have they?

The government policy written by the honourable member for Coburg gave Vicnet a strong role and an increased budget. I am sorry to say that both Vicnet and Carlo Carli have disappeared from the ministerial statement.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr PERTON — As the honourable member for Mordialloc says, they have disappeared into cyberspace.

The minister demonstrates his extraordinary ignorance of what has been done and what still needs to be done. He talks of greater access for libraries. Victoria is already seen as the world leader in the delivery of Internet services in libraries. Every public library in Victoria has access.

I went to Washington, DC, to visit its National Commission on Information Services in Libraries expecting to learn. Instead, I was introduced as the person coming from the first jurisdiction anywhere in the world to give free Internet access to every public library. Later on, in its last budget, the former government doubled funding for Internet access in libraries.

The Liberal and National parties have been committed to empowering Victorians in new technologies.

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr PERTON — The minister did not pay much attention to his speech before he delivered it.

One of the nice things about the policy statement made by the minister is that, to the extent that there is anything good in it, it is pure plagiarism. Every one of the programs referred to is a program of the former Victorian state government, along with further commitments taken from policies of the former government.

It is nice to see that the minister has not sacked the old speechwriters. There are some interesting anecdotes in the minister's new policy statement. The story of Ben, for example, is a heart-warming story plagiarised without footnote from Alan Stockdale's speeches over the past two years. Dear, dear, John! You need to make sure the speechwriters are writing some new speech material for you.

There was an extraordinary vote of confidence for the past government and its policies in the area of IT.

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr PERTON — The minister says the previous government focused too heavily on international firms at the expense of local industry. I thought we wanted to give young Victorians opportunities in global industries. The companies expressing their confidence by increasing their investment exposure in Victoria during the term of the former government included IBM, Digital, Fujitsu, NEC, Hewlett-Packard, Ericsson, Siemens, Nortel, Tandem, Telstra, United Telecommunications, Philips, Optus (Cable and Wireless) in regional centres, Kodak, Data General, Nokia, Ascend Communications, Anam, Continuum, Electronic Arts and hundreds more — plus hundreds of small businesses that have become large businesses. Looksmart, for example, started off as a very small business situated in the suburbs of Melbourne and became a company of international renown with an extraordinary capital base.

I now look more closely at each of the elements of the document. Part 1 is entitled 'Building a Learning Society' and contains a promise to build a culture of lifelong learning. That lifelong learning policy was a policy of the Victorian coalition, drawn up by the honourable member for Warrandyte, now the shadow Minister for Education. It is an extraordinarily good policy that was very well received.

On page 3 of the document there is a list of schools that are among the best in the world for their exposure to multimedia and IT. Glen Waverley and Ballarat secondary colleges, it states, are making great gains through introducing learning technology. Bendigo Secondary College has been referred to by the managing director of one of the multinational corporations doing business in Victoria as a school that is as good as it gets. It is interesting to note that Bendigo Secondary College is a self-governing school, one of the schools the Minister for Education is determined to destroy and tear down.

Dr Napthine — We have the best computer to school ratio in Australia.

Mr PERTON — Indeed, it is as the Leader of the Opposition has said.

Has the minister read anything about Bill Gates? Has he heard of Bill Gates? Does he know who Bill Gates is? Bill Gates refers to Victoria's delivery of computers in schools as the best in the world. It is extraordinary that the government can tear down the education initiatives

of the past government and yet still claim some of those initiatives in its own policy document.

The section called 'Skilling of the Work Force' is a wonderful piece of plagiarism.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr PERTON — As the Leader of the Opposition says, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

The opposition's policy document *Global Victoria* was well received right across the community and internationally. The section headed 'Skills Development — Filling the Skills Gap' outlines a program to which the former government committed \$1.25 million in its last budget. Each of the elements of that program has been picked up in the minister's new policy document. *Global Victoria* states that the former government aimed to:

respond to the ICT industry's evidence of significant skill shortages and training gaps in Victoria, where these are gaps which cannot be addressed by take-up of existing training programs or which the industry cannot address by its own training arrangements;

promote ICT skills development across industry, and the education and training sectors;

expand the availability of, and participation in, ICT training to ensure Victoria's work force is competitive in ICT now and in future.

The document goes on for another page and a half, not a couple of paragraphs as in the minister's statement. Our document has specific initiatives to deliver training to the people of Victoria.

The Labor government continually tries to run down the reputation of TAFE colleges. There is no doubt that employers — the people TAFE colleges rely on for both funding and the ability to attract students — have given the Victorian TAFE system an extraordinary vote of confidence. It behoves this government to stop tearing down the reputation of the good TAFE system.

Part 2 of the policy is entitled 'Growing the industries of the future'. In an extraordinary sentence the minister states that the Labor government is unashamedly pro-business. I do not know whether that is a factional backhander to the left! Under that heading the minister states:

We will actively seek and welcome international investment from this state in recognition of the spin-off benefits this provides to our local industry.

That contradicts the statement on page 1 about the focus of the former government on international

companies. However, to the extent that the Labor government works to attract international business, I will very much applaud every new set-up in Victoria. On the other hand, every information technology business that now goes to Queensland at the expense of Victoria will be attributed to the government's lack of ambition and its inability to understand the business needs of society. Society wants leadership; it wants a minister for IT and a Premier who is committed to the cause.

The most extraordinary section in the paper is entitled 'Boosting e-commerce'. It gives a clear indication that the minister comes to the field utterly fresh-faced and ill-equipped to deal with the challenges. I find it extraordinary that nowhere in this document is there reference to the cutting edge of technology — that is, artificial intelligence, expert systems, data warehousing and data mining. I am sorry! This minister still thinks e-commerce new technology is an email address. Does the minister have an email address other than that provided to him by the Parliament? Does he know of services such as Hotmail or Yahoo? Does he know that commercial entities around the world provide email addresses for free? No. The minister's great initiative will be to provide email addresses.

Ms Pike interjected.

Mr PERTON — The honourable member for Melbourne! What a pleasure it is to hear her inaugural interjection. I wonder if she knows how to use the Internet.

To the extent that there is anything of any benefit or strength in the policy at all it is the Regional Call Centre Attraction program, which is a direct continuation of a program of the former coalition government. It is a direct rip-off of the Liberal policy set out in *Global Victoria*. What is interesting is that this is a government that keeps saying it is fiscally responsible; that its policies are thoroughly costed. Where are the costings for the Regional Call Centre Attraction program? Where is the budget for the High Tech Towns project? To the best of my knowledge the budget for the Electronic Export Assistance Centre is \$70 000 over three years. It will not be possible to rent a portion of a server for that! Who is going to develop the content and process requests for assistance? It is extraordinary that this minister, who claims to be part of a fiscally responsible government, cannot put costings to it.

There is not much new in this document. Let us see how the High Tech Towns project works, and I am still waiting to see a televillage. Al Gore, the Vice-President

of the United States, is said to have invented the term information superhighway. John Brumby will go down in history as having created the term televillage. I suspect that after the government has finished with the businesses and industries in Melbourne, Ballarat and elsewhere Victoria will have many televillages rather than global cities in the global economy.

Victoria's tourism project is, once again, a rip-off without a footnote. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition — then Minister for Tourism — announced the Victorian Tourism Online project a year ago. The former coalition government announced a \$7 million allocation for it in the May budget. The emphasis of the project was on regional operators who have much to gain by being online. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but once again the opposition has to thank the Labor government for plagiarising its policies and projects without attributing those policies to the people who did the work.

The last paragraph in that section deals with data and privacy protection, a vital component of an e-commerce regime. I note that no time line is provided. When will the bill be introduced? If the federal government does not introduce a privacy regime for the private sector, will the government go on with the Victorian bill?

It is no wonder the Minister for State and Regional Development does not want to go on with the privacy protection bill. This is a minister who does not believe in privacy; who when in federal Parliament was one of the strongest proponents of the Australia card. Do you remember the 1970s concept of the new socialist state, with identity cards? The minister was one of the greatest proponents of the identity card in the former federal Labor government. It is no wonder there is no substantial commitment on data privacy in the statement.

Where is any reference to the electronic business framework bill? Where is the reference to a legislative framework for electronic signatures? Where is there a reference to new legislation relating to crimes committed online or committed through the use of computer systems? Where is there a system for electronic commerce, the resolution of e-commerce disputes? Nowhere at all. It is clear that either the minister has not read his briefing documents or that to the extent he has read them, he has not understood them.

Section 4 of the policy deals with Skills.net, which is a Liberal policy. It was Alan Stockdale's commitment to empowering all Victorians to use the new technology. To the extent that it continues the work and adopts the

policies of *Global Victoria* and even to the extent that it extends them, the opposition will certainly support an expansion of Skills.net. However, the section of the statement relating to infrastructure and access is the most disappointing section of the policy. It says nothing. It contains no costings. It says it will help Victorians to gain access to world's best practice telecommunications infrastructure, but how will it do it? Where is the fleshing out of it? There is no detail — no costing at all in the policy.

The opposition supports the notion of working cooperatively with industry and the local community to guarantee high-speed digital access to information and email. Obviously the opposition continues to support VicOne, a fantastic former Liberal government initiative that delivered a communications infrastructure that linked up every school, every government agency and every government office across the state and provided a backbone for the private sector. To the extent that the government continues to implement and to improve it the opposition can only say 'Hear, hear!' and support it.

To the extent that there will be cooperation on each of the matters that are set out in the tri-state alliance on regional communications, it is terrific. However, yet again the statement still looks like a press release only. It contains no costings, no criteria for success.

Mr Plowman — And no dollars are committed.

Mr PERTON — No dollars are committed. I have put a question on notice in respect of that and I will wait for the answers to see what the performance criteria are.

Lastly, the section entitled 'Promoting a new politics' is interesting.

Mr Brumby — Promoting new politics is interesting.

Mr PERTON — The Minister for Finance is interjecting inanely, but that was always his way. The second paragraph of that section states:

We will continue the internationally recognised Government Online program ...

That is, of course, Victoria's program. The commitment is to deliver all government services online, possibly by 2001. The question is, 'Where is the target?'. The British Labour government has a target of 2008. The former Victorian coalition government had a target of 2001.

Mr Bracks — You are so negative!

Mr PERTON — Premier, do you want to commit yourself to the target? Do you want the opportunity to now commit yourself to 2001? Will you? Can you commit yourself to the target? Are you going to commit yourself to the target? Five times I have asked the Premier; five times he has failed to answer!

Electronic service delivery (ESD) was one of the great visions of Multimedia Victoria, and Minister Stockdale and Premier Kennett were recognised around the world as best in the world. The target was for government services to be delivered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by 2001. The American state of Utah, the next most progressive state in the world in the area, could not achieve that until 2002. I set the challenge for the government to meet the ambitious target of the coalition government to deliver ESD by 2001.

The next initiative proposes that people will have Internet access at town halls. Who wants to go to a town hall to access the Internet? Does anyone? Perhaps that is the People's Republic of Moreland policy. Perhaps people will be forced to go to their town halls. What is wrong with library services? What is wrong with ensuring that people can access the Internet from home? Internet access from town halls is a strange policy.

The initiative also refers to Net access centres. That is the sincerest form of flattery. Perhaps the minister has read the coalition's *Global Victoria* document, which under the heading 'Vic Shop initiative' states:

Victoria has established itself as a national and global leader in information technology and multimedia. We are using the new technology to provide more effective, better tailored services and information to Victorians ...

The coalition will initiate a major service project to establish an extended community presence for government services through Vic Shop. We will establish more than 100 service shopfronts around the state under the Vic Shop brand. The Vic Shops will provide the daily face-to-face contact between Victorians and the government.

How many net access centres will there be under this government? How much will they cost? When will they be delivered?

An honourable member interjected.

Mr PERTON — No, that is precisely the case. This government's policy document contains no new ideas, no costing and no targeting.

The last initiative to which the statement refers is Democracy Online. It is a great tribute to what the previous Victorian government provided in this Parliament. I notice that the Minister for Finance does

not have his laptop in the chamber; I do not think he knows how to use it. I have also noted that the Premier is not a great computer user. Nevertheless, the ability to bring a laptop into the chamber, to access the Internet at 2 megabytes per second and to receive and send emails from the chamber is extraordinary and powerful. It brings new technology and democracy right into Parliament. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to provide leadership to the community in that policy area.

I notice that the new honourable member for Dandenong North at least takes the responsibility seriously and has his laptop in the chamber. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services sent me my first email interjection. Although its language is not parliamentary, it indicates that this Parliament is moving on.

The opposition strongly supports the government's initiative that it will:

... refer to a parliamentary committee the issue of how best to use new technologies to open up the processes of Parliament and government to the people of Victoria.

There is not much in the government's document. To the extent that Connecting Victoria continues the former government's policies, it is terrific; to the extent that it is completely bereft of new ideas, it is appalling.

In concluding, on behalf of the IT and multimedia industries and a Victorian community that wants its children and grandchildren to have the best opportunities in the world, I ask the Premier to either take on the responsibility himself and become the IT minister or appoint a specialised minister for IT. For the government not to have a dedicated minister or people generating new ideas and to relegate the policy area responsibilities to a junior parliamentary secretary is depressing. It is a slap in the face for all Victorians.

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms KOSKY (Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment).

Debate adjourned until next day.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Corangamite Catchment Management Authority — Report for the year 1998–99

East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority — Report for the year 1998–99

Financial Management Act 1994 — Financial Report for the State of Victoria, incorporating the Annual Financial

Statement for the year 1998–99 together with the audit report of the Auditor-General — Ordered to be printed

Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority — Report for the year 1998–99

Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority — Report for the year 1998–99

Mallee Catchment Management Authority — Report for the year 1998–99

North Central Catchment Management Authority — Report for the year 1998–99

North East Catchment Management Authority — Report for the year 1998–99

Parliamentary Committees Act 1968 — Interim response of the Premier to the Federal–State Relations Committee's Third Report on Federalism and the Role of the States: Comparisons and Recommendations

Port Phillip Catchment and Land Protection Board — Report for the year 1998–99

West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority — Report for the year 1998–99.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

Responses to reports

Mr BRACKS (Premier) (*By leave*) — There are 12 parliamentary committee reports from the last Parliament which under the Parliamentary Committees Act the government is obliged to respond to before the end of the year.

On 4 November the Attorney-General tabled interim government responses to the recommendations contained in the report on the inquiry into the right to silence by the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee and the report on the review of the Fences Act by the Law Reform Committee. Today, I have tabled an interim government response to the report on federalism and the role of the states by the Federal–State Relations Committee.

The government has decided that it is also appropriate to table interim responses in a further six cases. It is with considerable reluctance that the government has decided to adopt the approach of tabling interim responses to a number of parliamentary committee reports. However, it has been advised that such an approach is consistent with the Parliamentary Committees Act and has decided that it is in the interests of good government to do so.

Good government demands that the government's responses to the difficult and complex issues raised in the reports should be fully considered. The report on the right to silence is a case in point. The report raises a host of complex philosophical, practical and legal issues and it is essential that the response be fully informed and well considered.

Moreover, it would be an insult to the careful and detailed work that has gone into the reports if the government were to table final responses without giving the same careful and detailed consideration to the recommendations contained in the reports. Yet if interim responses to a number of reports are not tabled, that will be the consequence. In the few weeks since the Governor commissioned me to form a government it has not been — and may not be — possible for ministers to give appropriately detailed consideration to a number of these reports, details of which follow:

1. Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee's report on the right to silence;
2. Law Reform Committee's report on the review of the Fences Act 1968;
3. Federal–State Relations Committee's report on federalism and the role of the states: comparisons and recommendations;
4. Federal–State Relations Committee's report on the register of specific purpose payments received by Victoria;
5. Law Reform Committee's report on criminal liability for actions performed while in a state of self-induced intoxication;
6. Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's report on annual reporting in the Victorian public sector;
7. Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's review of Auditor-General's reports nos 39 to 41; and
8. Road Safety Committee's report on the incidence and prevention of pedestrian accidents.

I can assure the Parliament that with the right to silence report and the other cases where the government intends to table interim responses, final responses will be tabled as soon as possible. If it is not possible to do so this year, final responses to those reports will be tabled in the autumn sittings next year.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Adjournment

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday, 23 November.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Wangaratta Festival of Jazz

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I draw to the attention of the house the fact that the Wangaratta Festival of Jazz conducted its 10th international festival from 29 October to 2 November and has won the Best Victorian Regional Festival for three years running. Importantly, last Friday the Wangaratta festival was successful in winning the Australian award for the most significant regional festival and special event.

Thousands of Australian and international enthusiasts visit Wangaratta each year for this special event, and I pay tribute to the chairperson of the local committee, Mrs Patti Bullus, her committee and the large number of volunteers who make the festival such a success. In recognising the award of excellence for a regional Victorian festival, I ask the government to ensure that continued strong financial support is provided for a great success story for Wangaratta and country Victoria.

Remembrance Day

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I pay tribute to those former railway and tramway personnel who died making a contribution to the Great War. I do this following a ceremony that was held today at Transport House where the great sacrifice to Australia made by those people was remembered. Today's ceremony was conducted in front of an honour roll that paid tribute to the 364 railwaymen from head office who set off to war in 1914–18, 52 of whom did not return.

That process of contribution and sacrifice was repeated many times in railway towns and workshops and tramway depots all over Victoria. It continues a tradition that was commenced by the previous Minister for Transport, Alan Brown, and I pay tribute to him for his initiative.

W. J. Craig Memorial Centre

Mrs ELLIOTT (Mooroolbark) — On Sunday 14 November the Canterbury Family Centre, a Uniting Church agency, will officially open the W. J. Craig Memorial Centre in Croydon. The Canterbury Family Centre has a history dating back to the 1920s and for many years has worked with vulnerable parents and children to break the all-too-common cycle of abuse and neglect.

The work of the Canterbury Family Centre is highly regarded by the Department of Human Services. The relocation of the centre from Canterbury to Croydon is a recognition by the Uniting Church of the high support needs of many families in the outer east and is a very welcome move.

The agency is operating from a redesigned and rebuilt Uniting Church property in Mount Dandenong Road which was left vacant by the amalgamation of two parishes on one site. I look forward very much to joining the Moderator of the Uniting Church, the Reverend Pam Kerr, the executive director, Mr Milan Poropat, and the staff and volunteers for the opening ceremony on Sunday.

I also eagerly anticipate the enhanced service provisions the W. J. Craig Memorial Centre will provide to families in the Mooroolbark electorate and the surrounding areas.

Frankston Hospital

Mr VINEY (Frankston East) — I draw the attention of the house to the fact that last Friday I attended the Frankston Hospital with the Premier and the Minister for Health. The Premier and the minister made an announcement to honour a commitment made during the election campaign to start the process of providing 64 more beds at Frankston Hospital.

We had the privilege of a tour of the hospital. I was pleased to be a part of that tour, although I was shocked and disturbed by the condition the previous government had let the hospital get into over the past seven years. In particular, the tour of the midwifery, paediatrics and emergency units showed that the hospital had been left to decline for many years. I am pleased the government has been able to honour its commitments to the hospital so early in the Bracks government period, and I am sure the community will get behind and support that commitment.

Last Tuesday the member for Frankston made some questioning remarks about the government's commitment to the hospital, which she repeated in the

local newspaper. I am not surprised because the opposition only found out about the problems of the hospital during the election campaign. The Labor Party has of course been campaigning about this for two years and is now honouring its commitment.

Betty Bruce

Ms BURKE (Pahran) — I praise the work of a lady in my electorate, Betty Bruce. For over 41 years Betty has held dancing classes for youth in the area — both male and female. During that time she has never charged for the classes. She also organises an annual concert where the children get the opportunity to perform and show their talent. As honourable members know, every child has some innate skill that needs to be brought out. Betty is a wonderful person for helping those children understand the abilities they have within them.

Betty does this work for the Try Youth organisation, which was started in 1883 by a gentleman called William Mark Foster, who saw youths hanging around a post box when he went to post a letter one night in Pahran and decided to take them home and give them some projects for some sort of entertainment. The Try Youth group is now a very big organisation, particularly in my electorate, that runs kindergartens. It has now taken over the Horace Petty Kindergarten, which is the kindergarten located below the housing ministry units, where the children do not often get the opportunity to leave the estate and go to kindergarten. Try Youth has taken over that kindergarten, which is making a big difference to the quality of life of those children.

Sexual Discrimination Act

Just as important an issue in my electorate is the fact that today is the 15th anniversary of the Sexual Discrimination Act.

Ron Castan, AM, QC

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — On 21 October the nation lost a true champion of human rights and reconciliation and a fine jurist. I ask the house to pay its respects to Ron Castan, QC. He was a member of the Victorian bar for over 30 years, during which time he applied his outstanding intellect to laudable humanitarian aims.

Ron Castan was honoured by the indigenous community throughout Australia. He began his work with the indigenous community in 1971 as the founding honorary secretary of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and continued his participation through an

ongoing role as a trustee of the Melbourne-based Koori Heritage Trust.

His involvement in the Mabo case and in drafting the Native Title Act 1993 changed the political and historical landscape of Australia. He was tireless in his fight for indigenous rights. He contributed to many human rights organisations and was a leading figure in the Jewish community. Among other contributions, he was a member of the board of governors of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. With his wife, Nellie, he was a benefactor of the National Gallery of Victoria and made a major contribution to the gallery's indigenous collection. He was also a friend of this government when it was in opposition. For example, he advised the government on the KNF affair.

Ron Castan is survived by Nellie and their three children, his mother and his brother. Not only has the indigenous community lost a great hero and friend but we, as a community, have lost a great man. He remains, however, an inspiration to us all.

Police: Paynesville

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — I raise an issue for the house that is a concern of many residents of my electorate — that is, the inability of the police force to adequately service the region because of low police numbers.

The issue is particularly relevant to the town of Paynesville, which has a permanent population approaching 4000 people. It is a tourist town that has a large population increase during the summer period. Currently it is serviced by the Bairnsdale police station, over 18 kilometres away. The community has asked me, as the local member, to raise the issue of a police presence with the government because of the high incidence of vandalism in Paynesville. I ask the government to consider all possible avenues to deliver a greater police presence to Paynesville, preferably a permanent police station.

Colac–Otway arts and cultural centre

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — I wish to congratulate and thank the former coalition government and the former member for Polwarth, Ian Smith, for the grant of \$2 million from the Community Support Fund for an arts and cultural centre to service the Colac–Otway district. The grant represents one of the largest single allocations from the fund, and it went to country Victoria.

For country performing arts groups, community organisations and travelling performers the facility will

provide a much-needed venue to entertain people and help them to develop their skills. It is evidence of the previous coalition government's commitment to the arts in rural and regional Victoria. Further, I acknowledge the commitment to this facility of Colac resident and performing arts supporter Mrs Beryl Doak, who has lobbied for many years for this facility. The performing arts centre will bear testimony to her endeavours.

Peter Wilson

Ms BARKER (Oakleigh) — Today the community of Oakleigh, the labour movement, my family and I record with much sadness the passing yesterday of Peter Wilson at the age of 51. Peter had fought a long battle with cancer.

Peter will long be remembered for his tireless commitment to the local community, his knowledge of and work to preserve and maintain the heritage of the area and his commitment to health services for all residents. He was a founding member of the Monash Medical Centre board of management and was one of the people who established this much-needed health facility for the local community and the people of the south-eastern region.

Peter was a gentle man, quietly spoken and always smiling. Even when he was very ill and was asked about his health, he would smile and speak reassuringly to you of his illness.

Peter was a dedicated and determined union organiser who believed passionately in the rights of workers. He fought hard and long to see safe work practices and protection for injured workers put in place. He fought without fear or favour for the rights of working people.

I record my thanks to Peter for his community spirit, his dedication and commitment to the labour movement and his work in establishing much-needed facilities such as the Monash Medical Centre.

Peter was a friend of mine — a gentle, passionate and sincere man who will be sadly missed. My sympathy and thoughts and those of the Oakleigh community are with Peter's wife, Pearl, and his son, Shaun.

ALP: election result

Mr BAILLIEU (Hawthorn) — I wish to correct misleading assertions by members of the government that the Australian Labor Party won a majority of the two-candidate preferred vote — specifically the claim that the ALP won 50.4 per cent of the vote and that this gives legitimacy to the government. It did not. It is a

pretence. The ALP failed to finish either first or second in six seats — all of them regional and rural.

The only way to arrive at 50.4 per cent is to pretend, firstly, that in a bizarre twist, the Liberal Party won the seats of Mildura and Gippsland West and the National Party won Gippsland East; and secondly, that the ALP finished second in those seats. In those seats the average ALP primary vote was less than 16 per cent.

If the Labor Party wishes to claim this version of history it should vacate the government benches and acknowledge an outright four-seat majority for the coalition. It cannot have it both ways.

The only way to accurately record the aggregate two-candidate preferred vote is to accept the Independents result. For the record, the result is 2.7 per cent to the Independents, 49.2 per cent for the coalition, and 48.1 per cent for the ALP. Anything else is a fabrication, a myth, a distortion of the truth and an insult to the intelligence of the public, which serves to undermine the legitimacy of the government.

New Gisborne: teacher awards

Ms DUNCAN (Gisborne) — Today I wish to pay tribute to Barbara Simcocks and Marcus Ward — teachers at the New Gisborne Primary School — who last Tuesday received \$1000 each under the Civics and Citizenship Education School and Teachers Awards for their work with year 6 students at the school.

The award is a tribute to the two teachers. Its purpose is to encourage the development of innovative programs and activities and to promote increased student understanding of democratic decision-making processes.

I congratulate Marcus and Barbara and the school on the great work they do.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL

Second reading

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Freedom of Information (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill implements the government's pre-election commitment to promote open and accountable government, together with its commitment

to the Independents charter to rebuild the Freedom of Information Act.

As a policy, freedom of information is grounded in the following fundamental principles of a democratic society:

the individual's right to know what information is contained in government records about himself or herself;

that a government open to public scrutiny is more accountable to the electors; and

where people are more informed about government policies, they are more likely to be involved in both policy-making and government itself.

The Freedom of Information Act was first introduced by a Labor government in 1982 as part of its commitment to open government. Over the last seven years the previous government made numerous amendments to the act, the result of which has been to narrow the operation of the act and restrict the right of Victorians to access government documents. The aim of this bill is to reinstate the act as a fundamental cornerstone of open and accountable government.

The bill proposes to rebuild the act by:

narrowing the exemption for cabinet documents;

narrowing the exemption relating to commercial confidentiality;

removing the \$170 appeal fee at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) for deemed refusals;

compelling ministers to explain to the house the reasons for appealing from a VCAT decision to release documents; and

removing recent changes to the act that prevent access to documents that identify any person, including public servants, named in those documents.

Cabinet confidentiality

The bill narrows the exemption for cabinet documents by removing the exemption for documents that are merely presented to cabinet without having the status of a formal cabinet submission. It is the intention of the bill that documents now prepared for submission to cabinet should be in the form of formal cabinet submissions. Any attachments to a cabinet submission

would need to be relevant to that submission and not merely attached in order to attract an exemption.

Commercial confidentiality

The Freedom of Information Act provides an exemption for a range of information relating to business, commercial or financial matters that is obtained by government agencies from business organisations. This exemption has been employed in the past, under the guise of commercial confidentiality, to prevent disclosure of documents that should be open to public scrutiny.

The bill narrows the ambit of this exemption. Under the proposed amendments documents will be exempt only if disclosure of information relating to business, commercial or financial matters would be likely to expose a business organisation unreasonably to a disadvantage. This narrower exemption will operate in conjunction with the government's policy commitment to post all contracts for the delivery of services to the community on behalf of the government on the Internet. This will ensure that Victorians are aware of and better able to scrutinise business undertakings entered into by the government.

Excessive costs for appeals

The previous government whittled away access to information by introducing extra fees and charges. The government is committed to reducing excessive costs for appeals to ensure that the mechanisms in the act remain accessible to Victorians. This bill removes the fee charged for reviews of deemed refusals. Deemed refusals are where a government agency either fails to respond to a request for access to documents or fails to respond within the required time limits, requiring an applicant to go to VCAT to obtain access to the documents. Currently, an application to the tribunal seeking review of a deemed refusal attracts a fee of \$170. This fee, which was brought in by the previous government, will be removed.

The government has promised to cap appeal and application costs for freedom of information requests for the term of the next Parliament.

Ministers' accountability

As part of its commitment to accountability, the government promised to require ministers to explain to the house why the public interest is served by the government appealing from a decision by the tribunal to release documents. The bill requires the relevant minister to make a brief statement of reasons as to why they are appealing to the house within seven sitting

days from when a summons for leave to appeal is filed with the court.

Personal information

The previous government recently amended the act to exempt from release documents that identify any person, including public servants. A person wanting this information is forced to apply to VCAT, incurring additional costs in the process. The amendments were said to be in response to the tribunal's decision in the Coulston case.

Not only have the amendments unjustifiably narrowed the operation of the act, the amendments have also created an administrative nightmare for government departments and agencies, which have been required to painstakingly examine documents the subject of a request in order to delete identifying information relating to a person.

The bill repeals those amendments, contained in part IIIA of the act. In conjunction with repealing part IIIA, the bill clarifies that 'information relating to the personal affairs of any person' as contained in section 33 of the act includes identifying information of any person, such as the person's name or address. Recent VCAT rulings have raised doubts as to whether information relating to the personal affairs of any person includes the names and addresses of persons. The bill gives guidance on this issue.

The government recognises that there will be instances where the release of identifying information may be inappropriate: for instance, where a person's life or physical safety may be at risk. The bill permits a decision-maker, in deciding whether disclosure of a document would involve the unreasonable disclosure of information, to take into account in addition to any other matters whether the disclosure of the information would, or would be reasonably likely to, endanger the life or physical safety of any person.

Transitional provisions

To ensure that the amendments operate fairly, the bill contains detailed transitional arrangements. In particular, applicants who have applied under part IIIA will not have to pay any additional fees in the resolution of those cases under the new law.

These amendments to the act form part of a package of reforms being developed to implement the government's freedom of information policy. In addition to these amendments, the package will include changes to the freedom of information guidelines, revised policy and administrative directives for

departments and agencies, together with training for relevant officers and amendments to the cabinet handbook. The administrative directives for departments and agencies will emphasise the high priority this government places on adherence to the procedures and time lines as laid down in the act.

With this important package of reforms the government confirms its commitment to restore open and accountable government to the citizens of Victoria.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Dr DEAN (Berwick).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 25 November.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (BEST VALUE PRINCIPLES) BILL

Second reading

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

This is a bill that will deliver fundamental reform to the local government sector, placing it firmly back in the hands of local communities.

This bill implements the government's election commitment to abolish compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) for local government. In place of CCT the bill introduces a new approach based on best value principles. This approach removes the inflexibility and rigidity of CCT while ensuring that councils remain accountable for their expenditure and obtain value for money in the delivery of council services.

The new best value approach will enable councils to determine the most effective means of providing a service to the community. It will reflect local considerations such as the retention of skills and jobs within the community and the economic impact on the community. As rural Victoria has suffered through the loss of employment and a declining population, this bill will facilitate actions on the part of municipal councils to encourage employment growth and retain employment within their municipalities. It will help reverse the disadvantage that rural councils often suffered at the expense of CCT where in-house council staff could lose to an external service provider and then be forced to leave rural areas in search of alternative employment.

While the previous compulsory tendering regime imposed a rigid system that mandated a tendering target for councils, this bill will provide greater flexibility by enabling councils to determine whether there is value in going to tender. It will remove the effect of the current provisions where councils often find it necessary to tender for small-value contracts solely in order to reach their statutory CCT target. The new provisions will allow councils to apply the best value principles to their services as existing CCT arrangements expire.

The best value principles will underpin all financial decisions relating to service provision and introduce a new system of local accountability. The bill sets out six best value principles that councils must observe. These place an onus on councils to ensure that their services offer the best possible quality and value for money; are responsive to community needs; are accessible to the people they are intended for; show continuous improvement; are subjected to regular community consultation; and that a council reports regularly to its community on how the council's services measure up against the best value principles.

These principles will be supported by guidelines and codes established by the minister in consultation with the sector. They will assist councils in implementing the best value principles and will provide leadership in the development of local standards for achieving the best mix of quality services and affordability.

The bill requires councils to develop quality and cost standards for their provision of services to the community. This will ensure that councils deliver to their communities the desired features and levels of service expected of them. The bill sets out key factors to be taken into account by councils in developing the standards. They include the need to review services against the best on offer in both the public and private sectors; the assessment of value for money in service delivery; community expectations and values; and the balance between affordability and accessibility of services to the community.

In reviewing services, councils may continue to use tendering but equally may choose to compare their services against those provided by other councils, public and private sector providers, without conducting public tendering. Either way, councils will be looking broadly to set service standards, programs for achieving them and ongoing reviews to ensure their standards are reached or exceeded.

The bill also sets out factors that may be taken into account by councils in applying the remaining best value principles. Some factors are common to those that

apply to setting standards. Others include opportunities for local employment growth and or retention; the value of potential partnerships with other councils, state and commonwealth governments, and the private sector; and potential environmental advantages for the municipality.

The new system will be ushered in by councils publishing timetables for best value reviews of all the services they provide to their communities by 31 December 2000. Councils will have five years, to December 2005, to complete and implement review outcomes. While the obligation to strive for services delivering best value will be ongoing, and progress reported annually by councils to their communities, all services will be subjected to a best value review every five years.

As a related matter, the bill raises the threshold above which councils are required to use public tendering before entering into a contract. The current limit of \$50 000 will be raised to \$100 000 to better recognise the cost of tendering relative to the value of contracting.

The government is committed to fulfilling its election commitment to abolish a policy which has imposed an arbitrary target on all councils for tendering and strained the financial and social sustainability of many rural communities. The Labor government understands that the key to successful local government is allowing councils the freedom to build effective partnerships with the local community. By introducing a new best value approach to the delivery of council services, the bill will ensure that councils are primarily accountable and responsive to the needs of local communities, rather than the state. While councils will be encouraged to strive for continuous improvement in the services they deliver, the state government will not be imposing a prescriptive, audited regime on councils which forces them to meet state imposed standards.

I turn to the provisions of the bill. Clause 1 outlines the purpose of the bill, which is to amend the Local Government Act 1989 to replace the compulsory competitive tendering requirements imposed on councils, with an obligation to ensure that councils seek the best value in providing services. Clause 2 provides for the bill to come into operation on the day after it receives royal assent.

Clause 3 provides that in seeking to achieve its purposes a council has a new objective of achieving the best value principles. Clause 4 substitutes the competitive tendering provisions in the Local Government Act 1989 with a new division dealing with best value principles. The new division sets out the best

value principles and provides that a council must comply with these principles.

It also requires councils to develop quality and cost standards for the provision of any service it delivers for its community. In developing these standards a council must take into account the need to review services against the best on offer in both the public and private sectors, an assessment of value for money in service delivery, community expectations and values; and the balance of affordability and accessibility of services to the community. These standards must be publicly available.

In applying the best value principles a council may take these above factors into account as well as opportunities for local employment, growth and retention, the value of potential partnerships with other councils and state and commonwealth governments, and potential environmental advantages for the council's municipal district. A council must report to its community at least once every year on what it has done to ensure that it has given effect to the best value principles.

A council must apply the best value principles to all of the services it provides on or before 31 December 2005 and must develop a program for the application of the best value principles on or before 31 December 2000. In addition, the minister may publish a code and or guidelines in relation to the best value principles.

Clause 5 repeals other competitive tendering provisions in the local government act 1989. Clause 6 substitutes section 186(1) of the Local Government Act 1989 with a new minimum compulsory tender amount of \$100 000 replacing the current \$50 000 amount. Where a council intends to enter a contract for the purchase of goods or services, or for the carrying out of works, and the contract has a value of \$100 000 or more, the council must invite tenders or expressions of interest by public notice.

Clause 7 provides a new regulation-making power in schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1989 relating to the best value principles.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms BURKE (Pahran).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 25 November.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I recognise and welcome a former Premier of Victoria, Ms Joan Kirner, who is in the visitors gallery this afternoon.

BURWOOD BY-ELECTION

The SPEAKER — Order! Following the resignation of the Honourable Jeffrey Gibb Kennett as member for the electoral district of Burwood in the Legislative Assembly, I have this day issued a writ for the election of a member to serve in the Legislative Assembly for the district. In accordance with the writ, nominations will close on Monday, 22 November 1999, and polling day has been set for Saturday, 11 December 1999.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**Industrial relations: workplace agreements**

Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is for the Premier. On Tuesday in the other place the Minister for Industrial Relations said that Victorian public servants would have a choice between Australian workplace agreements or collective bargaining. Yesterday it was revealed that heads of departments have been ordered to transfer all employees to collective agreements. I ask the Premier whether this is another case of an incompetent minister having a different view of government policy to the Premier. Why should public servants not have a choice?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I could not agree more — we need choice in the public sector and in industrial relations. We need choice that the previous Kennett government did not give the public servants of this state. The reality is that Australian workplace agreements were forced on the public sector in Victoria by the minister and the former Kennett government.

The New Labor government is honouring an election commitment, and that is now happening in every other state in Australia. Despite the fact the previous government tried to force Victorian public servants on to workplace agreements, only 9400 people signed up for those agreements.

Australian workplace agreements have been rejected in the department of the federal Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, Mr Reith, and in most federal departments. The New Labor

government is committed to abolishing Australian workplace agreements. I am proud to say that public servants will get the same standards as those in the private sector, the same as in other states. They will have enterprise agreements.

On the question of choice, it is useful to note that the 9400 individual contracts entered into under the previous administration were identical in character. They were no different from one another. They were template contracts.

I am proud to announce that the government will institute collective or enterprise agreements, which is the standard of other states, for non-executive public servants. It is meeting its election commitments, unlike the previous government, which said that no worker would be worse off. The former government said it would keep awards and standards and it then introduced the failed Employee Relations Act which simply did not work. What happened to that act? Industrial relations was handed over to the federal government because the system in Victoria did not work, just as Australian workplace agreements have failed.

I give the house this guarantee: the government will not prop up the failed Australian workplace agreements. The Leader of the Opposition can join Mr Reith if he wishes, but this government will not join him or support his rotten agreements.

Catchment management authorities: levy

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — I ask the Premier what action the government will take to deliver on its election pledge to abolish the unfair catchment management authority tax on Victorians in regional and rural Victoria.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for Ballarat East for his question and his campaign against the catchment management authority tax in country and provincial Victoria. One reason the former government is now in opposition is partly due to the flawed and stupid catchment management authority tax arrangement.

Today I announce more good news for country and regional Victorians. The government has taken action to end the double taxation imposed by the retiring Leader of the National Party by abolishing the catchment management authority tax. The catchment management tax will no longer exist in Victoria.

Mr McNamara interjected.

Mr BRACKS — Let us take up this matter first. In addition to announcing the abolition of the previous government's catchment management tax, I indicate that additional funding will be made available for catchment management works. No project currently being undertaken by catchment management authorities in Victoria will be disadvantaged. Every project will be funded, particularly over the summer period, but such funding will continue into the future. The government guarantees funds for existing projects and is committing ongoing funding of more than \$10 million for catchment management works. That is greater than the amount the catchment management authority tax was proposed to raise, and it will be spent more efficiently. The government will fund the initiative by cutting into the waste and mismanagement of the former administration. The allocation will come from general taxation and not from a double tax introduced by the retiring Leader of the National Party.

The government will abolish this unfair tax on country Victorians and provide an equivalent amount of funds for catchment works. A review of each catchment management authority will establish clearly the appropriate level of resourcing required.

The Minister for Environment and Conservation will be meeting with the chairmen of the catchment management authorities next Monday to discuss arrangements for the implementation of the government's policy commitment. The process will be the start of significant locally constructed and properly funded catchment management works throughout Victoria. Honourable members representing regional and rural Victoria will be pleased to learn that the catchment management authority tax on country Victorians, introduced by the former city-centric Kennett government, is now dead and buried forever.

Northern Mallee pipeline

Mr McARTHUR (Monbulk) — I refer the Minister for Environment and Conservation to the successful \$52 million, seven-stage northern Mallee pipeline project and the federal government's recent announcement that it will provide \$2.8 million for stage 6 of the project. Will the minister now make the required matching funds available for stage 6 and guarantee to complete this good project?

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Environment and Conservation) — That highly praised scheme will save large amounts of water that evaporate or seep from that channel between the origin of the water supply and the farms where the water is delivered. It has been a staged

process, and I am now in the process of considering funding for that final stage.

Independents charter: ALP response

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — I refer the Premier to the government's commitment to open and accountable government. Will the Premier detail to the house what action the government has taken to fulfil that promise in its first 21 days?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — The government is celebrating its first 21 days in office. Already Victorians realise this is a different place and a different style of government. Following question time today a wave of legislation will have its second reading, revealing a tide of democratic reform. I said in my response to the Independents charter and to the people of Victoria that my government and I would sow the seeds of lasting democratic and parliamentary reform in this state, and so we are and will over the next few weeks.

I made a commitment to Independent members and the general Victorian community to lead an open and accountable government. In just 21 days, the new Labor government has developed an extensive legislative program that will deliver on the government's promises. As can be seen, the first part of that program will be introduced over the next few days, restoring the powers of the Auditor-General, returning the right to freedom of information, setting up a regional infrastructure fund and abolishing the jobs killer — compulsory competitive tendering.

Those reforms, like the government, will deliver decency to Victoria. The government will take its new approach to government — open, honest and accountable — to the people of Burwood in seeking support for a new style of leadership. I welcome the date set by you, Mr Speaker.

It is ironic that on the very day the Speaker has announced the date for the Burwood by-election the Auditor-General legislation has been tabled in the house. It is ironic and pleasing that that is a sign of the new government and a sign of what we rejected in the previous administration.

It is also interesting and intriguing to note that 11 November is the second anniversary of the resignation of Mr Roger Pescott as the member for Mitcham. All honourable members remember why Mr Pescott resigned. He resigned on two matters, the first being the previous government's attempt to nobble the Auditor-General and the second being the reduction in common-law rights.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Mr BRACKS — Mr Pescott resigned on the very matter the question raises — that is, openness and accountability. The previous honourable member for Mitcham had standards on this matter. He accepted the notion of openness and accountability and the right of the Auditor-General to have independence from government, a right the previous government did not accept.

History will remember it as an intriguing event in Victoria's history that the announcement of a by-election in Burwood has come on the anniversary of Mr Pescott's resignation. I am hopeful — and I am sure the current honourable member for Mitcham is, too — that history will repeat itself and that openness, decency and democracy will be rewarded. Those people who stood against those principles have been punished as they should have been. They were punished in the election and they should be in Burwood, as well.

Mildura courthouse

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — My question without notice is for the Attorney-General. The Mildura courthouse has been in need of an upgrade for six years. The former Premier made it quite clear that to achieve that we would need to elect a Liberal member. Can the Attorney-General advise the house that the future decision on the Mildura courthouse will be made on the basis of need and not punishment politics?

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I thank the honourable member for Mildura for his question. I remind the house that in 1997 I visited the Mildura courthouse. I was absolutely astounded.

Mr McNamara interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the National Party should cease interjecting.

Mr HULLS — I was absolutely astounded by the state of the courthouse. We came to government promising policies that would improve access to justice in this state, including opening up freedom of information and ensuring that no community legal centre is forced to close. But also the government needs to look at the current condition of many of the courts around the state.

After visiting Mildura courthouse in 1997 I wrote to the then Attorney-General, advising her of the disastrous state of that courthouse. I told her it was dangerous and a security risk. The court dealt with about 1200 criminal

and 120 civil matters each year, and the facilities were absolutely appalling.

I received a letter from the then Acting Attorney-General, Rob Maclellan, who advised me the Mildura court was being looked at and that it was a priority as far as the previous government was concerned. However, nothing seemed to be done about the court. I was surprised that the fact that I made representations to the former Attorney-General seemed to have no effect! The government did nothing about it.

However, since becoming the Attorney-General of this state I have gone through the file on the Mildura court. I note that I am not the only one who found that the Mildura court was in a disgraceful state. The former member for Mildura, Mr Craig Bildstien, in 1995 wrote to the then Attorney-General, advising her that the Mildura court facilities were absolutely appalling and in urgent need of replacement, not just upgrading. He went on to say in his letter dated 26 April 1995:

I understand that both the chief magistrate and regional department heads support urgent action in this regard.

He continued:

... having inspected the ... facilities, I can assure you we need a new courthouse — desperately.

However, it appears the then Attorney-General failed to act on the Mildura courthouse. It is interesting to note that there is a further letter on file regarding the Mildura courthouse, dated 30 July 1998, written by the Honourable Denis Naphine, MP, and addressed to the Attorney-General. He says he also visited the Mildura courthouse. I expect it was not in relation to a car accident or any other motor vehicle matter. I expect he was visiting the courthouse because he, too, had some concerns about that court.

He wrote to the Attorney-General and advised her the courthouse was in an appalling condition, that it needed an upgrade of facilities, including improved facilities for the safety and security of clients and privacy for client-worker and client-legal adviser discussions. He urged the Attorney-General to make it an absolute priority. The Leader of the Opposition is nodding his head in agreement. However, nothing has been done about the Mildura courthouse.

During the election campaign an announcement was made by the then Premier that \$7.8 million would be provided for the Warrnambool courthouse. We need only look at the history of preselections in Warrnambool to know why \$7.8 million was allocated to Warrnambool. There was a dirty great blue going on between the Nationals and Liberals. The Premier

wanted his man up — he wanted his Liberal candidate up in Warrnambool, so he decided to pork-barrel the people of Warrnambool by offering \$7.8 million when he knew full well that the real priority was the Mildura court.

My department has supplied me with a list of capital works priorities for courts. It makes it quite clear that a new multi-jurisdictional court at Mildura is urgently needed — it is on top of the list with the Wodonga court. In fact the Warrnambool court is way down the barrel.

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

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Monbulk is entitled to put his point of order.

Mr McArthur — It appears the Attorney-General is reading from a document. I ask him to make it available to the house.

The SPEAKER — Order! Is the Attorney-General reading from a document?

Mr HULLS — I was quoting from a departmental briefing which I am more than happy to table.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Attorney-General has said he will table the document.

Mr HULLS — I am more than happy to table the entire document; also the letter from the honourable member for Portland to the department.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr HULLS — I am more than happy to table those documents. I am more than happy to table Craig Bildstien's letter to the department and I am more than happy to table my letter to the department.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the Attorney-General that when the Speaker is on his feet he shall cease answering and sit down. I now ask him to conclude his answer to the honourable member for Mildura.

Mr HULLS — The Mildura court is of the highest priority. I have asked my department to provide an updated proposal for the Mildura court and to seek

urgent capital funding for its upgrade. The government will not be playing personality politics.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the opposition benches to come to order. Honourable members are wasting question time.

Mr HULLS — The Mildura courthouse is a priority of the honourable member for Mildura; it is also a high priority of the Bracks government.

Workcover: administration

Ms DUNCAN (Gisborne) — Will the Minister for Workcover inform the house of the latest information on the state of the Victorian Workcover Authority's finances?

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Workcover) — Over the past four financial years losses have occurred with Workcover. The former government mucked around and interfered and meddled with Workcover. As a result, in each of the previous four financial years the black hole has worsened. Last year the loss was \$176 million.

I am able to give honourable members information on the financial position of the Victorian Workcover Authority for the first three months of this financial year. The VWA set a target of a net profit of \$31 million. Instead, there was a net loss of \$24 million. The mess gets bigger and the black hole gets deeper and blacker!

Despite the mess the government is determined to implement its policy arrangements. Access to common law, and a legally fairer, fully funded system are part of those arrangements. The former government created an enormous black hole which the Bracks government is determined to fix.

Schools: self-governance

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — In light of yesterday's guarantee by the Premier, reaffirmed today, of free speech for teachers and public servants, I ask the Minister for Education whether she will allow principals of the 51 self-governing schools to publicly discuss the implications for their school communities of the government's decision to abolish that highly successful program.

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — One of the great joys of the election of the Bracks Labor government is that Victorians now feel liberated

to freely discuss any matters of public policy, no matter how divisive or sensitive they may be, although any division that might exist on the government's policy on self-governing schools relates to a mere handful. Only 51 schools were seduced by the former Kennett government's offer of favourable funding formulas.

The government has fulfilled its election pledge to terminate the self-governing process. The funds will be returned equitably to every school in Victoria. Every Victorian school will benefit according to need, not according to number.

The honourable member for Warrandyte was a member of the former Kennett government that gagged teachers and principals.

An Honourable Member — Who was gagged?

Ms DELAHUNTY — They were all gagged, every one of them. Victorians are now liberated and able to discuss any matter of public policy. That liberation extends to the principals of those 51 schools. In my meetings with those principals and school presidents I have been gratified by their understanding of the government's election pledge and that they are grateful that I have appointed an audit team from the Department of Education to work on a case-by-case basis with every one of those 51 schools. Children in those schools will suffer no disadvantage. On the contrary, as the result of the government's massive injection of funds into education, on the basis of the first pledge class sizes will be brought down to 21, and with welfare support and extra money for special learning needs and shared specialist teachers in rural Victoria, every one of those schools will receive extra money.

Education is the government's highest priority. I look forward to working with the honourable member for Warrandyte for good education policy in Victoria.

Hospitals: networks

Mr HOLDING (Springvale) — I ask the Minister for Health to inform the house of what action the government is taking to set in place a new system of governance for Melbourne's hospitals to replace the wasteful health network bureaucracy.

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — The government is totally committed to spending health resources on patients rather than on the bureaucracy. Four layers of bureaucracy ran the health system under the former government. An extra layer — the network bureaucracy — was imposed in 1996, allegedly to create efficiencies. However, what occurred was

inefficiencies, waste and the expenditure of moneys that would have been better spent on patients.

The government is committed to dismantling the network system and I am pleased to announce the formation of a panel to oversee that dismantling. The panel will be headed by Dr Stephen Duckett who I am sure has the respect of honourable members on both sides. That is acknowledged by the Leader of the Opposition. Dr Duckett is currently the Dean of Health Sciences at La Trobe University.

Dr Duckett will be joined by Ella Lowe, who is the executive director of nursing at the Peninsula Health Care Network; Dr Allan Zimet from John Fawcner Oncology; Meredith Carter, director of the health issues centre; and Stan Capp, the chief executive of Barwon Health.

Those individuals are widely respected and represent many years of experience in health. As a group they will oversee Melbourne's new hospital system that will ensure two key aspects. The first is that the money is spent where it ought to be spent — on patients. The second is that the hospital system will be in touch with the community.

Under the former government's administration it was impossible for hospitals to have any relationship to their communities. The inner and eastern network went from Healesville at one end to St Vincent's and the Alfred hospitals at the other. Nobody had any say on or input into what was going on. The honourable member for Berwick obviously had little knowledge about what was going on in Berwick, a fact he demonstrated the other night when he made a complete fool of himself.

It is important that the new network organisation, which will be much smaller and more in touch with the community, will be able to deliver extra beds in the suburbs — the other thing the former government failed to do. In the seven years of the Kennett government not one extra bed was built in the eastern or south-eastern suburbs. Not one! Already in its first 21 days of office the Bracks government has started to implement the process of putting 64 extra beds at Frankston.

Government Members — Hear, hear!

Mr THWAITES — In 21 days the government has achieved more than the former government did in seven years.

Dairy industry: deregulation

Mr McNAMARA (Leader of the National Party) — My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. If dairy

deregulation fails to occur by 30 June next year how will the government provide \$760 million in lost competition payments to dairy farmers while at the same time budget for losses from national competition policy payments totalling a further \$700 million over the next six years?

Mr HAMILTON (Minister for Agriculture) — The question makes a number of suppositions that currently are no more than hypothetical suggestions. The government proudly took into account that it was going to be an open and transparent government and was going to consult with dairy farmers. The Leader of the National Party would well know that is already in process.

The government is also aware of a number of important decisions to be made concerning dairy deregulation and it will not walk away from that. It has openly advertised that there will be a number of criteria as well as a ballot. Let me put it on the record: the government is not conducting the ballot without committing itself to take due note of what the result may or may not be. It is not going to pre-empt —

Mr McNamara interjected.

Mr HAMILTON — The leader of the third party is still determined not to listen, and he has given no indication that his party, in which I am very disappointed, understands the democratic processes.

If a government does not listen to a proper and fairly conducted ballot, whether it be this state government or the federal government, it will not be in government for long. Despite all of the push and talk of inevitability we still live in a democracy that says that a government, be it state or federal, should take complete note of what the people say. If it gets run over by the economic rationalists of the world, then it will not remain a government.

Honourable members should remember that they are talking about difficult questions of great import to real people who live in real country communities — and their interests will be properly taken into account. The Bracks government will not be bulldozed into making hasty decisions that we might be left to regret at our leisure.

Let us go through the process, return democracy to this state, and keep the promises made during campaigns. The government is committed to responsible government that takes into account all the factors, not just some. It is not going to be bulldozed by any party on this difficult decision. A government that fails to observe due process or listen to its constituents will not

remain in government. The Bracks government will be here for a long while because of that.

Australian Automotive Week 2000

Mr LANGUILLER (Sunshine) — Will the Minister for Manufacturing Industry provide the house with details of plans for Australian Automotive Week 2000?

Mr HULLS (Minister for Manufacturing Industry) — I thank the honourable member for Sunshine for his question, and for his interest in manufacturing, not just in his electorate of Sunshine but throughout the state.

I am pleased to announce that the government plans to put a real emphasis on jobs for young people in the manufacturing sector. I have endorsed the proposed theme for Australian Automotive Week 2000 — namely, career opportunities in the automotive industry. AAW 2000 will take place in March of next year, with particular emphasis on attracting young people into the industry. The theme was proposed to me by an advisory committee representing the key automotive industry manufacturers and component suppliers and is based on the industry's increasing need for qualified, skilled people.

AAW 2000 will maximise the promotional opportunities provided by the Melbourne International Motor Show and the grand prix to focus attention on Victoria's thriving automotive industry. Although the industry is large, diverse, innovative, technologically advanced and offers a wide range of exciting careers, it is not perceived by young people as a glamour profession. It has always experienced some difficulty in attracting young people to take up trades, technical and professional-level careers.

The advisory committee has involved young people from across the industry in developing the program for AAW 2000. These young champions are proud of the fact that they work in what they consider to be Victoria's most exciting industry and are keen to convince other young people of that fact.

The focus of the week will be a series of seminars and an education expo that will take place in Melbourne and in the state's other important automotive centre, Geelong. There are also plans to hold seminars in other regional centres, demonstrating the Bracks Labor government's focus on regional and rural Victoria. The purpose of the seminars will be to ensure that all young people across the state have an opportunity to participate.

The honourable member will be aware that the government is all about ensuring that young people across the state have access to employment opportunities. That is in stark contrast to the previous government, which did nothing to assist young people in obtaining employment and careers.

The focus of Australian Automotive Week 2000 is on career potential in the industry. It is supported by the government, as I hope it is supported by all members of this house.

Dr Naphthine — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance regarding an answer given by the Attorney-General to a question asked earlier today. In that answer he purported to quote from a departmental briefing note on capital works and, to the best of my recollection, implied that it was a briefing note from the department prepared under the previous government.

The briefing note has now been tabled and is dated 11 November 1999; it is not a briefing note from the previous government. The briefing note ranks equally the priority for new court complexes at Mildura and Wodonga and the purchase of new land at Warrnambool. Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance about what action can be taken to ensure that the Attorney-General has not inadvertently misled the house in the use of this document.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. I am advised that the Attorney-General handed to the Clerk the document from which he was quoting.

REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND BILL

Second reading

Mr BRUMBY (Minister for State and Regional Development) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

It is with great pride that I introduce the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund Bill into the house.

The establishment of the fund is the first step in beginning the task of rebuilding infrastructure in regional and rural Victoria. It represents our commitment to shift the focus of government in this state to fully encompass the people, communities and industries outside metropolitan Melbourne.

It reinforces the commitment of the Bracks government to develop the whole of our state and govern for all

Victorians. And just as importantly, the introduction of this bill as one of the first pieces of legislation also highlights that this government is true to its promises. We promised that this legislation would be a priority. Today the Bracks government is honouring that promise.

The need to boost infrastructure in country Victoria is well known and well established. For too long country Victoria has been missing out on economic opportunities crucial to generating growth and jobs.

For the last seven years country Victoria has been neglected by a Melbourne-centric government. A review of economic indicators confirms the extent of that neglect.

This year's report of the Building Control Commission shows that over the past financial year country Victoria won just 10 per cent of new commercial building investment and only 16 per cent of new retail building investment. An earlier report by respected analysts Access Economics highlighted the fact that of the new investment in manufacturing under construction, only 14 per cent was being undertaken in rural or regional areas.

Of the 21 projects managed by the previous government through its Office of Major Projects, not one was in country Victoria. All of the \$2.1 billion-worth of projects were located within the tram tracks of Melbourne. This Melbourne-centric focus was exacerbated by the closure of 178 country schools, 8 country hospitals and the dissemination of 6 passenger rail services.

The neglect of country Victoria feeds through into unemployment statistics. Despite an unprecedented seven years of national and international growth, the unemployment rate in many areas of country Victoria remains at double digit levels with youth rates in some regions approaching 50 per cent.

The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics figures over the year to September 1999 are even worse. They show that over the past year full-time employment in regional and rural Victoria actually declined 0.2 per cent. ABS statistics for the three years ended June 1999 show that during this period Melbourne gained 98 per cent of all net new jobs and country Victoria just 2 per cent. In total, Melbourne grew by 92 700 jobs. In contrast, regional Victoria gained just 1900 jobs.

The importance of infrastructure investment in boosting economic opportunities in country Victoria has been highlighted by a number of groups, including the Victorian Farmers Federation. In a detailed submission

prepared earlier this year the VFF detailed the massive infrastructure backlog in regional and rural Victoria. The VFF called for government action to address infrastructure shortfalls in electricity, telecommunications, water, transport and health.

These views were echoed in the recent regional summit in Canberra where speaker after speaker highlighted the need for greater infrastructure investment in regional areas. The essential point is that both the state and federal governments must invest much more in vital economic infrastructure in regional Victoria.

For its part, the Bracks government is committed to providing genuine leadership by working in partnership with regional Victorian communities, business and other levels of government to attract new investment and create jobs. It is essential that regional Victoria enhances its competitive strengths that are vital to competing in world markets and generating export opportunities.

Infrastructure is a key part of building competitive capacity. If regional and rural Victoria is to achieve its economic potential and generate \$12 billion of food and fibre exports by the year 2010, world-class infrastructure will be needed.

One way in which the state government can stimulate investment, jobs and exports is to facilitate infrastructure projects that build on regional strengths and provide scope for new business activity and public and private sector cooperation.

The passage of this legislation through the house will enable the government to establish a regional infrastructure development fund and make available capital works funding to regional communities.

The bill presented to the house is simple and straightforward. The bill:

- establishes the fund as a trust fund in the public account;

- defines the broad purposes for which the fund may be used; and

- makes clear the ministerial arrangements pertaining to payments out of the fund.

The government has decided to establish the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund by way of a trust fund in the public account. This arrangement is clear, transparent and accountable; and it shows the sincerity of the government's commitment to using the funding available for the purposes for which it was intended.

We will deliver on our promise to provide up to \$170 million for infrastructure funding over the next three financial years.

The bill establishes the broad purposes for which the fund is established. These are to provide benefits to regional Victoria through providing infrastructure which:

- supports new industry development;

- improves critical transport linkages;

- builds up tourism infrastructure; and

- better links regional Victoria to new opportunities in education and information technology.

During the recent state election campaign the now government announced a number of major infrastructure initiatives to be provided through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. These include:

- rail freight standardisation — up to \$40 million in partnership with the federal government and Freight Victoria to enable the conversion of key broad gauge rail lines to standard gauge;

- education — major commitments to new education and technology infrastructure in the key regional areas of Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong and the Latrobe Valley;

- dairy industry — \$4 million to assist the dairy industry with the cost of constructing cattle underpasses;

- wine industry — seed funding to establish a wine industry centre of excellence at Aradale in Ararat;

- information and communications technologies (ICT) — measures to assist the growth of ICT, including two new high-tech town pilot projects and a Regional Call Centre Attraction program;

- electricity — \$8 million to enable the upgrading of electricity infrastructure in south-west Victoria in partnership with industry and dairy farmers.

Once this bill becomes law, work can commence to put these projects and others in place over the next three financial years.

In addition, the government will seek further proposals that will enhance the development of rural and regional Victoria. These will be assessed in line with transparent

and open criteria that will ensure these projects address real needs and deliver real benefits.

Detailed guidelines for submissions for funding under the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund are being prepared and will be published for the information of all Victorians. They will of course be distributed to all members of Parliament so that they can encourage communities in their electorates to apply for funding.

In determining how payments out of the fund are to be made, we have sought to provide both flexibility and responsiveness as well as accountability. The bill therefore provides for grants of less than \$2 million to be approved by the minister while grants of \$2 million or over will also require the approval of the Treasurer.

The government's decisions will be informed by the recommendations of a committee comprising representatives of the departments most centrally involved in delivering this key initiative, in particular the departments of State and Regional Development, Infrastructure and Premier and Cabinet.

Critical to the success of this initiative will be the input of the soon-to-be-formed Infrastructure Planning Council, which will provide a forum for the involvement of key stakeholders on infrastructure issues.

This bill embodies both a symbolic and practical commitment to regional Victoria. This bill demonstrates our commitment to giving rural and regional Victoria a better chance to share in Victoria's prosperity. It introduces a tangible mechanism by which we can begin to redress existing disparities between Melbourne and country Victoria.

This bill will deliver substantial benefits to rural people and their communities. It will deliver solid benefits for regional industries and businesses.

This bill deserves the support of all members of this house who have the interests of country Victoria at heart. That should be all honourable members of this house, no matter what their political persuasion.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr RYAN (Gippsland South).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 25 November.

HEALTH PRACTITIONERS (SPECIAL EVENTS EXEMPTION) BILL

Second reading

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The principal aim of the bill is to authorise visiting health practitioners to provide health care services to visitors in Victoria in connection with designated special events while exempting such practitioners from the provisions of Victorian law relating to health practitioners.

The Victorian government has made a commitment to host rounds of both the men's and women's football — soccer — competitions of the Olympic Games in September 2000. In addition, there may be other visiting teams associated with the Olympic Games who use facilities in Victoria for training prior to the games.

Over any year Victoria also hosts special sporting, cultural and other events which bring teams or groups of participants from other countries into Victoria specifically to take part in the special event.

Many groups or teams associated with special events are accompanied by health practitioners who provide health services to the visiting group or team participants. Formal registration processes as provided for in the existing Victorian health practitioner registration acts are not deemed necessary for visiting health practitioners to provide services to members of a visiting team or group.

Provision is made in this bill for the Minister for Health to declare a special event in the *Government Gazette*. Visiting health practitioners will then be exempted from the offence provisions contained in a health registration act and from those contained in the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act and its regulations.

Furthermore, visitors who are members of a team or group who are visiting as part of a declared special event will be exempt from any offence provision contained in the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act and regulations relating to the possession or use of a drug or poison where the drug or poison has been prescribed or supplied to them by a visiting health practitioner.

The bill also makes provision for a person who is licensed to supply or sell a drug or poison to be exempted from offence provisions of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act and regulations

when the sale or supply is to a visiting health practitioner. Similarly, a pharmacist who dispenses a prescription written by a visiting health practitioner is also exempt from offences under the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act and regulations.

The bill authorises visiting health practitioners to provide health services to any visitor during an exemption period of a special event; authorises visiting health practitioners to use any title he or she normally uses in providing health services and to hold himself or herself out as being able to provide those services. Visiting health practitioners are also able to prescribe or supply a drug or poison to a visitor and to obtain or purchase drugs or poisons for supply to a visitor.

In addition to the above exemptions and authorisations, the ministerial special event order will specify the exemption period, impose conditions, restrictions or limitations on visiting health practitioners relating to services to be provided or to the security or storage of drugs and poisons in their possession.

This bill will streamline the process necessary for a visiting health practitioner to provide health care services to a member of a group or team associated with a designated special event.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr DOYLE (Malvern).

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — I move:

That the debate be adjourned until Tuesday, 23 November.

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — On the question of time — and I promise I have no intention of invoking the spectre of a former member of this house, Mr Tom Roper — the opposition is happy to agree to a shorter period for consideration of the bill by mutual agreement on the understanding that the bill is substantially the same as the one prepared by the previous government before the election. I have had that assurance informally from the Minister for Health. On that basis, the opposition is happy to agree to the shorter period before debate is resumed.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until Tuesday, 23 November.

LEGAL PRACTICE (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The bill makes a number of miscellaneous amendments to the Legal Practice Act 1996 to improve the efficient operation of the Legal Profession Tribunal.

Power to disqualify practitioners

The Legal Practice Act 1996 empowers the Legal Profession Tribunal to disqualify lawyers who have been found guilty of misconduct. As the right to practise law in Victoria flows from the possession of an annual practising certificate, disqualification from practising law is similarly linked to the cancellation of a practising certificate or the ineligibility to obtain a fresh one.

However, a lawyer can surrender a practising certificate at any time. By surrendering the certificate or by not renewing it when it lapses a lawyer may ensure that at the time he or she is convicted they no longer hold a practising certificate. If there is no certificate to cancel, arguably there is no clear power in the tribunal to impose a disqualification period. The lawyer could therefore be eligible to apply for a new practising certificate immediately after being convicted. The tribunal is currently relying on its general powers to disqualify lawyers even though there has been no prior cancellation of a practising certificate.

To put this issue beyond doubt, the act will be amended to provide the tribunal with clear power to impose a period of disqualification on a lawyer even where it has not first cancelled the lawyer's practising certificate. In conjunction with this the tribunal will acquire a discretion as to whether to refer such practitioners to the Supreme Court with or without a recommendation that the practitioner's name be struck off the roll of practitioners.

Civil disputes jurisdiction

The Legal Profession Tribunal has effectively a small claims jurisdiction for the handling of civil disputes, often over costs, between a client and lawyer. While the maximum amount that the tribunal can award is \$15 000 there is no limit as to the amount that can be in dispute in non-cost-related disputes — for instance, those alleging negligence.

Recently there has been an increase in the number of claims brought before the tribunal for amounts well in excess of \$15 000. Many complainants are using the tribunal as a trial run for their larger common-law claim, or using the tribunal process as a fishing expedition to gather evidence. The result of this has been a huge drain on the tribunal's resources. Hearings can last for weeks requiring the tribunal to examine

thousands of documents and hear lengthy and complex evidence.

The tribunal was never meant to handle complex civil litigation. It was established to assist claimants, particularly those with limited financial resources, to resolve minor disputes. Complex civil matters properly belong in the courts and it is not appropriate for the limited resources of the tribunal to effectively subsidise parties seeking to avoid the usual costs associated with civil litigation.

To ensure that the original intention of the act is maintained the proposed amendments will give the tribunal a discretion to refer such matters for hearing in the appropriate court.

Cost of obtaining transcripts

With longer and more complex evidence being presented, the cost of the tribunal obtaining a transcript of evidence for the use of the full tribunal on appeal is also increasing. To address this issue the act is amended to give the full tribunal a power to order that a party pay the full tribunal's cost of obtaining transcript of a hearing before the tribunal at first instance.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Dr DEAN (Berwick).

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I move:

That the debate be adjourned until Tuesday, 23 November.

Dr DEAN (Berwick) — Mr Acting Speaker, in normal circumstances the opposition would require a longer period for legislation such as this. But in the spirit of cooperation and because the legislation was drafted by the previous government — and I hope it will not be amended from that original template — the opposition is happy with the adjournment period.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until Tuesday, 23 November.

ESSENTIAL SERVICES (YEAR 2000) BILL

Second reading

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am sure that all members of the house are aware that the year 2000, or Y2K, problem may potentially pose a significant threat of upset to the everyday lives of all

Victorians. Of course, our hope is that the recent efforts made by both government and industry are successful to ensure that there will not be Y2K failures of computer systems and equipment. Despite these efforts, protection against Y2K failure is not guaranteed.

Following the tragic Longford gas plant incident of 1998 we have all experienced the difficulties of day-to-day living without essential services such as gas. While the people of this state showed great adaptability and community spirit in a time of adversity, the cost of the disruption to business was significant. As a consequence of this incident and in light of previous major service failures in the Australasian region — such as the Auckland electricity supply failure and Sydney water supply failure — a review of Victoria's security of supply and emergency management arrangements was conducted.

A contingency planning process has been undertaken and a review of existing emergency powers and essential services legislation has concluded that the legislation may be potentially outdated and inadequate to effectively manage technological problems arising as a consequence of Y2K. As part of the contingency planning process, the government aims to ensure that government departments, funded agencies and service providers are prepared well before 31 December 1999 to deal with all eventualities associated with possible Y2K failure. The government has an additional responsibility to ensure that it can respond in such an emergency to effectively manage a disruption to essential services.

The bill is specific to the Y2K problem and will provide the necessary powers to manage Y2K problems. Where the Governor in Council is satisfied that any essential service is affected as a result of Y2K so as to be unable to meet the community's needs, the Governor may make an order that this bill is to apply. Additionally, the Governor in Council may make a declaration that any service is an essential service. Such a provision may be used to declare food an essential service if it were necessary to regulate food storage and distribution.

Where the Governor has declared that this bill is to apply, the responsible minister will have the power to give directions to any person for the purpose of maintaining or resuming essential services. Such directions may be for the purpose of regulating, restricting and rationing these essential services, having regard to the needs of the community.

In addition, there will be tough enforcement provisions to punish those persons or corporations who feel their

own needs to be more important than those of their fellow Victorians and who choose to disregard such directions by continuing to use essential services.

There may be those that feel that the powers given to the minister are so broad as to be almost draconian. In response I ask members to note that the private and public sector have had the opportunity for quite some time to undertake contingency planning and Y2K compliance programs.

If these programs are successful the powers under this bill should theoretically be unnecessary. However, this bill ensures that the state government has met its responsibilities to provide for effective management of Y2K problems if contingency and emergency planning is inadequate.

Additionally the bill will make an amendment to the Emergency Management Act 1986 to clarify the definition of emergency to include significant disruptions to essential services or commodity supply systems. This is designed to increase certainty for agencies who have responsibilities under the act as to the circumstance under which they are required to act. As such these agencies will be in no doubt that they will have emergency management responsibilities for Y2K situations, in addition to fires, floods and explosions which are currently defined as emergencies under the act.

Several key dates have been identified in relation to the Y2K problem, including 1 January 2000, 29 February 2000 and 1 January 2001. Accordingly, the act will sunset within six months of the end of the potential Y2K danger period.

Statement under section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975

Clause 32 of the bill provides immunity from legal action for persons who act in good faith in the execution of part 2 of the act or any proclamation or ministerial direction under part 2. Clause 33 states that it is the intention of clause 32 to alter or vary section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975.

The reason for altering or varying section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975 to limit the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court is to ensure that persons acting in good faith in the execution of part 2 of the act or any proclamation or ministerial direction under part 2 are immune from suit as these people are acting in the public interest and should be confident that their actions will not be exposed to legal action.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Dr NAPTHINE (Leader of the Opposition).

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I move:

That the debate be adjourned until Tuesday, 23 November.

Dr NAPTHINE (Leader of the Opposition) — On the question of time, the opposition agrees to an adjournment until 23 November in a spirit of cooperation, to assist with the business of the house. However, our agreement is not to be regarded as a precedent for ongoing issues, when the opposition would expect the normal minimum period of adjournment, and more significant periods of adjournment for bills of greater importance.

Also, I seek the cooperation of the minister to arrange briefings on the bill. I understand the bill is similar to that prepared by the former government. In summary, with the proviso about briefings and the other matter I mentioned, in the spirit of cooperation the opposition agrees to a shorter period of adjournment.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until Tuesday, 23 November.

AUDIT (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — Mr Acting Speaker, before I commence I must say that this is a proud moment for me and the members of my team.

I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The need for an effective and independent Auditor-General is almost universally accepted as a hallmark of our democratic institutions. The Auditor-General plays a pivotal role in supporting Parliament in its function of authorising and supervising the spending of public money by the executive. It is therefore important that the legislative framework enables the Auditor-General to play that role.

Recent debate in the Victorian community has highlighted people's concern that the independence of the Auditor-General was compromised by the amendments to the Audit Act in 1997. The 1997 amendments removed the capacity of the Auditor-General to conduct audits in his own right. An independent agency was established, Audit Victoria, to

which a significant number of the staff of the Auditor-General's office were transferred.

This bill will restore to the Auditor-General complete discretion over the management and contracting of all external audits of all public sector authorities and will enhance his independence from the executive, whilst strengthening his accountability to Parliament.

This government has a clear mandate for these amendments. They were comprehensively outlined in our election commitments and were subject to the agreement with the three Independents. The opposition also made a commitment to the Independents to restore the role, function and resources of the Auditor-General.

In amending this act, two basic principles have been applied: ensuring the independence of the Auditor-General from executive direction, and establishing a transparent accountability framework for the Auditor-General. It is important that the Auditor-General be accountable for the performance or exercise of the functions, duties and powers attached to the office, and for the public resources applied in the process. A balance must be kept so that the accountability framework does not compromise the independence of the office.

The Auditor-General has been consulted on the development of these amendments. Some further amendments that have been suggested by the Auditor-General will need to be considered at a second stage as they require a greater degree of consultation than could be allowed for in the preparation of this legislation.

The bill enhances the independence of the Auditor-General by maintaining his status as an independent officer of the Parliament and, more particularly, by enshrining and entrenching the provisions relating to the appointment, independence and tenure of the Auditor-General in the Constitution Act 1975. The bill removes sections 4, 4A and 5 of the Audit Act and places them in a new division 3 in part V of the Constitution Act. The appointment of the Auditor-General must now be made by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the parliamentary committee. There is also a provision that prevents the remuneration of the Auditor-General from being reduced.

The current act did not have a provision for the Auditor-General to resign. This has been rectified by proposed section 94C of the Constitution Act, which provides that the Auditor-General can tender his resignation to the Governor in Council.

The independence of the Auditor-General from executive direction is further enhanced by giving the parliamentary committee the authority to vary any obligation or requirement imposed on the Auditor-General or his office, by or under, the Financial Management Act 1994, or the Public Sector Management and Employment Act 1998. Proposed section 7C provides for that and further requires the parliamentary committee to table any variations before each house of Parliament within six sitting days of making the variation.

Members should be aware that the bill allows either house to disallow such a variation. It is expected that variations will be rare and are there primarily to signal the independence of the Auditor-General from the directions of the executive. As a general principle, the Auditor-General and his office are expected to comply with the minimum accountability standards imposed on all other authorities that would be subject to external audit by the Auditor-General.

The accountability framework established for the Auditor-General is based on the need to report to Parliament on the effective and efficient use of public resources and for the performance or exercise of the function, duties and powers attached to the office. The arrangements whereby this accountability will operate is similar to that of public sector authorities — namely, by ex ante specification and agreement of expected performance; and ex post reporting and review of actual performance.

The Auditor-General is now required through a new section 7A of the act to prepare an annual plan for comment by the parliamentary committee. The annual plan will set out the intended work plan for the year and the way the resources allocated by Parliament in the budget are to be applied.

The Auditor-General is now required to make an annual report to Parliament, but this will be strengthened by requiring him to comply with the minimum standards set out for public authorities, unless the parliamentary committee exempts him from so doing.

Our policy commitment is to reintegrate Audit Victoria into the Auditor-General's office so that he has the resources to exercise complete discretion as to how he conducts the audits of public authorities. This bill repeals part 2A of the Audit Act, which established Audit Victoria and its board, and part 2B, which established the role of authorised persons.

The role of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) will be expanded in relation to the accountability of the Auditor-General. Currently the PAEC advises the Auditor-General on its performance audit priorities and recommends to Parliament the engagement of the financial and performance auditors of the Auditor-General's office (VAGO). As a result of these amendments, the parliamentary committee will also recommend the appointment of the Auditor-General to the Governor in Council, will comment on the Auditor-General's budget and annual plan, will exempt if necessary the Auditor-General from complying with legislative requirements, and will report such exemptions to Parliament. These changes strengthen the accountability of the Auditor-General to Parliament and enhance the power of the Parliament over the executive.

There are some further amendments suggested by the Auditor-General that will provide greater efficiencies, such as the power to engage any person under contract to assist with any of the functions of the office — proposed section 7E — and the power to delegate functions and powers — proposed section 7F.

To increase transparency and accountability a dispute resolution mechanism over fees charged by the Auditor-General has been introduced.

The confidentiality provisions in section 12 of the act have been tightened to give the Auditor-General more discretion to include in a report information gathered in the course of an audit if it meets the test of being relevant to the subject matter of the report and is in the public interest.

The government has made a commitment that the Auditor-General will report on the day of presentation of the state budget whether the government has met its commitment to maintain an operating surplus. This commitment will be achieved through separate legislation relating to responsible, transparent and accessible budgets rather than in this act. It is my government's intention to introduce such legislation prior to the next budget.

This act also provides for the separation of the auditing and reporting requirements currently found in sections 25(j), 26 and 27 of the Financial Management Act concerning the annual financial statement. The bill adds a new section 16A to the Audit Act to deal with this separation of responsibilities and to set the timetable for the auditing of the annual financial statements.

With the abolition of Audit Victoria, transition arrangements are set in place that will transfer the staff to the Auditor-General's office on terms and conditions not less favourable than they received in Audit Victoria immediately before the commencement of the act.

Provision is also made for the transfer of all liabilities, obligations, rights, property and assets of Audit Victoria to the state. There may be cases where Audit Victoria has entered into obligations and activities that are outside the scope of the Auditor-General's powers, and in those cases transition provisions are included that enable the Auditor-General to continue such activities until their completion or termination.

There are a number of other important issues raised by the Auditor-General, but as these require further consultation with other parties they will be considered at a later stage.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Dr NAPHTHINE (Leader of the Opposition).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 25 November.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed from 10 November; motion of Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) for adoption of address-in-reply.

Mr RYAN (Gippsland South) — On this Remembrance Day of 1999 it is my great pleasure to join the address-in-reply debate. Indeed, this is the third occasion on which I have risen to make such an address.

Remembrance Day is a particularly poignant day. My brother is a Vietnam veteran, and I know he and many others have proud memories on this day.

On the issue of pride, I take the opportunity to congratulate the Speaker on his elevation to high office in this place. He migrated to Australia as a 10-year-old in 1965. Some 20 years later he was elected to represent the people of Mill Park, and since then he has done so with distinction. Some 14 years later he has risen to high office in this house. His achievement is a great commentary on him, his family and the Greek community. It is also a commentary on the great nation in which we live, which is a matter he reflected on when he assumed his role.

We all had to work hard to get him there, particularly honourable members on this side of the house. One of the great heroes of conservative politics in Victoria is the honourable member for Murray Valley, who I note is in the chamber now. He is a great hero — an honourable man who did an honourable thing. Despite being hard-pressed by the Labor Party to assume the position of the Speaker, he did the honourable thing for politics in Victoria by resisting all their exhortations. As I said to the honourable member for Thomastown, I would hate to be paying the STD bills, but I congratulate the honourable member for Murray Valley.

We now have a minority Labor government in Victoria. Since the day the government assumed office we have been in the unusual position of having two opposition parties, which together comprise 43 members. The minority government was carried across the line by the three Independents.

In my former life practising law, I spent much of my time involved in litigation. I used to love cross-examining witnesses, and I would love to cross-examine the Independents. It would be terrific to get the full story on the phone calls, the conversations, the arrangements that were struck and the deals that have been done. I only hope the assurance given by the Independents that they will undertake their roles in this place with complete independence is honoured. Some of the commentary at the time of the discussions was a touch disappointing.

The honourable member for Gippsland East is a fine fellow, and I am sure he will do his best to represent the interests of the people of Gippsland East, but I must say I do not understand how he came to the conclusion that the then government would not deliver on the undertaking to provide 75 000 megalitres of water for the Snowy River project, which is so close to his heart. I took part in discussions with him and confirmed the arrangements in writing. So how he concluded, as he apparently did, that we would not deliver that assurance is beyond me.

I know the honourable member for Mildura made some comments at the time. In one comment he lauded the honourable members for Murray Valley and Rodney — two great members of the National Party, that wonderful voice of country Victoria. I am pleased the seating arrangements in this house provide him with daily inspiration at close hand. On his right he will find the honourable member for Murray Valley and behind him is the honourable member for Rodney. I am sure they will be a source of ongoing inspiration for him.

The policy initiatives of the minority Labor government in its first 21 days reveal the vast gulf between the two conservative parties on this side of the house and the minority Labor government on the other. When in government the coalition parties emphasised policy development driven by individual rights and freedoms, policies that enabled people to use their own initiative as they thought appropriate.

The coalition's drive was for small government. We made sure the benefit of good government was felt in appropriate policy settings, but at the same time we did not get in the way of people using their own initiative to better themselves and their communities. That policy direction contrasts starkly with that of the minority Labor government, which is driven by ideology. Ideology is its first port of call. It advocates big government and adds more personnel to its ranks. It smothers initiative, kills off incentive and brings people back into its bosom. It does what it thinks it can do best — manage people's lives rather than give them the freedom to do what they want to do.

The minority government intends that the many initiatives of the former coalition government designed to enable people, particularly country people, to achieve good outcomes will be lost.

An announcement has been made about the abolition of Parks Victoria. That is a tragedy. The magnificent and internationally famous Wilsons Promontory is in the electorate of Gippsland South. I have enjoyed myself there many times. I did so in June this year when my wife, Patricia, and my younger son, Julian, and one of his friends and I stayed at Wilsons Promontory for a couple of days. We were hosted there by staff from Parks Victoria. We walked the track between the lighthouse and Waterloo Bay, a new track constructed under the management plan of the former Minister for Conservation and Land Management, the Honourable Marie Tehan. It was a wonderful experience, and I strongly recommend the track to all Victorians and all visitors to the park.

The staff of Parks Victoria, who looked after us while we were down there, are absolutely committed to the work as if born to it. They have spent lifetimes looking after national parks and have travelled across the world and around Australia working for the enhancement, preservation and betterment of national parks. They are a specialist group, and the establishment of Parks Victoria as an organisation was a wonderful initiative, now abandoned by the incoming minority government.

A few weeks ago at Mount Buller I had the pleasure of launching the annual staff conference of the eastern

region of Parks Victoria. It was attended by 110 members of a total staff of about 160. I talked to them about the wonderful work they had done. It is tragic that those people are now being dragged back into the department by the new government, a government that cannot stand seeing an organisation such as that one, established in its own right, making a magnificent contribution to the enhancement of places like Wilsons Promontory.

I turn to the abandonment of the self-governing schools initiative. I note that the Minister for Education has come into the house. She has a notion of killing off incentive and smothering initiatives, and her government has the attitude 'We know better'. School communities, 51 of them — the minister refers to them as 'a handful of schools'! — gladly took self-government upon themselves. They have an average of about 600 to 800 students each, so we are talking about 30 000 to 40 000 students plus the communities that go with them. But no, in we go, slash and burn, take away from these people the wonderful initiatives they were developing. They were enabling their communities to develop their areas of speciality.

Ms Delahunty interjected.

Mr RYAN — You see, it is all about the lowest common denominator. Mediocrity will be the measure. Why not dress them all in grey, Minister? Why not tell all school personnel to dress in grey?

Ms Delahunty interjected.

Mr RYAN — The minister asks how many schools were closed by the former government, as if that government were the first to be engaged in school closures. Look at the history of development of education in this state under Labor governments. Who closed schools left, right and centre before the Kennett coalition government came into power? It was the miserable bunch you see opposite, Mr Acting Speaker.

The point is that we had a fantastic initiative developed in concert with school communities, so it was all too much for government members to hack. Someone had enough initiative to get out of the bag and develop policies and proposals that suited school communities. That is what government members cannot stand, so they kill it off, smother it, burn the incentive and drag it all back in. I hope the additional people to be employed in the bureaucracy will be able to oversee it. At the moment it is a tragedy.

I turn to the circus of dairy deregulation. The minister has bumbled around this topic, one that is critical to the future of country Victoria. He does not know what he is

doing. He does not understand inevitability. I respect the fact that by asking farmers what they want to do or not do he is showing an interest in democracy. The harsh reality, however, is that we are facing a train in a tunnel. Deregulation, by one means or another, is certainly coming. When the train passes through the tunnel are we going to be on it? Will Victoria's dairy farmers get their share of \$760 million out of the package, or will we be hit by the train so that our dairy farmers miss out on the benefits offered by the package?

The Minister for Agriculture is dithering about in an issue fundamental to the interests of country Victoria. We must have regard for our country communities. Our small farmers are crucial to this issue. The harsh reality is, however, whether we like it or not, that deregulation is coming. If the minister and the minority government think the large farmer-owned cooperatives will not smash the current deck of cards, they are kidding themselves.

You can send across the border a box of light globes, 25 suits of the sort I wear, fruit or a truckload of chairs, but you cannot send milk! It is ridiculous, and larger farmer-owned cooperatives are not going to let it continue. They will blow the thing wide open.

Are we going to take the benefit of the \$760 million, or are we going to let the program happen without us and miss out on the money? Instead of deciding, our minister is fiddling around the edges. He should be encouraging our country communities, as the former minister did.

When there was a declaration of exceptional circumstances in Gippsland a couple of years ago, for example, the former minister arranged through his department to ring 2600 dairy farmers and say to each one, 'Are you all right? Do you need help? Can we assist you with funding and advice on these difficult issues?'. That is the sort of initiative the current government should be pursuing. It is yet another example of a lack of leadership on the part of the government.

There is the emerging fiasco over industrial relations. We cannot even get the Premier to agree with his minister as to what the accurate position is. One does not need to be blind Freddy to know who is driving that argument: it is being driven from outside the halls of Parliament, make no mistake. Talk about fiasco! It will be interesting to look at that a few months down the line once the unions are back in here and see what has eventuated.

The rhetoric about interest in country Victoria is interesting. I had a good look at the cabinet structure the other night. Who is in the cabinet? Eighteen cabinet ministers are supposedly running the show on behalf of the minority government — 16 in Melbourne, 1 in Morwell and 1 in Bendigo. Good old country representation at the cabinet table! We will see some innovative work come out of that bunch, all redolent of a background in unionism and electorate offices.

I sat here last night and heard the honourable member for Essendon lauding the fact that she has, as she termed it, trained two of the parliamentarians who now sit on the backbench for the Labor Party. It will be interesting to see, in times to come, how the so-called country-based organisation will go.

Mr Loney interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! I warn the honourable member for Geelong that he is out of his place and disorderly.

Mr RYAN — The coalition government did great things for country Victoria. It made mistakes, and I will acknowledge that in the course of further contribution.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kilgour) — Order! I warn the honourable member for Geelong. If he wishes to take part in this debate he must do it from his own seat or I will call him for being disorderly.

Mr RYAN — When debate resumes on the second reading of the bill on regional infrastructure development, one of the first questions to ask is, 'Where is the money?'. One hundred and seventy million lousy dollars. I will talk more about that at an appropriate time.

Wonderful things are happening, and they will be furthered in the course of the lives of the people in my electorate. I have the honour to represent one of the great electorates of Victoria, Gippsland South, which provides huge opportunities for growth. I look forward to participating in that growth. The only fear I have is that this lot on the other side will make a heck of a mess of it.

As an aside, I mention that I walked through what are now the opposition rooms on the Saturday that they were vacated by the then opposition, now the government. I saw a portent of things to come. It was an absolute pigsty — paper, rubbish, garbage all over the floor; technical equipment stacked on the floor in one of the rooms; posters up on walls, drawings all over the place — a sign of things to come. Just as we were

sent in to clean up the mess in 1992 it will happen again. It is as clear as crystal.

In the electorate I represent there is great opportunity for agricultural growth, particularly in the dairy industry, if this lot does not butcher it on the way through. There are two factories in my electorate run by Murray–Goulburn — one in Maffra, producing \$240 million worth of produce each year, all of which is exported, and another in Leongatha, with about \$250 million worth of product, the majority for export. I am certain that both will grow with the passage of time.

The oil and gas industry will also undergo enormous growth. A work-over of the gas plant at Longford is now being undertaken with thoughts of the tragedy of 25 September 1998 still in the minds of local people; nevertheless, life goes on. The prospect of growth is evident in Port Welshpool, which is prospectively a centre for interstate trade, particularly with Tasmania. Aquaculture is an emerging industry that I have pursued for years and hope to see developed, which means we will have to get the policy settings right.

There have been fantastic advances in education over the years, including the approaching completion of works worth \$6 million undertaken at Sale College and works worth \$3 million undertaken at Mirboo North. The former coalition government committed \$1.3 million for works at Maffra and \$4.5 million for works at Foster, and we hope the incoming government will see fit to honour those commitments. Tremendous advances have also been made on road projects: \$17 million was spent on the Rosedale Bridge, an initiative with which you, Mr Acting Speaker, are familiar.

Time is on the wing. It is my great privilege to represent the electorate of Gippsland South in the 54th Parliament in Victoria. I only hope that when the bunch on the other side have finished we will again be sent in to clean up the pieces. Onward and upward!

Mr LONEY (Geelong North) — What a pity that bitterness reigns supreme in this chamber! Honourable members have just heard a tirade of bitterness from the honourable member for Gippsland South.

I begin by conveying my congratulations to the new Speaker. I do so both as a close friend and as a member of this chamber, where I believe he will do a fantastic job as Speaker. May I also congratulate the Deputy Speaker on her elevation. Both appointments are historic — the first person from a migrant background to be appointed Speaker of this chamber, and the first

woman to take up the role of Deputy Speaker. Those advances are what the community looks for.

I give thanks to the electors of Geelong North who saw fit to return me with an increased majority, in spite of the protestations of the previous Premier, who came to Geelong a couple of days before the election and told the people that he wanted Geelong North to go Liberal so he could have total control of Geelong. I think that after that my margin again increased markedly! The former Premier's statement was indicative of the way the previous government went around Victoria dispensing arrogance and very little else. It was an arrogant statement from an arrogant Premier presiding over an arrogant government, and the people responded to it in the appropriate manner.

It is a privilege to be a part of the Bracks government, the first Victorian government of the new millennium and a government that will return democratic values to the running of the state. That was clearly outlined in the new Premier's response to the Independents charter when he said:

It is the policy of the Victorian Labor Party to implement reform in order to revitalise Victoria's democratic institutions, increase community participation in decision-making and strengthen the power of key independent watchdogs.

These are things that had been absent from this state for seven years. Other government proposals include the return of proper powers of the Auditor-General and the return of decent freedom of information legislation.

It is worth reminding honourable members and Victorians generally that only Labor governments have committed themselves to freedom of information. A Labor government brought it in and a coalition government effectively tossed it out. It has been left to a Labor government to return accountability to government in Victoria. The Labor government will reject compulsory competitive tendering and reinstate the partnership with Victorians that has been absent for seven years. The previous government abandoned that partnership, abandoned the people and effectively abandoned true government as it rapidly embraced what can only be termed managerialism.

The former government did not want to govern; it wanted simply to manage. It did not understand that to govern is to do much more than to just manage things and shuffle accounts.

The government did not understand that it requires a connection with the people, so it divorced itself and paid the price. Opposition members are still wandering around wondering what went wrong. They still do not

understand that being in government means having a partnership with the people — and until they understand that they will never return to this side of the house. Premier Kennett was the managing director, the cabinet was his board and once every four years he delivered a report to the shareholders.

An Honourable Member — Were there good performance bonuses?

Mr LONEY — Good performance bonuses all around. The Kennett government never saw it as necessary to incorporate Victorian citizens in decision making. In fact, I do not think it even recognised citizens; it talked about shareholders and about customers. The government was about delivery to customers. Where was citizenship in this state during the past seven years?

Mr Doyle interjected.

Mr LONEY — It certainly did not appear in Malvern. Members of the former government, such as the honourable member for Malvern, were simply required to collect the proxies and vote for what the board was delivering to them. Those members, the honourable member for Malvern included, just gave unstinting, unthinking enthusiasm to every decision made by the managing director — the former Premier. Government decisions were no longer developed in consultation with the people and the role of local government, a proud tier of government, was diminished to the lower levels of democracy.

Economics and other policies were developed by the Premier and his cronies and simply handed down. It was a real top-down corporate, not government, structure. Every policy was developed at the top and rammed down. Any persons choosing to argue, complain or criticise were declared un-Victorian or just plain pathetic. If they were in positions under the government fiat they were summarily got rid of; if they were not under government fiat and could not be sacked they were attacked and vilified. It was a government of sack and attack. Little wonder that for the past seven years few have dared to voice criticism and that only in the past 21 days have members on the other side even found a voice.

Mr Doyle interjected.

Mr LONEY — Exactly. The honourable member for Malvern makes an excellent point. Government members can see the way opposition members treat the place because only one of them has bothered to come into the chamber. They did not listen during the past seven years and they are still not listening.

Former government members had imposed on them that wonderful piece of campaigning by the former managing director: the gag. It was a real highlight of the election campaign. But the real highlight for me was not the imposition of the gag but how they embraced it. None of them wanted to speak. The gag was their excuse to not communicate and have a dialogue in their electorates — and for seven years that is precisely what took place. As long as the managing director was satisfied nothing else mattered in Victoria. It is as simple as that. Traditional standards of accountability were thrown out — abandoned. Public accounts were presented in such a way that year-on-year comparisons became completely impossible. Performance measures were no longer related to assessments of improvements in community or social welfare; instead, they were tied to one of the most simplistic measures ever seen — the Premier's satisfaction. That can be seen in the budget papers.

Pages 328 and 329 of the 1999–2000 budget paper 3 set out the performance measure for the Premier's department as being the Premier's satisfaction. At least he required 100 per cent satisfaction. Elsewhere in the budget papers it can be seen that the Treasurer required only 80 per cent satisfaction. This is from the mob who claimed to have great economic management skills. The Treasurer required the budget to be delivered only 80 per cent on time and be 80 per cent right — and he was satisfied because it had come in 80 per cent all right.

The former government not only downgraded reporting standards but also used the excuse of commercial in confidence to keep the population at large ignorant of the true nature of the various privatisation deals in the state. The full financial and other implications of the sale of more than \$30 billion of the people's assets has yet to be revealed — but, Mr Acting Speaker, they will be revealed.

Over the past seven years freedom of information laws were savaged so that it became almost impossible for any Victorian citizen to obtain information about almost any government decision, no matter how small. No matter how apparently corrupt, bizarre or malevolent a government decision appeared, citizens could not get information about it. Everything was declared subject to commercial in confidence because the government in place had a managing director who operated under those sorts of principles and who believed he was in the private sector and was only contracted to run the state.

Behind the wall of secrecy gross inefficiency flourished. Many areas in which there was gross

inefficiency are now being revealed by the new government as the veil of secrecy that hung over the state for seven years is slowly being ripped away. An example is the former Premier's Federation Square project, which it is now revealed had a cost blow-out of more than 100 per cent. It was Kennett's castle; there was a 100 per cent blow-out but it did not matter because the Premier was satisfied. Of course the previous government would never have revealed it to the people of Victoria; commercial in confidence and the former Premier's arrogance would never have allowed it.

In a true democracy — that is, a democracy in which the people's wellbeing is paramount — the ultimate priority is to ensure that the welfare of society is increasing. Only materialists believe that the welfare of society can be equated simply to economic welfare.

That was the mantra of the previous government. There is a very old but still relevant saying that man cannot live by bread alone. A democratic government would be concerned to ensure that the welfare of the people of Victoria as a whole was advanced. The Kennett government was simply interested in ensuring that its mates were enriched. As has been illustrated by recent events, many members who left the Parliament probably thought they could obtain from their mates obscenely highly paid jobs on their retirement. Look after yourself all the time! The autocratic Kennett–Stockdale government was interested only in its own social welfare, not the social welfare of the citizens of Victoria. That welfare was measured in financial terms and never in social terms.

Consistent with its financial goals, the Kennett–Stockdale government chose consultants to sell off Victoria's assets. They had no prior knowledge of, interest in or commitment to the Victorian people. They were a cartload of carpetbaggers! The principal policy of the consultants was to maximise their own incomes. Having once got their snouts into the trough they were loathe to remove them.

Treasurer Stockdale took the advice of those consultants and in the matter of a few years sold off more than \$30 billion of Victoria's assets that the Victorian community had taken a 100 years to build. They are gone! As a result, utilities were broken up with no thought as to what the long-term consequences would be for the different regions of the state and security and safety standards were sacrificed. Stockdale operated like the Danny DeVito character in the film *Other People's Money* — he was about the same stature. He was the archetypal 1980s greed-is-good

entrepreneur, and he systematically stripped Victoria of its assets.

History will not be kind to the previous government. Given all that, it came as absolutely no surprise that the Kennett government was rejected in regional areas.

Mr Doyle interjected.

Mr LONEY — It may have come as a surprise to the honourable member for Malvern, but for those of us who get outside Melbourne, it did not come as a surprise. The Minister for Agriculture, the honourable member for Morwell, knew what was happening in regional areas; and the honourable member for Gippsland South is now very aware of what happened in regional areas. There was a 13 per cent swing against him; one of the biggest in the state. Despite that, he comes into this place with a tirade of bitterness and has still not listened to his electors.

Incredible pain was being felt in regional and rural areas over the social destruction engendered by the previous government, including the former Minister for Small Business, the honourable member for Brighton. That was caused by a range of factors: council amalgamations, without any thought for community interests and the consequent loss of employment; hospital closures across regional areas; school closures; the withdrawal of agricultural and other extension services, which the Minister for Agriculture will now have to put right, particularly throughout country Victoria; and the severe reduction in the reliability of power supply, which affects the ability to build industry and detracts from a decent lifestyle.

Down the ages, people have universally been prepared to make enormous sacrifices when believing it was for the benefit of the whole community. When people realise those sacrifices have been at their expense and that of their families and communities they soon tire. That realisation happened in Victoria. Some members of the community were sacrificing while others were looking after themselves. At the last state election the community turned back and said 'Enough!'

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr PATERSON (South Barwon).

Debate adjourned until next day.

Remaining business postponed on motion of Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education).

ADJOURNMENT

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Drugs: expert committee

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Health the recently announced Drug Policy Expert Committee headed by Dr Penington. Yesterday during debate on a matter of public importance, the minister asked for opposition support for the government's policy of implementing five heroin injecting facilities. Before the opposition could offer such support it needs assurance that certain difficult questions will be put before the professionals involved and the community and that those questions will be satisfactorily resolved before the doors of any facility open. Those questions concern health, social, planning and, not least, legal matters. If those questions can be satisfactorily resolved, we can move forward on this important debate. The opposition is prepared to contribute to Dr Penington's committee.

The matter that I raise concerns the unfortunate comment of the mayor of Port Phillip, a member of the committee. He made an inauspicious start to the committee's deliberations by making a loose-cannon comment before a single meeting of the committee has been convened. His reported view was that he thought there should be not 5 but 25 heroin injecting facilities. That is an inappropriate and unfortunate comment — it is not helpful to the spirit of the debate.

I will not call for him to be sacked — head-butting politics on such a serious issue is not needed. I could do that but the minister would simply stick by him. The mayor should stand down from the committee, but I have a more constructive suggestion: in the spirit of moving the debate forward, I suggest adding to the committee a senior police officer — an area of expertise missing — who would make a useful contribution, particularly in regard to the legal questions of implementation. If the government were to give consideration to that proposal the opposition would consider it favourably. As key players, the police have a lot to contribute regarding what is possible and practicable.

In the spirit of not making the debate adversarial and heated, I offer the suggestion of an addition to the committee of a senior police officer who will help us move the debate forward.

VCAT: representation

Mr LENDERS (Dandenong North) — I draw the attention of the Attorney-General to a problem faced by one of my constituents that was caused primarily by the previous government's heartless cuts to the judicial system. I refer to a constituent called George who is 74 years old and is hearing impaired. He readily admits that he has read only two books in his life.

Recently, George engaged a painter to work on his home and incurred a \$1000 bill. Unsatisfied, he went to the Master Painters Association of Victoria and ended up at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). He was part of an unsuccessful procedure because no-one had time to spend with him. He was hustled through and had few rights, and when he asked for a written statement explaining why his case was ordered to be dismissed he was told he should have been there on the day, he should have listened and he should have asked for the written case beforehand.

When a person appeals from a VCAT decision to the Supreme Court it must be on a question of law. When you are 74 and have conducted your own case that is of very little comfort when you seek a place to go. When George went to the VCAT he was provided with information on how to handle his case. That paperwork did not mention that he had to get on his feet on the day and ask for written reasons if he wanted more than oral reasons.

I put to the Attorney-General that when a person chooses to represent himself or herself in a matter before a tribunal, regard should be given to the person's capacity to cope with the procedures. Special consideration should be given to people with hearing, reading or LOTE difficulties or other problems. I ask the Attorney-General to address the problem.

Motorcycles: regulations

Mr LUPTON (Knox) — I draw the attention of the Minister for Transport to a matter raised by a constituent in my electorate. My constituent's son-in-law allowed her four-year-old grand-daughter to ride as a pillion passenger on his motorbike. She was shocked to think a four-year-old could be stuck on the back of a motorbike. My constituent contacted Vicroads, the police and the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria and discovered that the only safety stipulations are:

1. An approved, properly fitting child helmet must be worn;
2. The child's feet must be able to reach the foot pegs;

3. An approved handrail must be installed.

It is ludicrous that you can put a four-year-old on the back of a motorbike and expect him or her to hang on to the handrail at the back. The child in question was taken from Bayswater to Croydon, a distance of approximately 7 kilometres. The grandmother is concerned that, while it is within the law and the child met the necessary requirements, it is obviously an unsafe practice.

A letter from Vicroads refers to an article produced in *Motorcycle Notes* no. 1, which highlights the difficulties experienced by motorcyclists at construction and maintenance work sites. The letter states:

Loose road surfaces, metal plates and diesel fuel on the road surface can cause some real difficulties to motorcyclists.

I ask the minister to look at ways of having the law amended so that a child must be of a certain age and mental capacity before he or she can be carried as a pillion passenger. I suggest that 8 to 10 years of age might be an appropriate minimum age for children to be allowed to ride on the back of a motorcycle. A law that allows a four-year-old to ride on the back of a motorcycle is amazing. I believe the matter has been overlooked by many people because not many responsible parents would stick a four-year-old on the back of a motorbike.

I ask the minister to look at the issue to see whether anything can be done to amend the law so that some semblance of sanity can be brought into the matter.

Jet skis: licensing

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — I direct the attention of the Minister for Transport, who represents the Minister for Ports in another place, to the issue of licensing users of personal watercraft, or jet skis as they are more commonly known. Members of the house may be aware of two fatalities — one at Werribee involving a small child, and one at Rye involving a father and his adult son — involving the inappropriate use of personal watercraft.

Following those fatalities, two coroners reports, the water police, the Marine Board of Victoria and the State Boating Council have all called for the licensing of personalised watercraft. Unfortunately the former government paid lip-service to the issue and never gave it priority. I ask the minister to investigate the issue of licensing for riders of personalised watercraft as a matter of urgency.

Only yesterday I received a fax from a Carrum resident who bemoans the onset of summer because of the

cowboy behaviour of some jet ski riders. On election day I spoke to an owner and rider of a number of jet skis, and he agrees that riders should have to obtain licences.

Carrum has a problem with inappropriate riding on the Patterson River. Although only a minority of jet ski riders are involved the number is sufficient to pose a serious danger. Patterson River is one of the busiest waterways on Port Phillip Bay. Many boats come in and out and people swim both in the river and along the foreshore by the mouth of the river. On occasions they are driven out of the water by inappropriate riding of jet skis. The issue must be addressed.

Main Road, Eltham: school crossings

Mr PHILLIPS (Eltham) — I raise with the Minister for Transport some traffic lights in Main Road, Eltham, close to Dalton Street, that had been agreed to by the previous minister. I raise the issue on behalf of the Eltham Primary School, the Eltham High School and the Nillumbik community, which for many years has been seeking to have traffic lights installed as a priority of the Nillumbik Shire Council on the basis of safety for the children crossing the road. It is a very busy and dangerous section of Main Road.

Over the past few years there has been a great deal of correspondence between the local primary school and me, Vicroads and Nillumbik council about the installation of traffic lights, and all parties, including the previous minister, have agreed that it was a priority and that the lights would be installed this financial year, with works to be started on or around February 2000.

I am seeking from the minister a reassurance on behalf of the community that those traffic lights will continue as a priority. There are problems now with the bus service, which has withdrawn pick-up and drop-off at the stop closest to Dalton Street because of the bad bend in Main Road where the lights were to be installed. Nillumbik council has agreed that its no. 1 priority is for the lights to be installed, and the community has a genuine expectation, after many years of lobbying, that the installation of the lights will commence in February 2000. Eltham High School recently contacted me about its concern about children having to cross the road, asking whether that commitment would be honoured. I indicated that I would raise the matter in Parliament, that I believed the commitment would be honoured, and that I would seek reassurance from the minister on the basis of need and merit, not any other basis.

Because it is Nillumbik's no. 1 priority, Vicroads has agreed that the signals are warranted and that they meet all the requirements. The community is desperate to have these lights installed at the earliest possible date. Today I seek from the minister a reassurance that this project, priority and commitment will continue.

Moe: unemployment

Mr MAXFIELD (Narracan) — I raise with the Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment the difficulties faced by the residents of Moe, the largest city in my electorate, which has suffered immensely under the former Kennett government's economic rationalisation policies. Moe was driven by the power industry, which was savagely cut and sold off by the Kennett government. The former government's policy significantly reduced employment opportunities in the area.

Moe currently has an appalling unemployment rate of 18 per cent — the worst in the state. But it is even worse than that. The youth unemployment rate is 48 per cent! One in every two of our teenagers are effectively out of work.

Mr Perton — One in two young people are looking for work.

Mr MAXFIELD — The Kennett government denied them work; it ignored their education needs; it cut back TAFE funding. Prior to the sell-off of the power industry the Kennett government said it would provide a dividend to the Latrobe Valley. Where is the dividend? I have not seen it. Has anybody here seen it?

Mr Perton — Yes.

Mr MAXFIELD — Where is it? I know where the jobs were sent; they were sent to the city. Where is the growth in rural employment? The city of Moe has been abandoned. Many hard-working people in Moe who have been employed by the state for years delivering power have been ignored. They have lost training opportunities through the cutbacks in TAFE funding. We require training for our youth because they have suffered immensely.

Walwa Bush Nursing Hospital

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Health the Walwa Bush Nursing Hospital, which is in imminent danger of closure within 3, 4 or 5 weeks. The 10-bed hospital is a significant employer in the region. It has a patient base of 1400 people, an in-house pharmacy and a fully

accredited medical practice with two doctors. If the hospital closes the doctors' positions will be untenable.

The hospital has been providing health services in the area since the 1920s. This not-for-profit organisation is bed based and provides an emergency stabilisation service for the small isolated community. In recent years the hospital's financial position has been deteriorating, as has the financial viability of all bush nursing hospitals. That is due in large part to the reduction in private health cover and the static return for aged care services from private health funds to bush nursing hospitals. The closure of the hospital will mean the demise of the small country centre.

I remind the government and the Minister for Health that they have said time and again that they are concerned about country areas and will act on behalf of country communities.

I ask that the minister review a business plan established as a result of a needs analysis instigated by the former Minister for Health. The needs analysis identified that the hospital could provide an accident emergency service and be funded as a public hospital. That has been provided for in a business plan presented by the Upper Murray Health and Community Services, based at the multipurpose service at Corryong, and the Walwa Bush Nursing Hospital. I ask the minister to act on this as soon as possible as a matter of absolute urgency.

Saigon Club, Footscray

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Gaming the Saigon Club at 17 Leeds Street, Footscray. The minister would be aware of the strong representations made to him and me yesterday by representatives of the Vietnamese Community in Australia, Victoria Chapter, the Inner Western Region Migrant Resource Centre and the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria and local interested citizens and business people about their concerns about the gaming venue at 17 Leeds Street.

Under the previous government's free-for-all, laissez-faire, anything-goes gaming policy, in 1997 and 1998 planning and liquor permits were granted for a facility with 65 additional gaming machines in what was then the City of Footscray. Only the remaining probity checks are required to be done before an operator's licence would normally be provided. Needless to say, the main issue is that now the larger City of Maribyrnong does not need the additional gaming machines that are yet to be provided. Already Maribyrnong has 15 venues and more than

775 machines, which is the highest concentration in the metropolitan area and the highest concentration in Victoria outside the CBD — in an area with the lowest income and poorest socioeconomic profile.

Community groups also have made certain allegations and observations about the probity and structure of the Vietnamese Cultural and Recreational Club. I put on record that the principal of the applicants, Tan Le, former Young Australian of the Year, is a distinguished person and has performed an outstanding role representing her community, but in the spirit of comments offered to me I ask the minister to direct this matter to the attention of the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority. I draw to the attention of the minister a petition with more than 1200 signatures on it — unfortunately not in the form required by the Parliament, so it cannot be offered to the Parliament — and almost 100 letters.

Milgate Primary School

Mr PERTON (Doncaster) — The matter I raise is for the Minister for Education and involves a student called Hoi Kin Leung at Milgate Primary School. Hoi Kin Leung is a grade 2 pupil who suffers from hypohidrotic ectodermal dysplasia, a life-threatening condition in which the child does not perspire and therefore is unable to control body temperature. Overheating leads to an elevated temperature and thus the possibility of seizures and subsequent brain damage.

At the moment the Milgate Primary School is undertaking a major upgrade through the provision of almost \$2 million of state government funds. The school applied to the region for permission to put in cooling systems to provide for the education of Hoi Kin. During the interim Hoi Kin's parents provided a portable cooler. That helped but it also severely restricted his participation in school activities as he was unable to move around the classroom.

As I said, the school is undertaking a major works program and it made plans for an evaporative cooling system to be incorporated in the upgrade. The school engaged the services of a cooling specialist to obtain appropriate quotes.

There was support from the region and reassurances from the department's disabilities and impairment staff that the submission was legitimate and should be supported. Following the election of the Bracks government, the application went to the department's central authorities and was rejected. Warmer weather is now approaching and the parents have a growing

concern for their child's welfare. Both the teachers and members of the school council are frustrated in their attempts to solve the problem.

Precedents have been set in two schools — Seaford North Primary School and Warrandyte Secondary College — where cooling systems were provided for students with similar medical conditions. Both the principal of Milgate Primary School and the child's parents are extremely concerned. I ask the minister to intervene to reverse the department's decision and allow the school to make provision for an appropriate cooling system so that Hoi Kin Leung can undertake as normal an education as possible for a child with his condition.

Multicultural resource centre, Richmond

Mr WYNNE (Richmond) — I refer the Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs to the accommodation needs of the statewide resource centre located at 217 Church Street, Richmond. The centre is a central resource for many statewide educational functions. It also houses several ethnic community groups, including but not exclusively the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre, the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, abilities education unit, the statewide School Library Association of Victoria, the Modern Language Teachers Association, Victorian Association of Social Studies, and I can go on. Some 20 groups altogether use the building. Those groups provide a valuable service to the community. The loss of tenure has occurred because of redevelopment of the building as alternative accommodation for the Richmond police station.

I ask the minister to undertake active consultation with the user groups to ensure that the various organisations are appropriately accommodated in a central and accessible location. Because it is important that the centre branches into the community, it is vital that the service be located close to both the centre of the city and public transport routes. The various groups are under great pressure in their need to find alternative accommodation, and I seek the minister's support.

Moorooduc Highway: Frankston traffic lights

Ms McCALL (Frankston) — I refer the Minister for Transport to transport problems on the Mornington Peninsula. My colleagues the honourable members for Wantirna and Mordialloc have already raised problems with the Scoresby freeway and the long-delayed Mornington Peninsula Freeway. I refer to stage 2 of the widening of the Moorooduc Highway, and in particular to the traffic lights to be installed at the corner of

Robinsons Road and the Moorooduc Highway. The former Minister for Roads and Ports visited the area before the election campaign and committed the funding for that stage 2 widening, which was well received by the local community.

Fatalities have occurred at the corner, and I draw the attention of honourable members to the death of a school-age child. The road is a feeder road for three schools in my electorate — Derinya Primary School, Frankston High School, and Mount Erin Secondary College, of which I am a proud member of the school council. The staff and council of Mount Erin have canvassed for traffic lights at the corner of Robinsons Road because money for the Moorooduc Highway has been stalled. Enrolments at Mount Erin Secondary College number close to 1200, the highest since the school converted from a technical college in 1991. The school could have been self-governing, but that is a story for another time.

The concern the school raises relates to the traffic lights at Robinsons Road. I ask the Minister for Transport to look into the issue as a matter of urgency, particularly given the approaching school holidays and new school year in 2000.

I am happy to submit any documentation to the minister in due course. I hope for a speedy resolution.

Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs

Mr LIM (Clayton) — I refer the Attorney-General to the 1998–99 annual report of the Department of Justice, which was tabled in Parliament earlier this week and which raises some serious concerns.

Page 101 of the report indicates that the former government failed Victorian consumers miserably. During the year the number of complaint calls to the Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs increased by 47 per cent, which represents a jump of almost 300 per cent from when the previous Labor government was in power in 1992. There were 734 970 individual calls made to the office. Of significant concern is the fact that 25 per cent of people abandoned their calls. There is a need for a review of the operation of the office.

Responses

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — The honourable member for Dandenong North raised an issue about cuts to the judicial system and cited a local constituent named George, aged 74, who had a problem with a painting account and whose claim ended up at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. The

constituent did not receive appropriate treatment in the process.

VCAT was set up to be a low-cost, user-friendly jurisdiction. I have met with Justice Murray Kellam, who heads up VCAT. We had a fruitful discussion about the future of the tribunal and some of the past problems associated with it, including the planning lists, which appear to have been brought under control.

I am sure VCAT would want to know if there were complaints about how individuals were treated. Often people have gripes with the court system for a range of reasons. Sometimes individuals believe they have not received an appropriate decision. Because of the separation of powers it is not for the Attorney-General to express particular views about decisions. However, it is important that all who appear in the court system are treated appropriately, and I will have a look at that matter. The previous government did not place a great deal of commitment on access to justice and did nothing to fight cuts to legal aid.

The Bracks government is taking a totally different stance. Access to justice is paramount. In the event of further proposals to cut legal aid, Victoria will be at the forefront of resistance and will fight strenuously. The honourable member for Dandenong North can assure his constituent that following the change of government access to justice will be an absolute priority.

The honourable member for Clayton referred specifically to page 101 of the annual report of the Department of Justice which shows there will be a huge increase of some 47 per cent in the number of complaints to the Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs. He said that most people were not receiving appropriate assistance. As I understand it, under the previous government staff numbers at that agency had either remained steady or been progressively cut. Now with a change of government there will be a far greater emphasis on fair trading.

As I said the other day, any of the shonks and charlatans who think they can get away with inappropriate practices in which they were involved before the recent elections have another think coming. The government believes people should be treated appropriately. Those shonks and charlatans will be driven out of that industry, and the government will do whatever it can to ensure appropriate fair trading practices are embarked upon by the Victorian community. The time for the crooks, shonks and charlatans is now over.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — The honourable member for Carrum raised with me for the attention of the Minister for Ports in another place the licensing of water crafts and their irresponsible use on the foreshore of her electorate. I know it is a serious problem and a safety risk. I shall refer the matter to the Minister for Ports, who will get back to the honourable member for Carrum.

The honourable member for Knox raised with me changes or adjustments to the law relating to the carrying of young pillion passengers on the back of motorbikes. He expressed a concern raised with him by a constituent about irresponsible behaviour. I shall ask Vicroads and road safety experts to examine the current law and determine whether it is adequate to deal with the current situation or whether changes to the law are required.

Laws can be changed but often it is the irresponsible application of the law by parents and guardians which leads to dangerous situations. Commonsense cannot always be legislated for or required and the lack of commonsense may be the biggest problem in the particular circumstance the honourable member outlined.

I ask the honourable member to make available to me the correspondence which sets out the issues in detail. I shall have them taken up with the appropriate people and get back to him.

The honourable member for Eltham raised with me problems being experienced in the Eltham community relating to the need for pedestrian-operated traffic lights on Main Road near Dalton Street, Eltham. He indicated that the Nillumbik council regarded the matter as top priority and that the installation of the traffic lights was an important requirement by the Eltham Primary School.

He also correctly indicated that Vicroads was of a similar view. I advise the honourable member that Vicroads believes the signals should be installed. I am pleased to inform him that the traffic signals will be installed.

I am told they are likely to be switched on in the first week of March 2000. I have asked that if possible the design of the project be brought forward so Vicroads can get on with it. That may not exactly coincide with the commencement of the new school year but it will be very close to it. The department hopes to be able to join with the honourable member for Eltham and others in the Eltham community in switching on those traffic

signals. The honourable member should set aside some time in the first week of March to do that.

The honourable member for Frankston raised with me another area where, according to the information she has been supplied with, traffic lights are needed — that is, on the corner of Robinsons Road and the Moorooduc Highway. The honourable member for Frankston East also indicated it was a serious problem that needed attention. I have asked the honourable member for Frankston to supply the relevant information and she has undertaken to do so.

The circumstances will be investigated and I will establish where those lights are on the Vicroads priority list. If the previous minister made a promise about them and took steps to ensure they worked their way up the list, and if the funds were made available by him, the government will ensure those lights are installed. If the previous minister made an empty promise with no funds attached to it, it may well be much more difficult to do in the time frame needed. I will have a look at the situation. Road safety is important to the Bracks Labor government and it will see what it can do, as it has done for the honourable member for Eltham.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Gaming) — The honourable member for Footscray raised an issue about a Vietnamese community gaming venue in Footscray. There was a delegation — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order!

Mr Perton — Do you support Tan Le?

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — Yesterday a delegation presented a number of petitions. Obviously gaming in this state has become a major issue of controversy and difficulty for many communities. Today Jesuit Social Services released its report on the impact of gaming on the Vietnamese community. It raised some very real issues about the impacts on families — intimidation and some violence — and the way they are being targeted for promotion by the gaming industry. They are very serious issues.

Mr Perton — Do you support the honourable member for Footscray's slur on — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order!
The honourable member for Doncaster!

Mr Perton — What is your position?

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — And that issue — —

Mr Mildenhall — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member for Doncaster, by interjection, is continually impugning me by claiming that I have maligned Tan Le, the former Young Australian of the Year. That is not what I did, and I take great offence at the interjections. I ask him to withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order!
The honourable member for Footscray has taken offence. I ask the honourable member for Doncaster — —

Mr Perton — He took a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker; he did not take objection. On the point of order, the honourable member for Footscray suggested that I had said by interjection that he had slurred and impugned Tan Le, the Young Australian of the Year in 1998. As you know, Sir, Tan Le is a person of great standing and reputation in this community, and the fact that the honourable member for Footscray is locked into a factional battle with Tan Le's mother is no excuse for him to use this house to defame and impugn her.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! I have heard sufficient on the point of order. The honourable member for Doncaster will sit down.

Mr Perton — He has used this adjournment debate to do so, and he ought to be utterly ashamed of himself.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! I have heard sufficient on the point of order.

Mr Perton — He raised the point of order, and I would submit to you, Mr Acting Speaker — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order!
The honourable member for Doncaster will sit down. The Chair has heard sufficient on the point of order and will make a ruling. There is no point of order. If the honourable member for Footscray takes offence at the remarks of the honourable member for Doncaster he may ask for the specific words and comments to be withdrawn by the honourable member for Doncaster.

Mr Mildenhall — I do just that, Mr Acting Speaker. The honourable member for Doncaster has continued to make those allegations in his response to the point of order. I ask that his comments that I have slurred the reputation of Tan Le, the Young Australian of the Year, be withdrawn. I take great exception to that because that is not what happened. I ask that those comments be withdrawn.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! I ask the honourable member for Doncaster to withdraw unequivocally.

Mr Perton — Mr Acting Speaker, I understand — —

Ms Gillett — Withdraw!

Mr Perton — Will you be quiet? I am looking at *Rulings from the Chair: 1920–1999*, which shows there is a requirement on the Speaker to determine what words are determined to be offensive. When you, Mr Acting Speaker, have determined what words I have used in respect of the honourable member, I will withdraw.

If you, Sir, look at the rulings, you will see that they all refer to the withdrawal of expressions that refer to an honourable member. Had I called the honourable member a liar or a cheat, had I called him any offensive word, you could ask me to withdraw, but the fact that I interjected to defend a fellow citizen from slurs that the honourable member has made does not entitle the honourable member to ask me to withdraw any words.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! I have heard sufficient.

Mr Perton — Mr Acting Speaker, you have to determine the offensive words.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! I have heard sufficient from the honourable member for Doncaster. The honourable member for Footscray has said that the words used by the honourable member for Doncaster were offensive to him personally, and therefore I ask the honourable member for Doncaster to withdraw.

Mr Perton — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the Chair has to determine — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster will sit down. I ask the honourable member to withdraw. He may raise a further point of order after this issue has been dealt with.

Mr Perton — Mr Acting Speaker, there are no words that I can withdraw. I have not used any unparliamentary expression in respect of the honourable member.

Mr Leigh — On the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! I ask that the honourable member for Doncaster withdraw or I will call the Speaker to the house.

Mr Perton — Call the Speaker.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Footscray has taken offence at some words used by the honourable member for Doncaster and the honourable member for Doncaster has been asked by Mr Acting Speaker to withdraw. Is the honourable member prepared to withdraw?

Mr Perton — May I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker?

Dr Napthine — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, as I understand it the standing orders rely on the fact that an honourable member uses words that are offensive to another member, and under standing order 108 the member who is offended can ask for the words to be withdrawn.

In this case, although there may have been some heat in the discussion and the issue, the honourable member for Footscray has been asked a number of times to tell the house which word or words he found offensive so that the honourable member for Doncaster could appropriately make a judgment about withdrawing them.

I suggest that perhaps you, Mr Speaker, could request the honourable member for Footscray to enunciate the words or word he found offensive so a judgment can be made by you, Mr Speaker, and the honourable member for Doncaster as to whether those words, under the rules of the house, constitute words that would normally be seen as offensive rather than as words normally regarded appropriate by way of interjection or byplay or comment within the house.

Mr Mildenhall — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, the words used were, ‘The honourable member for Footscray has impugned the reputation of Tan Le, the former Young Australian of the Year’. I find that remark objectionable and it is the exact opposite of what I said. I said that she has made an outstanding contribution to the Australian community and her community. I find it absolutely objectionable that that could be twisted around to imply that I said the opposite.

Mr Maclellan — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, I was in my office downstairs and heard the explanation offered to the house by the honourable member for Footscray.

Mr Bracks interjected.

Mr Maclellan — The Premier may laugh, but I was listening and came to the house. The honourable member complains it was alleged he had impugned the Young Australian of the Year. Is the word ‘impugned’ the word he wishes to have withdrawn? No, he is requesting you, Mr Speaker, to order that a whole comment or interjection be withdrawn — not that some words are offensive, but that a statement made by way of interjection during the course of debate offended him. If that becomes the rule, it opens up extraordinary opportunities for people to be offended by something other members say in the course of debate.

Speaker after Speaker has ruled we must all be big enough during debate to cop a certain amount, but that does not include unparliamentary language or allegations directly made against a member which would in any way be seen to be offensive. In a whole succession of rulings the Chair from time to time has ruled on what is and what is not offensive. Frankly, what the honourable member for Footscray wants withdrawn is a comment made, not something that is inherently offensive.

Mr Bracks — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, the honourable member for Footscray was explicit about the words he wants withdrawn. The 16 words allegedly used by the honourable member for Doncaster were, ‘The honourable member for Footscray has impugned the reputation of ... the Young Australian of the Year’. They are the words the honourable member wants withdrawn.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr Bracks — I will come to that interjection from the Leader of the Opposition. It is not a matter of whether I or the opposition or other members find the words offensive, it is whether the honourable member for Footscray finds them offensive.

The honourable member for Footscray is quite within his rights. Under the standing orders and given past rulings of the Chair, if a member finds a comment offensive he has the right to ask to have it withdrawn.

It is not a question of judgment as to whether other honourable members find the words to be offensive, the issue is whether the honourable member for Footscray finds the comment offensive. On that basis, and given that the offensive remark is contained in 14 words, I believe the honourable member for Doncaster should apologise and withdraw the comment.

Mr Richardson — On the point of order, it has long been a tradition in this place that only specific words are deemed to be offensive. On many occasions the Chair has ruled that it would be easier for all concerned if an honourable member accused of using an offensive expression simply withdrew it. That is an option open to any member of the house. On many other occasions the Chair has ruled that an honourable member who feels offended may be oversensitive on a particular issue.

They are choices that lie before you, Mr Speaker. Although I understand the view of the honourable member for Footscray, I suggest that he is being oversensitive and that you should suggest that to him.

Mr Batchelor — On the point of order, I take up the comments of the honourable member for Forest Hill, who began his remarks by saying it was possible for sensitivities to be recognised. He then said that the sensible resolution of this issue would be for the honourable member for Footscray to withdraw his objection. The suggestion that the honourable member for Doncaster should do what the Chair has asked him to do and withdraw the offensive comment is equally logical.

It is inappropriate for the honourable member for Footscray to have the full burden placed on him, when it could equally be argued that the burden should be placed on the honourable member for Doncaster who should not persist against the request of the Acting Speaker. However, given the refusal of the honourable member for Doncaster to withdraw and his desire to push the issue to the limits, the Chair has no alternative but to look to the standing orders. The standing orders are quite clear, and they provide you, Sir, with the method of resolving the issue in the absence of the honourable member for Doncaster doing the decent thing.

A Government Member — You would know about decency.

Mr Batchelor — Don’t tempt me.

I refer you, Mr Speaker, to standing order 108, to which the Leader of the Opposition has already referred you. It states:

No members shall use offensive or unbecoming words in reference to any member of the house ...

It goes on to state, and I wish to emphasise the words:

... and all imputations of improper motives shall be deemed to be disorderly.

The honourable member for Footscray has complained and sought protection from the Chair under standing order 108, and he has asked for the suggestion by the honourable member for Doncaster of improper motives to be withdrawn.

If we are unable to reach a commonsense and decent resolution to this issue, I put to you, Mr Speaker, that the words of standing order 108 should be applied and that the honourable member for Doncaster should be required to withdraw his remarks. If he refuses to do so, we will deal with that as the next issue.

Mr Leigh — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, I can recall when on at least one occasion the member for Broadmeadows, now a minister, sat where the member for Doncaster is now sitting and called the former Premier, the Honourable Jeff Kennett, a liar. Mr Kennett always took it on the chin and went on — —

Government members interjecting.

Mr Leigh — Unlike members of the precocious group sitting opposite. If you dish it out, sometimes you have to learn to take it. The Leader of the House is attempting to have a precedent set. He is suggesting that every time anyone makes a comment that is in any way offensive to a member of the government, such as an allegation by me that a member of the government has done something I think improper, the Chair will require that the allegation be withdrawn.

If the honourable member for Doncaster had said the honourable member for Footscray was corrupt or had lied, if he had used terms as specific as those, some action could be required. What you are being urged to do here, however, Mr Speaker, is to set a precedent so that every time an opposition member wishes to challenge a member of the government he or she will be required to withdraw.

Sometimes in this chamber, which used to be a place of rather robust debate as I recall, members have to learn to take it — as has been said before by others, including the father of the house, the honourable member for Pakenham. I plead with you, Mr Speaker, not to set this precedent. It will take away from us our democratic opportunity to raise allegations about other members.

Mr Thwaites — Briefly on the point of order, Mr Speaker, there is no question of the Chair setting a precedent. The existing precedents are quite clear. We have a clear ruling by Speaker Delzoppo stating that it is not the role of the Chair to adjudicate on whether something is offensive to an honourable member; it is left to the honourable member concerned to make his

own decision. The ruling is quite clear. It is, of course, also a matter for debate and commonsense.

It is not in the best interests of the house to define too narrowly what is offensive. In many instances when the government party was on the other side of the house I was asked to withdraw statements. I sometimes complained, but at the end of the day I always did the right thing and withdrew. That is all the honourable member for Doncaster can do in this case.

The SPEAKER — Order! I draw on the wisdom of the previous Deputy Speaker, John McGrath. On a number of occasions when he had to confront similar situations he asked that commonsense should prevail.

The honourable member for Footscray has taken offence at the comment made by the honourable member for Doncaster. In the past on every occasion when a member has taken offence and has asked for a withdrawal, that withdrawal has been forthcoming.

I ask the honourable member for Doncaster to withdraw.

Mr Perton — I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER — Order! I thank the honourable member for Doncaster. I appreciate his cooperation and commend his actions.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — The honourable member for Footscray raised a matter about a current application by the Vietnamese Cultural and Recreational Club for a gaming venue licence in the City of Maribyrnong. The debate which has just taken place highlights the division resulting from the former government's gaming policy, the effects of which can be seen in the community at the moment.

The application referred to by the honourable member for Footscray was made on 27 March 1998. I advise the honourable member that the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority is considering that application at the moment. I am also advised that the club has already been issued with a liquor licence.

I am conscious of the divisiveness of the previous government's gaming policy. As the new Minister for Gaming, I feel frustrated that it will not be possible to stop existing applications until the legislation is changed to create a stronger and proper regulatory environment. The project will be considered through the normal processes, as has been done in the past.

Mr Mildenhall interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Footscray is not assisting the situation by persisting with a matter that has already been resolved by the Chair.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — I can assure the honourable member for Footscray that I understand the issues. The application has to be dealt with under the proper processes of the existing gaming laws. I assure the honourable member that the government is committed to its policy of ensuring that there is more say for local governments and that local communities can have their points of view heard and considered by the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority, which does not happen at the moment. Future gaming legislation will provide for regional caps because the government is very conscious that the City of Maribyrnong has the highest concentration of gaming machines in the state.

I repeat: the matter has to be considered through the formal processes. I will pass the petitions that have been presented me on to the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority.

The honourable member for Richmond raised a matter concerning a decision by the previous government to buy a site in Church Street, Richmond which currently houses the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre, the subject associations and the abilities education unit. Because of the previous government's policy, community organisations that play valuable roles in delivering educational services and ethnic support will be homeless as of 1 January 2000.

Following advice from the Minister for Education, a working party consisting of representatives of the respective organisations, the Department of Education and the Victorian Multicultural Commission has been formed to consider the available options for accommodating those important groups. The government understands the difficulties they face and their frustration, because 1 January is not far away.

I have been informed that as a result of decisions made by the previous government the Victorian School of Languages is also to lose its accommodation, so the working party will consider finding accommodation for the Victorian School of Languages as well. The working party will hold its first meeting tomorrow. The government will be represented by Mr Carlo Carli, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier for Multicultural Affairs. The government wants to resolve the issue by early December so the community groups

concerned will have certainty about where they will be housed in the future.

The shame of the former government is that it did not think those things through, leaving the Labor government to inherit its problems. The government will take up the challenge and will fix the situation as soon as possible.

Ms DELAHUNTY (Minister for Education) — The honourable member for Doncaster raised the matter of Hoi Kin Leung, a grade 2 student at Milgate Primary School who, sadly, suffers from hypohidrotic ectodermal dysplasia, which prevents the body from cooling itself due to impaired sweat glands on the skin.

I am advised that the school was provided with funding for a portable evaporative cooler, which could be moved to whatever classroom Hoi Kin was in at any particular time. Further to that, the school requested the department to supply ceiling-mounted cooling systems in the library, the computer room, the music-art room and six classrooms so that that Hoi Kin could be comfortable in all those places.

As honourable members will understand, the request is very expensive. I am advised that the total cost is \$36 048 for the airconditioning, which is a fair proportion of the school's airconditioning resources.

Unlike the former government, the present government is very sympathetic to the plight of the young boy. At my request, after the matter was raised with me privately by the honourable member for Doncaster, the department has examined an alternative proposal — that is, that an airconditioner be mounted in two specialist rooms Hoi Kin uses most frequently. Proposed funding of \$6655 has been included in the integration program to facilitate the installation of a ceiling-mounted airconditioning unit that will service the two main home rooms at Milgate Primary School, where Hoi Kin spends most of his time.

The matter is very serious. The Bracks Labor government is anxious to provide the facilities needed by students, particularly those with serious disabilities, so they can stay in mainstream schooling.

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Health) — The honourable member for Malvern raised issues concerning the Penington expert committee on drugs, particularly the work it will do in relation to the municipal drugs strategy. He referred to some key questions that need to be answered about the implementation of policies, including the introduction of supervised injecting facilities, which relate to health, social and legal issues. He indicated that the opposition

is prepared to consider bipartisan support provided that proper answers could be given on the issues.

I am keen to obtain bipartisan support because it will be the best thing for the community. I have already spoken to Dr Penington and indicated to him that the government is keen for him to speak to the honourable member and other opposition members who wish to raise concerns with the committee. I am sure he would do so. I am keen for a genuine bipartisan approach. I would be happy to speak to any opposition members about the matter and will facilitate meetings with people such as Margaret Hamilton of Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre and the other experts who will be on the committee.

The honourable member also referred to the need for police expertise. I will certainly consider the matter. There is no doubt that the Penington committee will need to work closely with the police, and it intends to do so. Whether there ought to be a police representative on the committee is a matter I will discuss with Dr Penington. I am not sure that the police force would see that as necessary or appropriate; it may prefer to have very direct input to the committee but not actually be on it. Issues could arise about which it may be concerned and which may be part of a recommendation it has to implement, whether in a prosecutorial or any other role. I will talk to Dr Penington about the matter. I certainly want to involve the police in the process.

The final point the honourable member raised related to comments by one of the committee members. The one thing I will say about that is this: under this government there will be a more open approach and people will be able to speak out and say their piece. There will be more open debate and people will talk more openly. That will be a change. There will be different views.

I know the honourable member for Malvern and others will have different views. He has expressed his views in the press, and I urge him to embrace the Penington process. I will urge the committee to speak with the honourable member for Malvern and involve everybody. I will specifically put that suggestion about the police.

The honourable member for Benambra raised the matter of the Walwa Bush Nursing Hospital and stated that it is in financial crisis; I understand it is. He stated that the government has said it is concerned about country areas and country health. It certainly is. I am a little concerned that the honourable member is perhaps suggesting that the government ought to take action his government was never prepared to take in seven years.

Mr Plowman interjected.

Mr THWAITES — It is interesting that he says they were right on the ball. That is not true. It depends on what the honourable member is asking for. I am certainly prepared to investigate all options for the Walwa Bush Nursing Hospital. It is vital that we protect our bush nursing hospitals. However, financial concerns were identified in a report that was commissioned by the previous government.

I am prepared to work through the recommendations of that report with the honourable member for Benambra and other honourable members. I understand from what the honourable member said previously that he was asking the government to implement the recommendations contained in a report completed by Mr Kerr earlier this year. This government has been in office for three weeks. The present opposition was in government throughout the earlier part of the year and for some time after the report was completed, but nothing was done.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr THWAITES — The fact is that it is being raised now. I will work with the community and the local member to try to get the best outcome for the area.

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment) — I will keep my response brief in the spirit of attempting to allow country members to get home this evening.

The honourable member for Narracan raised with me the high youth unemployment figures in his electorate. In the short time he has been in this house he has raised far more issues than the previous member for Narracan did in the entire time he was a member.

Moe has definitely suffered from very high youth unemployment. The privatisation of the electricity industry and other events that have taken place in Moe have meant that young people have far more limited opportunities for employment, training and apprenticeships. Honourable members may have noted that youth unemployment has risen by 2 per cent from last month and it is now sitting at 19.6 per cent. That is clear evidence that the Bracks Labor government policies on youth unemployment are well overdue. The government has made a commitment to more than 2000 public sector traineeships, 600 of which will be focused on the long-term unemployed.

The previous government did not have a good record in public sector apprenticeships, believing that the marketplace really needs to look after itself and

government does not have much of a role. The Bracks Labor government has made a commitment, in recognition of the previous government's inactivity in this area, to those 2000 public sector traineeships and an additional commitment to 4700 private sector traineeships and apprenticeships with a wage subsidy of \$1000 to particularly address the skill shortages in a lot of trades and in information technology. The government wants to focus on providing opportunities for young people in training and apprenticeships so that they can then move into the work force and be provided with career paths.

The government has also made a commitment to a youth employment line so young people can have a one-stop shop to get information about employment opportunities, wages and the relevant awards and do not have to go through myriad different departments to get information. From the amount of conversation going on in the chamber it is obvious that members of the house are not interested in the issue of youth unemployment.

The government has also made a commitment to school exit plans. Brokers will be piloted in five areas to assist young people before they leave school and disappear into youth unemployment figures. The government will employ brokers to help young people look at their options and determine whether they want to take up training, whether they want some assistance in gaining employment or whether they want to go to another school.

The major commitment the government has made to addressing youth unemployment will impact on areas of high unemployment including Moe, which I am looking forward to visiting in the near future to make some announcements.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before putting the question I remind the house that electronic devices that emit sound are not permitted in the chamber.

Progress was made during the previous Parliament when electronic devices such as computers were allowed into the chamber so that members could continue to work. However, devices such as computers or pagers that emit audible sound will not be tolerated.

The party whips have been asked to use the non-sitting week wisely to try to resolve the problem.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 5.27 p.m. until Tuesday, 23 Novembe