

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 23 November 2011

(Extract from book 18)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

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Cabinet Secretary	Mr D. J. Hodgett, MP

Legislative Council committees

Privileges Committee — Ms Darveniza, Mr D. M. Davis, Mr P. R. Davis, Mr Hall, Ms Lovell, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Scheffer.

Procedures Committee — The President, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr D. M. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Lenders, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Viney

Legislative Council standing committees

Economy and Infrastructure Legislation Committee — Mr Barber, Ms Broad, Mrs Coote, #Ms Crozier, Mr Drum, Mr Finn, #Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pulford, Mr Ramsay and Mr Somyurek.

Economy and Infrastructure References Committee — Mr Barber, Ms Broad, Mrs Coote, #Ms Crozier, Mr Drum, Mr Finn, #Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pulford, Mr Ramsay and Mr Somyurek.

Environment and Planning Legislation Committee — Mr Elsbury, #Mr Finn, #Ms Hartland, Mrs Kronberg, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik, #Mrs Petrovich, Mrs Peulich, Mr Scheffer, *Mr Tarlamis, Mr Tee and Ms Tierney.

Environment and Planning References Committee — Mr Elsbury, #Mr Finn, #Ms Hartland, Mrs Kronberg, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik, #Mrs Petrovich, Mrs Peulich, Mr Scheffer, Mr Tee and Ms Tierney.

Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee — Ms Crozier, Mr Elasmr, #Mr Elsbury, Ms Hartland, Ms Mikakos, Mr O'Brien, Mr O'Donohue, Mrs Petrovich, #Mr Ramsay and Mr Viney.

Legal and Social Issues References Committee — Ms Crozier, Mr Elasmr, #Mr Elsbury, Ms Hartland, Ms Mikakos, Mr O'Brien, Mr O'Donohue, Mrs Petrovich, #Mr Ramsay and Mr Viney.

* *Inquiry into Environment Protection Amendment (Beverage Container Deposit and Recovery Scheme) Bill 2011*

Participating member

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee — (*Council*): Mr D. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Lenders, Ms Lovell and Ms Pennicuik. (*Assembly*): Ms Allan, Mr Clark, Ms Hennessy, Mr Holding, Mr McIntosh, Dr Naphine and Mr Walsh.

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Council*): Mr Leane, Mr Ramsay and Mr Scheffer.
(*Assembly*): Mr Battin and Mr McCurdy.

Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Peulich. (*Assembly*): Mr Burgess, Mr Foley, Mr Noonan and Mr Shaw.

Education and Training Committee — (*Council*): Mr Elasmr and Ms Tierney. (*Assembly*): Mr Crisp, Ms Miller and Mr Southwick.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Council*): Mr Finn, Mr Somyurek and Mr Tarlamis. (*Assembly*): Ms Ryall and Mrs Victoria.

Environment and Natural Resources Committee — (*Council*): Mr Koch. (*Assembly*): Mr Bull, Ms Duncan, Mr Pandazopoulos and Ms Wreford.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Coote and Ms Crozier. (*Assembly*): Mrs Bauer, Ms Halfpenny, Mr McGuire and Mr Wakeling.

House Committee — (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*) Mr Drum, Mr Eideh, Mr Finn, Ms Hartland, and Mr P. Davis. (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Ms Beattie, Ms Campbell, Mrs Fyffe, Ms Graley, Mr Wakeling and Mr Weller.

Law Reform Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Petrovich. (*Assembly*): Mr Carbines, Ms Garrett, Mr Newton-Brown and Mr Northe.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Kronberg and Mr Ondarchie. (*Assembly*): Ms Graley, Ms Hutchins and Ms McLeish.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Council*): Mr P. Davis, Mr O'Brien and Mr Pakula. (*Assembly*): Mr Angus, Ms Hennessey, Mr Morris and Mr Scott.

Road Safety Committee — (*Council*): Mr Elsbury. (*Assembly*): Mr Languiller, Mr Perera, Mr Tilley and Mr Thompson.

Rural and Regional Committee — (*Council*): Mr Drum. (*Assembly*): Mr Howard, Mr Katos, Mr Trezise and Mr Weller.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Council*): Mr O'Brien and Mr O'Donohue. (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr Eren, Mr Gidley, Mr Nardella and Mr Watt.

Heads of parliamentary departments

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

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

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

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FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Deputy Leader of the Government:

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Mr J. LENDERS

Deputy Leader of the Opposition:

Mr G. JENNINGS

Leader of The Nationals:

The Hon. P. R. HALL

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Mr D. DRUM

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Coote, Mrs Andrea	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	O'Brien, Mr David Roland Joseph	Western Victoria	Nats
Dalla-Riva, Hon. Richard Alex Gordon	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John	Eastern Victoria	LP
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Hall, Hon. Peter Ronald	Eastern Victoria	Nats	Somyurek, Mr Adem	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hartland, Ms Colleen Mildred	Western Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Mr Lee Reginald	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tee, Mr Brian Lennox	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Koch, Mr David Frank	Western Victoria	LP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Kronberg, Mrs Janice Susan	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Viney, Mr Matthew Shaw	Eastern Victoria	ALP

CONTENTS

WEDNESDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2011

PETITIONS

<i>Victorian certificate of applied learning:</i>	
<i>funding</i>	5419
<i>Children: Take a Break program</i>	5419

PAPERS

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

<i>Standing orders</i>	5419
------------------------------	------

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

<i>Remembrance Day</i>	5420, 5423
<i>Housing: Richmond estate</i>	5420
<i>Carbon tax: members comments</i>	5421
<i>Whittlesea Secondary College: bushfire memorial</i>	5421
<i>Environment Defenders Office:</i>	
<i>20th anniversary</i>	5421
<i>Rail: Pakenham level crossing</i>	5421
<i>Youth: Making Links mentoring program</i>	5422
<i>Sacred Heart Mission: rooming house exhibition</i>	5422
<i>World Diabetes Day</i>	5422
<i>Western Victoria: road tragedy</i>	5423
<i>Country Fire Authority: Wyndham Vale brigade</i>	5423
<i>Mount Victory Road, Halls Gap: reopening</i>	5423
<i>Country Fire Authority: Pastoria brigade</i>	5423
<i>Tidal River: pioneer commando memorial</i>	5424
<i>Sunbury: postal services</i>	5424

COMMUNITY SECTOR: WAGES

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

<i>Minister for Children and Early Childhood</i>	
<i>Development: correspondence</i>	5442, 5443
<i>Information and communications technology:</i>	
<i>government initiatives</i>	5444
<i>Qantas: industrial dispute</i>	5445, 5446
<i>Information and communications technology:</i>	
<i>former government performance</i>	5446
<i>Industrial relations: consent arbitration</i>	5447
<i>Housing: Norlane development</i>	5447
<i>Community sector: wages</i>	5448, 5450
<i>Industrial relations: minimum hours</i>	5450
<i>Public sector: government wages policy</i>	5451
<i>Dandenong: Little India precinct</i>	5451

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

<i>Answers</i>	5452
----------------------	------

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (SERIOUS

MISCONDUCT) AMENDMENT BILL 2011

<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	5454
<i>Statement of compatibility</i>	5454
<i>Second reading</i>	5455

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

VICTORIAN FAMILIES STATEMENT

MARRIAGE EQUALITY

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

<i>Queen Elizabeth Centre: report 2010–11</i>	5485
---	------

Auditor-General: Procurement Practices in the

<i>Health Sector</i>	5486, 5487
<i>Office of Police Integrity: report</i>	5488, 5490, 5494
<i>Library Board of Victoria: report 2010–11</i>	5488
<i>Royal Children's Hospital: report 2010–11</i> .	5489, 5492, 5493
<i>Auditor-General: TAFE Governance</i>	5490
<i>Auditor-General: Maternity Services —</i>	
<i>Capacity</i>	5491
<i>Auditor-General: Biotechnology in Victoria —</i>	
<i>The Public Sector's Investment</i>	5494

ADJOURNMENT

<i>Housing: Moorabbin development</i>	5495
<i>Health Purchasing Victoria: environmental policy</i>	5496
<i>Libraries: Sunshine</i>	5496
<i>Healesville freeway reservation: future</i>	5497
<i>Bushfires: preparedness</i>	5497
<i>Planning: green wedge logical inclusions</i>	5498
<i>Rail: Southland station</i>	5498
<i>Responses</i>	5499

Wednesday, 23 November 2011

The PRESIDENT (Hon. B. N. Atkinson) took the chair at 9.33 a.m. and read the prayer.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Victorian certificate of applied learning: funding

To the Legislative Council of Victoria:

This petition of certain citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the state government's axing of \$48 million funding for the Victorian certificate of applied learning program.

In particular, we note:

1. VCAL provides an important learning alternative to the VCE for students across Victoria.
2. Secondary schools stand to lose up to \$125 000 in funding which will impact heavily on teachers expected to deliver the support and services despite having inadequate time and resources to do so.
3. Funding has been axed despite strong objections from principals, teachers, parents and students across Victoria.

The petitioners therefore request that the state government immediately reverses its decision and restores funding to this vital program as a matter of urgency.

By Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) (111 signatures).

Laid on table.

Children: Take a Break program

To the Legislative Council of Victoria:

The petition of certain citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that funding for the Take a Break occasional child-care program, which is provided at more than 220 neighbourhood houses and community centres across Victoria, will cease after 31 December 2011.

The Take a Break occasional child-care program allows parents and guardians to participate in activities including employment, study, recreational classes and voluntary community activities while their children socialise and interact with other children in an early-learning environment.

Full funding for the program was provided by the previous state labour government but will not be continued by the Baillieu government beyond December 2011.

The cut to funding will mean that families across Victoria will be unable to access affordable, community-based occasional

child care to undertake tasks that benefit the family and allow them to take a break.

The petitioners therefore request that the Baillieu government reinstate funding for the Take a Break occasional child-care program.

By Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) (21 signatures).

Laid on table.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Auditor-General's Reports on —

Local government: Results of the 2010–11 audits, November 2011.

Portfolio departments and associated entities: Results of the 2010–11 audits, November 2011.

Ombudsman — Report on the investigation into ICT-enabled projects, November 2011.

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

Bass Coast Planning Scheme — Amendment C103.

East Gippsland Planning Scheme — Amendment C96.

Glen Eira Planning Scheme — Amendment C92.

Mansfield Planning Scheme — Amendment C22.

Monash Planning Scheme — Amendments C90 and C97.

Victoria Planning Provisions — Amendments VC83 and VC86.

Ordered that notice of approval of Victoria planning provisions amendment VC83 be considered next day on motion of Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Standing orders**

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — By leave, I move:

That standing order 5.02(3) be suspended to the extent necessary to enable questions without notice and answers to questions on notice to be taken at 2.00 p.m. on Thursday, 24 November 2011.

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — The opposition supports this motion. For the record, we

were extraordinarily critical of the government for abridging the proceedings of the house during the last royal visit. I say to the government that this approach when a major — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr LENDERS — This is a serious response and offer of cooperation. When a major event occurs and the government seeks cooperation to deal with ministerial arrangements and the sitting of the house around it, we on this side will cooperate. I congratulate the government on using this as a way of dealing with events like this rather than the way it happened during the last visit. We support the motion.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I take this opportunity to mention that I sent out a notice, co-signed by the Speaker. The relevance of this motion, as most members would be aware, is that there will be a visit of some dignitaries to Parliament House tomorrow. I re-emphasise, as I have to the press gallery, that this is a private function that has been organised by the Cancer Council Victoria. We are delighted to have the dignitaries attending the Parliament, but attendance at the actual event is strictly by invitation from the Cancer Council. The press gallery has been advised that the only members of the press who will have access to the facilities of the Parliament where the dignitaries are going to be are those who have been accredited by protocol and other parties associated with the visit.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Remembrance Day

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I had the honour of attending the Remembrance Day service at the Noble Park RSL along with my colleagues Mr Jennings and Mr Holding, the member for Lyndhurst in the other place. Remembrance Day provides an opportunity to remember and reflect on all men and women who have sacrificed their lives or suffered in wars and conflicts. On 11 November the official end of World War I was marked. On that date in 1918 hostilities formally ended at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month with the Germans signing the armistice.

On the first anniversary of the armistice, at the request of King George V, the commonwealth was asked to suspend activities for 2 minutes. On the second anniversary the burial of the Unknown Soldier added further significance. Initially we remembered the

sacrifice of those who served with the First Australian Imperial Force and who had died on the battlefields in Gallipoli, Europe and the Middle East. After World War II this was changed to Remembrance Day to commemorate all those who suffered or died in wars and conflicts.

It is heartening to see that local schoolchildren and the community in general continue to observe the minute of silence with a sense of pride and respect. This shows that the observance of Remembrance Day will continue and become stronger. The observation of silence at 11.00 a.m. demonstrates a mark of respect to those who have died and suffered and provides a time to reflect on the loss and suffering caused by war.

What made this Remembrance Day so poignant for me was my reflecting on the soldiers who have more recently fallen, like Captain Bryce Duffy, who was aged 26, Corporal Ashley Birt, who was aged 22, and Lance Corporal Luke Gavin, who was aged 29 — reflecting on the great sacrifice that they made and the sacrifice that every service person makes for this country in the course of their duty. I thank the Noble Park RSL for providing me with the opportunity to participate in the moving ceremony and for ensuring that our community remembers those who have made such significant sacrifices.

Housing: Richmond estate

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — One of my early initiatives as housing minister was to give police access to a unit on the Richmond estate as a way of tackling the drug scourge that terrified some tenants. It is wonderful to see the positive response from police in this week's *Melbourne Leader* Docklands edition. The command post in Williams Court gives police access to video streaming around the area and gives them a base from which they can patrol the estate, looking out for trouble before it happens. It shows residents that this government cares about their safety and that we are working with them to take the estate back from drug dealers and users.

The *Melbourne Leader* article quotes Sergeant Bill Brown speaking of an incident where one man walked out of a lift on the estate to find a police officer in the foyer. In a panic the man reached into his pocket and pulled out a package of heroin and threw it on the ground. Police estimated its street value at between \$7000 and \$10 000.

This is a win for police and a win for tenants on the Richmond estate. Make no mistake: this command post is making a real difference to vulnerable families, who

have had enough of the drug trade that is operating around their homes. The article also says the Baillieu government's initiative of a command post and closed-circuit television monitoring has helped save lives and has made people feel safer. It is time for those Labor members who are opposed to it to stop playing politics, wake up and back this lifesaving initiative that has such strong support from police and residents.

Carbon tax: members comments

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I wish to raise comments that were made in a contribution in this house in the last sitting week. They were in relation to Alcoa being a large philanthropic organisation. It was stated that Alcoa was not in a position to donate to schools programs like the KIDS Foundation in Ballarat because of the costs of the carbon tax. That was a fairly serious allegation that was made, and it motivated me and my office to contact the government relations officer at Alcoa for a response. The response on the telephone was that that was not the case. We then sought a written response, and the response from Alcoa's Victorian operations states:

... Alcoa's Victorian operations have come under significant pressure due to the strength of the Australian dollar, higher input costs and a low international aluminium price.

This has resulted in a reduction in discretionary spending such as sponsorships and partnerships.

Nowhere in Alcoa's response are the words 'carbon tax' mentioned. The comments made in the last sitting week cannot go unchecked. Alcoa is an important asset for the Victorian economy through many avenues, including its philanthropic contributions. It is not an organisation to be used politically by any member of this house to conjure up false and misleading statements to suit a disingenuous and deceitful anti-carbon tax campaign.

Whittlesea Secondary College: bushfire memorial

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I was honoured and privileged on Sunday last to attend the opening of the bushfire memorial rotunda at Whittlesea Secondary College. Members might recall that after a visit I made there in February this year the school captains, Brittany and Anthony, shared with me the fact that there was a funding shortfall for their rotunda. The Minister for Education, Martin Dixon, was kind enough to provide \$10 000 to finish the project. It is a sacred space; it is a quiet space; it honours and provides memories of those who tragically passed away in the Black Saturday bushfires.

I thank principal Terry Twomey for his leadership. Importantly, Terry Twomey, college chaplain Ian Findley and Cr Rex Griffin, mayor of the City of Whittlesea, all got together to help to make this project happen. The designers and builders were fabulous. It is a reminder of the tragic loss on the Black Saturday of 2009. I remind members that whilst the physical rebuild is well under way, the emotional rebuild still has a long way to go. Our love and our prayers for all those Victorians affected by the awful fires remain. We mourn, we remember, we care and we continue our support.

Environment Defenders Office: 20th anniversary

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — On 10 November I attended the 20th anniversary party of the Environment Defenders Office. The EDO is an organisation that I have supported over the years, as have many others in the community. The EDO is an independent, not-for-profit, community legal service that specialises in public interest environmental law. Its important work aims to redress the imbalance in financial resources and access to legal resources that exist for individuals, the community and conservation groups compared with government and business.

The EDO works to defend and enhance our natural heritage and to protect the right of people to a healthy environment. It provides high-quality legal services to the community, defends the existing environmental laws and works to improve their implementation. It provides that legal advice and representation to individuals, community groups and conservation organisations that are working to protect and enhance their local environment and to prosecute environmental issues against the government and/or business. I would like to pay tribute to the current staff and volunteers of EDO led by Brendan Sykes, and to all the people who have worked for it, worked with it and supported it over the last 20 years.

Rail: Pakenham level crossing

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — One of the issues I raised in opposition was the need for a second crossing over the railway line on the western side of McGregor Road, Pakenham. This was something which the member for Bass in the Assembly and I lobbied for in opposition. I was pleased that after a visit by the then shadow Minister for Public Transport, Mr Mulder, the construction of a new pedestrian crossing on the western side of McGregor Road became one of the coalition's election commitments prior to the 2010 state election.

As members may recall, funding for this important project was provided in the first Baillieu budget. I am pleased to advise the house that works on this project have now commenced. This is a very important project for the residents of Heritage Springs and other residential estates south of the railway line. It will allow schoolchildren to navigate the crossing of the railway line in a much safer way than they have been able to with the increased traffic volumes on McGregor Road. The new crossing will include paving, automatic electric gates and fences. It will comply with standards set out in the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. This is a great local project that will make a real difference to the safety of who walk to and from school or otherwise wish to navigate their way across the railway line on the western side of McGregor Road. I am very pleased to see that works are now under way.

Youth: Making Links mentoring program

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I was very pleased last Tuesday to attend the Making Links certificate presentation at the Shepparton KidsTown complex, where we saw 16 young people successfully graduate from the Making Links mentoring program. This is a terrific program. It is a low-cost, high-impact program that helps disadvantaged, at-risk young Victorians to re-engage with study or employment by pairing them with adults in their chosen field; those adults are mentors, so it is a mentoring program. The 16 young people who graduated last Tuesday attended the graduation along with their families, friends and mentors and not only received their certificates but also talked about the valuable experience and support that they gained by participating in the program.

The Making Links program helps many at-risk young people to re-engage with their study and employment, and it is very disappointing that the Baillieu government is stripping back from some of Victoria's most vulnerable young people any mentoring opportunities they might have by withdrawing \$3.9 million from the mentoring and capacity-building program of which this Making Links program is part.

I congratulate those 16 young people on successfully graduating and the mentors for being part of the program.

Sacred Heart Mission: rooming house exhibition

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — In Queen's Hall at the moment we have a wonderful art exhibition. It is called *Defining Us — Our Life. Our Dreams. Our Journey.*, and it is an installation of

60 artworks by 12 resident artists of the Sacred Heart Mission Queens Road rooming house. I encourage everyone to have a look at the excellent exhibition of work done by people who live in the Queens Road rooming house.

The Queens Road Rooming House Plus Project is designed to help people break the cycle of homelessness by providing residents with stable, long-term accommodation and support to maintain their housing. Many people who live at the rooming house have a range of complex and often multiple needs including mental health issues and substance abuse. These are the artists whose work is displayed in Queen's Hall at the moment. Their work is for sale, and I suggest to members that it would look good in their electorate offices.

The arts studio at the Queens Road rooming house is part of the Social Inclusion program. As well as art and music, this program includes sport and recreation activities, and learning community living skills. In August of this year the Minister for Mental Health, Mary Wooldridge, gave \$220 000 in funding and support for vulnerable individuals and families. This new money enabled greater coordination of services for residents at Sacred Heart Mission's Rooming House Plus Project, such as linking in mental health, drug and alcohol, and other welfare services, combined with stable accommodation, to meet a wide range of needs.

Ms Wooldridge said at the time:

This is an important accommodation option in the inner south of Melbourne and provides accommodation and support to 67 of our most vulnerable Victorians with a mental illness.

I encourage everyone to look at this excellent art exhibition.

World Diabetes Day

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — Monday of last week marked the 20th year of World Diabetes Day. World Diabetes Day is a global awareness campaign which was introduced in 1991 by the International Diabetes Federation and the World Health Organisation in response to the significant numbers of people around the world being diagnosed with diabetes.

The alarming number of people being diagnosed with diabetes that was recognised in 1991 continues at an even greater rate today. Diabetes is the fastest-growing chronic condition in Australia, affecting 1.7 million Australians. Diabetes and its complications are responsible for large numbers of hospital admissions and extensive health-care requirements.

Diabetes is a complex disease that usually has multiple health impacts, including increasing the risk of heart disease, kidney disease, blindness and neurological disease. Diabetes does not discriminate between men and women and can affect people from all ethnic backgrounds. In many instances diabetes can be prevented, and to draw attention to the diabetes health crisis over 1000 iconic buildings across the world, including Melbourne's AAMI Park, were lit up in blue on World Diabetes Day. Other activities undertaken by Diabetes Victoria to mark this important day included a photo competition, a family fun day, an event at Federation Square with Diabetes Care ambassador Catherine Freeman, and Diabetes Plus Exercise — an information session held at the Western Hospital in Footscray.

I would like to congratulate all those involved in the organising of these events for the success in highlighting the devastating effects this insidious disease can have.

Western Victoria: road tragedy

Mr O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — I would like to join my colleague Mr Ramsay, and I am sure all members of the house, in expressing my deepest condolences for the six young lives that were tragically lost north of Penshurst on 12 November.

I also express my thanks and appreciation to the police, State Emergency Services, the Country Fire Authority, medical personnel and all others who have been tasked with the very difficult job of responding to such tragedies and that tragedy in particular, which has shocked and saddened the whole of south-west Victoria and indeed the whole of the state.

Country Fire Authority: Wyndham Vale brigade

Mr O'BRIEN — In relation to the Country Fire Authority, I would also like to acknowledge and applaud the newly formed Wyndham Vale CFA brigade. On 20 November I represented the Deputy Premier, Peter Ryan, in relation to the formation of that brigade and also the handing over of a brand-new \$315 000 tanker, which will enable that CFA brigade to service the district in all its activities through the coming years.

Since its formation this brigade has attended more than 31 primary incidents, including several house fires, road crash rescues and 23 support calls. The coalition government is investing \$65.8 million towards 60 new or upgraded CFA stations and rolling out 101 new

firefighting vehicles this financial year alone as part of its overall commitment to build and upgrade 250 CFA stations across Victoria by November 2014.

Mount Victory Road, Halls Gap: reopening

Mr O'BRIEN — I would also like to acknowledge the work of VicRoads in reopening Mount Victory Road at Halls Gap on 18 November.

Remembrance Day

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — I spent this year's Remembrance Day, 11 November, in communion and reflection with many students from schools across the Maroondah City Council area. The Maroondah community Remembrance Day ceremony, held at the Sacred Heart Primary School in Croydon, opened with a rendition of *Amazing Grace* by Shannon Ritchie of Norwood Secondary College, followed by a flute ensemble by Jessica Marks, Jacqueline Homer, Jessica Haynes and Chloe Barrett from Croydon Secondary College. A duet was performed by Ebony Delmo and Brooke Johnston from Parkwood Secondary College, followed by members of the Aruma and junior choirs from Ringwood Secondary College.

One of the most moving parts of the program was the singing of *I Am Australian* by students from the Blackburn Language School. Ellery Weston represented Heathmont College with *Hero* and Josh Gordon from Parkwood Secondary College presented the *Commemoration of the Fallen*, followed by Jessica Baland with *The Inquisitive Mind of the Child*. Rhys Colthup from Heathmont College read the *Ode of Remembrance* with the Last Post and the Rouse being played by Liam Whitbourn of Ringwood Secondary College.

This moving and well-organised event was closed by the master of ceremonies, Tim Batchelor of Ringwood Secondary College. My congratulations go to the planning group. May the spirit of remembrance live on in the hearts and minds of all those who met that day to honour the Australian men and women who make the ultimate sacrifice in wars.

Country Fire Authority: Pastoria brigade

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — On Saturday, 12 November, I had the opportunity to represent the Deputy Premier, Peter Ryan, at a district called Pastoria on the outskirts of Kyneton. I had the opportunity to present to the Pastoria brigade of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) a new vehicle. It is what is known as a 'slip-on vehicle' — a four-wheel drive with a small

tank on the back. It can access hard-to-reach bushfires that some larger vehicles are unable to get to because of the terrain and can help to put out some of the spot fires that can jump ahead of a major fire.

As Mr O'Brien said earlier, this is just another example of the coalition's commitment of \$65.8 million to be spent across the state to improve, upgrade and rebuild up to 250 CFA stations over the term of this government, including more than 60 this year. We are building on Pastoria. We have already been to the Taradale CFA and to Turriff. We are relying on the volunteers to do this work for us, and they are relying on us to give them the support they need to do their jobs. We are also backing up these upgrades with equipment grants to the value of \$11.6 million so that the CFA brigades can have the equipment they need. These upgrades, vehicle grants and equipment grants show how committed we are to supporting the CFA and its volunteers.

Tidal River: pioneer commando memorial

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to take this opportunity to make some remarks on a significant event I attended last Sunday at Tidal River on Wilsons Promontory — that is, the unveiling of the honour roll at the pioneer commando memorial cairn. Tidal River is significant in Australia's military history as the place where the initial commando training occurred when the original independent companies were formed at the start of World War II. The isolated and rugged terrain of Wilsons Promontory was then considered to be ideal for training troops who might fight anywhere from the Libyan deserts to the jungles of New Guinea. Since 1941 the men who volunteered for the original commando units and the subsequent special forces have regarded Tidal River — and since 1964 the cairn at Tidal River — as a monument to the fallen.

At the cairn last weekend I unveiled a memorial roll with the names of some 600 deceased commandos. Those present included Sandy McNab, the sole member of the 1st Independent Company formed in 1941 to be there and a colleague of my father. I found the opportunity to participate in the event of great personal significance. Importantly families of deceased commandos were present and were honoured.

Sunbury: postal services

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — Today I would like to highlight the inadequate postal services in Sunbury, a growing township in my electorate. For at least the last two years there has been widespread and

growing dissatisfaction within the Sunbury community regarding Australia Post services. Sunbury currently has a population of approximately 35 000 people. This rapidly growing area is expected to have a population in excess of 60 000 by 2030, yet there is still only one post office to service this community, with queues regularly stretching out the door. Despite lobbying from the community, local business groups and the Hume City Council, Australia Post continues to neglect Sunbury by providing only one post office. Melton township, with a population of 35 000, has three post offices, while Werribee, with a population of 36 000, has two.

Sunbury is clearly being short-changed by Australia Post and the federal government, and the lack of adequate postal services is inconveniencing the community and affecting local businesses. I call on the Gillard federal government to stop ignoring Sunbury's growing needs and support the lobbying of Australia Post by the Sunbury community and the Hume City Council for a second post office in Sunbury. I raise this issue in Parliament to express the frustration of the people of Sunbury at the delays experienced, particularly at peak times and on Saturday mornings, when it is not unusual to wait in queues of 40 people or more. This growing community is sick of being ignored by its Labor representatives and deserves better.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I understand there are some people in the public gallery who have an interest in the motion that is about to be debated in the Parliament. We certainly welcome you to the Parliament and to hear the debate that will ensue. We have requirements in terms of the operation of the Parliament, and we ask that people in the gallery do not become involved in the debate. I am looking forward to your interest in the debate but not your participation. Thank you.

COMMUNITY SECTOR: WAGES

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I move:

That this house —

- (1) notes the absolute disdain expressed by Liberal-Nationals coalition members of this house at the tabling of petitions, relating to the Australian Services Union's (ASU) equal pay test case for community sector workers, on 30 June 2011;
- (2) further notes that the Liberal-Nationals coalition committed to fully fund any decision of Fair Work Australia (FWA) arising from the ASU's equal pay test case;

- (3) further notes that FWA recently made a landmark decision recognising the role gender has played in the undervaluing of work in the community sector; and
- (4) calls on Liberal-Nationals members of Parliament to apologise for misleading community sector workers about this matter in the lead-up to the election and for ridiculing the petitions they have submitted to the Parliament on this important issue.

President, I join with you in welcoming those people who have had a long involvement in this campaign to listen to our discussion about these matters, which very much relate to their employment. I certainly join you, President, in expressing that sentiment, because although their attendance in the gallery means they cannot participate in the debate right here and right now, I am confident that all the people who are with us today have been participating in this debate in other places over many years and indeed decades. The question of equal pay has a long history in Victoria and Australia.

Just to provide some context to this motion, which I put on the notice paper on 30 June, a number of my colleagues tabled petitions in this place on that day: Ms Darveniza, Mr Eideh, Mr Elasmarr, Mr Jennings, Mr Leane — in his own name and for Ms Broad — Mr Lenders, Mr Pakula, Mr Scheffer, Mr Somyurek, Mr Tarlamis, Mr Tee and Ms Tierney. We presented a number of petitions from certain citizens requesting that the government support the community sector by committing to properly fund the pay increase that will result from the Australian Services Union's equal remuneration case. I did not walk into the chamber on that day planning to put this motion on the notice paper, but I was moved to do so because I was very offended by the jeering, interjections and heckling from government members as the petitions were being tabled. I know that some time has passed since then, and people's memories of that may have faded, but that is the context in which the motion was moved.

Today it is very timely that we can discuss this motion and the matters it pertains to in some detail, so I am very pleased for the opportunity to talk about this important issue that affects many tens of thousands of Victorian SACS (social and community services) sector employees but also probably equal numbers of people who rely on the work that they do and equal numbers of family members who live in a household that is supported by the incomes that they earn. This is something of great importance to many Victorians.

It is also timely because just last week in Victoria we celebrated the centenary of women voting. We have come a long way in our endeavour for women to have equal and full participation in society, but particularly

in the area of pay equity for those working in the social and community services sector there is still a little way to go. There has been a great deal of work done, and on 16 May this year there was what can perhaps be described as a breakthrough moment. The full bench of Fair Work Australia concluded that workers in the social and community services sector do not receive equal remuneration when compared with workers in state and local government employment. In that position the full bench said:

... we have concluded that for employees in the SACS industry there is not equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal or comparable value by comparison with workers in state and local government employment. We consider gender has been important in creating the gap between pay in the SACS industry and pay in comparable state and local government employment. And, in order to give effect to the equal remuneration provisions, the proper approach is to attempt to identify the extent to which gender has inhibited wages growth in the SACS industry and to mould a remedy which addresses that situation.

The full bench of Fair Work Australia went on to suggest that further information about the remedy would assist in any further deliberations, and the parties were sent away to do a little more work on this and to try to come to a resolution. The hard work has continued over the six months since that period, and on 10 November the commonwealth government, Prime Minister Julia Gillard and the Australian Services Union announced an agreement on how pay inequity could be remedied for SACS workers. As part of that the commonwealth government has committed to provide in the order of \$2 billion for SACS workers to make up what is a significant shortfall.

Mr Lenders — Hopefully the state will honour its election commitment and match it.

Ms PULFORD — I would certainly be hoping that too, Mr Lenders, and I am sure that the many tens of thousands of SACS workers in Victoria are similarly waiting with bated breath for the Victorian government's response to this significant news. The Victorian government has now had an opportunity to acquaint itself with the details, because that joint submission of the commonwealth and the Australian Services Union was submitted to Fair Work Australia on 17 November.

This motion refers to the Australian Services Union, and it has been the lead organisation representing SACS workers in Victoria. Indeed some of this had its origins in a test case in Queensland. It is also important to note the contribution and involvement of the Health and Community Services Union and its members, particularly in the disability sector, and members of the

Australian Education Union. There has been a collaborative approach over many years. There are other workers who are to be credited for their role in what has been a long, important and ultimately very historic fight for pay justice in this country.

The SACS industry is perhaps most succinctly described in that May decision of Fair Work Australia. It characterised the SACS industry as being made up of the following sectors: disability services, youth and children's services, community centres, women's services, family support services, community legal centres, home and community care services, drug and alcohol services, community housing services, specialist health services, peak organisations, indigenous services, tenancy services and mental health services. As members will know, people working in these sectors are on the front line of service delivery in many areas of state government responsibility and administration. The commonwealth's share of this is through agency agreements in the areas it is responsible for, but the commonwealth's response to this is only one part of the equation.

Fair Work Australia went on to break down a number of the sectors into further distinct areas, including residential accommodation, day services, home-based services and case management; youth and children's services involving activities in disadvantaged areas, out-of-home care, supported accommodation and community social housing, domestic violence counselling and support, and resilience-building programs in our schools; and health and legal services, sexual assault counselling, support for women escaping domestic violence, including emergency accommodation services, and support for people transitioning from our prison system back into the community. Fair Work Australia noted there was an incredible diversity of services. People working in these areas are working in sectors members of state Parliament will all be very familiar with, because these workers are absolutely at the forefront of a great deal of the legislation we consider in this place and the issues we deal with in our electorates.

It is important to note that the people that SACS workers are attending to and working with represent some of the most disadvantaged people in Victoria's community; they are people who are isolated, people who are homeless, people with chronic health conditions — people experiencing significant challenges in their lives. It has been noted throughout the campaign, including in the decisions of Fair Work Australia and indeed in submissions by state governments, that there is also a great emotional toll in a lot of this work. For people who do work for which

frankly a lot of us probably do not have the intestinal fortitude to have such an unfair and unjust level of remuneration is quite something.

In June 2010, around a year before that landmark decision in May, I was at the ALP state conference, and it was on that day that the then Premier, John Brumby, made the first Labor Party election commitment in the election year. At the conference the Premier announced that the Victorian government would back Fair Work Australia's decision on the pay claim for social workers and community service workers in the community sector. At the time Mr Brumby cited organisations such as Wesley Mission, Yooralla, Melbourne Citymission and Scope. He said he was proud to announce 'that a re-elected Labor government will back Fair Work Australia's decision on this pay claim'. Mr Brumby said:

We will factor in any wage increases to our service agreements with community service organisations and ensure those wage increases are passed on to workers.

He went on to talk about the emotionally taxing labour and the value of the work not being properly reflected through remuneration for a number of historic reasons.

I know that was a very exciting day for those who had been campaigning on those issues for years in the workplaces and in the community more broadly. It was a very happy occasion. The then Minister for Community Services, who is now the member for Bellarine in the other place, Lisa Neville, talked about the extent to which we understood this case — it would be easier to get this sentence out if I had not been up until 3.30 this morning; President, bear with me — —

Mr Leane — You are doing all right.

Ms PULFORD — Thanks, Mr Leane. The then Minister for Community Services talked about our expectation that the determination of Fair Work Australia may in the long run reflect the previous decision in Queensland where workers obtained wage rises of between 18 per cent and 37 per cent. On that day Cath Smith from the Victorian Council of Social Service said that a pay rise would boost recruitment in the community sector. She also said that people who are working in the housing sector cannot afford to buy a house and people who are working in financial counselling are finding themselves in financial hardship. She said it was not viable. She talked about a real workforce crisis in the social and community sector.

Later that day in a frenzy of pre-election me-tooism, the then shadow minister, the member for Doncaster in the

other place, Mary Wooldridge, was quick out of the blocks and said that a Baillieu government would also commit to 'pay justice' for the tens of thousands of workers, and she pledged to match the government's commitment if it won office. Ms Wooldridge described such a move as 'long overdue'. I think social and community sector workers in Victoria could probably have gone to the Victorian election in November 2010 with quite some degree of confidence that, no matter what the decision of the people at the election, the Victorian government would be supporting and fully funding any decision of Fair Work Australia on this case.

That was in 2010. If we fast forward to 2011, the opposition spokesperson, Mary Wooldridge, is now the Minister for Community Services and the then Leader of the Opposition, Ted Baillieu, is now the Premier of the state and, in 2011, as in so many other respects, there has been a little bit of nuancing and a little bit of back-peddalling from the Victorian government on the issue of wages and industrial relations. The Victorian government's submission to Fair Work Australia following its decision of May — so this is in the period when deliberations are focused on a remedy — said among other things that gender is a reason, but not the only reason. Gender has, to a limited degree, contributed to the gap between the prevailing rates of pay in the SACS sector and rates of pay for employees in state and local government employment.

To clarify for members who are not quite familiar with these issues, that was the section of the workforce that was the comparator to demonstrate the relatively lower pay of SACS workers. The Victorian government submission said that accordingly there existed little or no evidence before Fair Work Australia directed at establishing the extent to which wages in the SACS sector were lower than they would otherwise have been by reason only of gender considerations. The minister submitted that on the available evidence the only safe finding open to be made by Fair Work Australia was that gender had contributed to a limited degree to the gap. The Victorian government said there was no material before Fair Work Australia to enable that portion of the wages disparity to be precisely estimated or quantified.

Before the election the government was absolutely, 100 per cent, all fired up about pay equity. Then in 2011 there was quite a departure. The difference between the coalition in opposition and in government is quite stark. The position in the Baillieu government's submission following that decision of May 2011 can be contrasted to the submission made prior to the election, in which the Victorian government stated that the

provisions continued to require a comparison to be undertaken between work performed by women in a female-dominated industry and comparable work performed by men in a male-dominated industry. It said there was a need to engage in a work value assessment which was gender neutral.

The former Victorian government prior to the May 2011 decision — the Victorian government that I was a part of — submitted that it accepted that work in the SACS industry was predominantly undertaken by women and that the value of such work had not always been reflected in the pay SACS workers received.

The coalition's submissions on this issue have changed somewhat since the election. This is another example of the way the coalition has said one thing on workforce and industrial relations issues before the election and another after the election. There have been examples of that in relation to police negotiations. The coalition promised that Victorian teachers would be the highest paid in the commonwealth, but it very quickly back-peddled on that.

There is also the approach in regard to the bargaining process involving nurses. Members have seen in the media parts of the leaked cabinet submission which outlines an apparent strategy to bring on a dispute with nurses. The submission flags extraordinary measures. There have been dysfunctional negotiations going on with the public sector employees. SACS workers know from their experience that the coalition has quite a different attitude to these issues since being in government compared to its attitude when it was in opposition and that this attitude is not something that is limited to their work.

This boils down to a notion of a gender pay gap. Despite what the Victorian government has submitted this year, the full bench of Fair Work Australia has determined that gender is a significant factor. People working in the SACS sector have known this for a very long time, the federal government has known it for a very long time as has the Labor Party in Victoria.

Believe it or not, it has been 42 years since the first equal pay determination — that is a really long time. In 1969 the former Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission introduced the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. We can fast-forward 42 years. A great deal has changed for women in the community and in our society in 42 years. There are more of us in this place than there were 42 years ago. We are represented in decision making at all levels of the community, and that is of course a wonderful thing.

On the question of equal pay, 42 years after that initial determination by the commonwealth tribunal, women are still paid 18 per cent less than men. 'How can that happen?', you may ask. What this means is that, on average, women — not one woman versus one man but when you compare women's earnings with men's — need to work 66 days more each year to earn the same amount. That is quite a while.

Members will no doubt have heard about or perhaps even participated in Equal Pay Day events. Equal Pay Day marks — celebrates would not be the right word — the day on which we can reflect that some 66 days into the new financial year women have earned what their male counterparts earned in the previous financial year. Who is affected by this? These are people who work in youth substance abuse services, in women's health, in supporting the many carers in the community, and social workers like those who are with us in the gallery today. Other people who are affected are those they care for and their families. Whilst many people who work in the SACS sector choose to work in that sector because they love the work and want to contribute to society through their work in supporting the most vulnerable people in our community, that does not mean that their households and their families ought to be disadvantaged by lower incomes because the work is caring or is predominantly done by women.

Just to give an example — and I have taken this from the Prime Minister's speech on 10 November — in the disability sector a worker with a degree qualification supervising five staff members can be earning \$38 000 a year. Contrast that with the average yearly wage for SACS workers of \$46 000 and general average yearly earnings in the order of \$58 000. Here we are in November 2011, 42 years after the original equal pay decision, and we are very near to the culmination of decades of work to achieve more equal pay. Now is the time for the Baillieu-Ryan government to get serious.

Equal remuneration provisions first appeared in federal legislation in 1994. There were 16 unsuccessful applications to prosecute the argument about pay equity in accordance with those provisions. The fair work legislation enacted by the commonwealth government introduced the notion of equal pay for work of comparable value, and as the Prime Minister said in her speech earlier this month, this was a consciously wider test than had existed under WorkChoices. The recent announcement by the Australian Services Union and the federal government was only possible for a number of reasons. It was possible because of the sustained campaign for pay justice by employees in the community sector, assisted and supported by their

unions — the ASU, the Health and Community Services Union and the Australian Education Union.

It was also only possible because of the legal framework that federal Labor put in place to enable a new test to properly consider the reality of pay inequity for so many tens of thousands of workers in Victoria. In Victoria this was possible because of a commitment made by John Brumby in June 2010 and significant work undertaken by my colleague and friend Lisa Neville to support that commitment in the lead-up to the announcement.

I am quite sure the Baillieu government announced its response to Labor's announcement on the afternoon of the day on which Labor's announcement was made. That demonstrates to us that the coalition only made that commitment because Labor had made its announcement at its state conference in June last year.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Ms PULFORD — Yes, Mr Lenders, and that is something that I hope we get an answer to from government speakers today. The coalition's promise to SACS workers was made a couple of days before the election, and it was confirmed by Mary Wooldridge on the same day that John Brumby made Labor's announcement. The coalition followed with a quick, 'Me too! We will be in that'. Hopefully its promises are a little more substantial than the promise it made to teachers about making them the best paid in the commonwealth.

It is time for Victoria to do the right thing. Negotiations have continued between the unions, their members and the commonwealth government, so the commonwealth has a significant achievement in this area. This is a lesson for Victoria about how industrial relations and pay equity can be dealt with in a constructive manner. The members of the ASU who are here today and who work in the sector — —

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, it is against standing orders to refer to any section of this house outside the chamber, such as the gallery or persons in it. I draw that to the member's attention.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! There is no point of order, but I remind the member of the standing orders.

Ms PULFORD — Thank you. To ASU members who may be listening anywhere — this is being broadcast on the internet — and people who work in the sector in my electorate and across Victoria, I

congratulate them on their efforts in this campaign. It has been a long fight — 42 years in some respects. Specifically on this case it has been years, and it has been a couple of years since the Queensland decision. Fair Work Australia made a significant decision in May to recognise the role of gender in pay rates of SACS workers. Those people should be very proud of their achievements, because I think we are on the verge of a historic moment in terms of how wages are determined in this country for many tens of thousands of people.

This motion calls on the Victorian government to take this matter seriously and to commit to the SACS workers that which government members promised in the lead-up to the election. To Mr Baillieu and Mr Ryan, to the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Mr Dalla-Riva, who is in the chamber: the deadline looms! There is an opportunity in the final stages of Fair Work Australia's consideration of these matters for the Liberal government in Victoria to do the right thing at Fair Work Australia. This government campaigned in large part in the lead-up to the election on the question of the cost of living and the needs of Victorian families. This is as good an example of helping people with the cost of living and supporting Victorian families as I can think of. This matter absolutely pertains to the lives of people in Victoria who are concerned about the cost of living. There is no greater response to cost of living challenges than a decent job and a decent rate of pay.

The Victorian government has not yet provided a response to the announcement made by the commonwealth government on 10 October. Fair Work Australia will continue hearing these matters on the 28th of this month — next week. Time is of the essence, so I ask the Victorian government not to oppose the joint submission but indeed to support in principle the commonwealth government and Australian Services Union agreement that I have spoken about. As my motion suggests, I ask the Victorian government to do as its members said they would do before the election and fully fund any decision of Fair Work Australia to provide pay equity to SACS workers in Victoria.

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — This discussion of the social and community services sector — the motion brought to this chamber by Ms Pulford today — gives Baillieu government members a very good opportunity to refute a whole range of myths that have just been perpetrated by the opposition.

In our contributions we will talk about real facts and real issues. Ms Pulford talked about the issue of the cost

of living. It is very disappointing that Ms Pulford played politics on this issue rather than talk about a lot of the measures by which we are meeting this issue with a great deal of respect for the workers concerned. However, it is the cost of living issue I would like to bring her up on, because right through her contribution she sprinkled in mentions of the Prime Minister. If there is ever going to be something that talks about the cost of living, it is the carbon tax — an indictment of the entirety of this country. If we are going to talk about the issue of the cost of living, then I ask Ms Pulford to have a closer look at the numbers on the carbon tax.

However, as I said, the debate on this motion gives us a very good opportunity to refute some myths. I ask the chamber to bear with us as we talk about what some of those issues might be — real issues and facts, not myth, union rhetoric or going back into the past and talking about 40 years of something and the bleeding heart exhibition we have just heard.

The Baillieu government strongly supports the principle of gender pay equity and values the demanding work done by community sector workers, who are predominantly women. I make the point that since November last year I personally have been out in the field looking at the very workers Ms Pulford mentioned earlier. She talked about social workers, mental health workers, those who work in drug abuse and about disability. I can assure Ms Pulford that the Minister for Community Services, Mary Wooldridge, has been out talking and working with those people; indeed so have I. In fact one of the very first things that Ms Wooldridge did as minister in January was go and speak to child protection workers in Gippsland. It was a very fruitful exercise. Ms Wooldridge spent an great amount of time speaking to them, listening to their concerns and working through their concerns. For the first time as a minister she listened to what the child protection workers had to say.

I might add that the former Labor minister had not been down to Gippsland to engage with those workers at all. The former minister had been down there cutting ribbons — she was very good at cutting ribbons and media spin — but she had not been down there to work with people at the coalface. Minister Wooldridge did go down there and she listened and that has been reflected in a lot of the work she has done since that time.

Recently a number of workers demonstrated outside the Malmesbury Youth Training Centre — I think reports have been shown on all the television channels. I have an enormous amount of respect for the workers at that centre. I have visited it many times, and I think the work people do there is absolutely commendable. I

know that those workers are at the coalface in very difficult circumstances and have to deal with the people who come under their care and within their orbit. Those people deal with their clients very sensitively, and I think they are to be highly commended. Most of these dedicated people are women — I will come back to that in a moment — however, it has to be noted that the Baillieu government has consistently supported the principle of gender pay equity.

The government acknowledges that gender has, to some extent, contributed to the wage disparity between community sector workers and those in the public sector, but there have been other non-gender factors, such as superior bargaining outcomes in the public sector and funding arrangements, which have also contributed to the gap. We have to balance those factors in this debate.

The principle of gender equality is very important, so let us get that out of the way. All in this chamber agree on gender equality, and many members have reiterated that over the years since my election to this chamber. The Baillieu government has already committed to providing \$200 million in funding over four years. That is consistent with the responsible management of the state's finances and the need to maintain a strong Victorian economy.

Ms Pulford went on at length in her contribution about what she called a frenzy of pre-election commitments from Ms Wooldridge when, as the shadow Minister for Community Services, she met the Brumby government's commitment to wage equity. Let me just take members step by step through the Brumby government's contribution; they will see just how mean and inadequate that contribution actually was.

I remind this chamber again that the Baillieu government has committed \$200 million over four years, and that is consistent with the state finances and the responsibility to the Victorian economy. The Baillieu government — and this is an important fact, not a myth — was the first Australian government to put money on the table. It is still the only government with specific funding in its budget. Prior to the election last year both the Labor government and the then opposition said that wage equity was important. The then Premier, John Brumby — and this was referred to by Ms Pulford in her contribution — said the amount needed to fund the pay equity case was \$50 million per year. We in the coalition noted in our pre-election financial commitments that \$200 million would be needed to fund the outcome of the case. Guess how much the Labor Party committed? Not one cent.

As the major parties went to the 2010 election on this important issue of wage parity for women in the community services sector, the coalition committed \$200 million and the Labor Party committed absolutely nothing. Who was the Treasurer at the time? None other than Mr Lenders, who is in the chamber at the moment. He did not commit a cent. I reiterate that the major parties went to the election in November 2010 on this important issue of wage parity for women in the community services sector. The coalition committed \$200 million, and the Labor Party committed nothing. I did not hear Ms Pulford explain in her contribution why the Labor Party did not commit one cent to wage equity prior to the election, and perhaps she will have something to say about that if she does a wrap-up of this debate. Perhaps the next speaker from the Labor side might wish to address the point that the Labor Party did not commit one cent prior to the election, while the coalition committed \$200 million.

It has been very interesting to reflect upon a lot of the successes of the Baillieu government in its first year. An enormous amount of promises we made prior to being elected have been kept in our first year in government. We are very proud of our record and the range of election promises that we took to the electorate with openness and transparency in November last year. In our first year 130 of those promises have been honoured, and the commitment to provide \$200 million in funding to cover the decision of Fair Work Australia on the social and community services sector was a big promise.

Members will find that commitment on page 50 of budget paper 3, which was presented by the Treasurer, Kim Wells, in May this year. It is there in black and white on page 50 of budget paper 3. That is a huge contrast to the sort of glossy, over-the-top style favoured by Mr Lenders when he was the Treasurer in the last Labor government. There was a lot of spin; they were very good at spin.

What did other governments across the country do in their budgets? Another myth presented here by Ms Pulford is that the Victorian coalition government is in fact dragging the chain. Let me clarify the facts once again. What did other governments across Australia do in their budgets? How many governments made specific budget commitments to the wage equity case? Not the Queensland Labor government, not the Tasmanian Labor government and not the South Australian Labor government. The West Australian Liberal government made some financial commitments, but those commitments were not tied to the Fair Work Australia case. The Gillard Labor government presented its budget in May this year a week after the

Treasurer delivered the Baillieu government's first budget. Guess how much the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, and federal Treasurer Wayne Swan committed in their budget papers to pay equity? Not one cent. The Labor Party, both state and federal, failed to commit a single dollar prior to Fair Work Australia's hearings, while the Baillieu government committed to providing and budgeting for \$200 million.

The Victorian government has engaged actively in the proceedings before Fair Work Australia this year, and it has adopted a responsible approach. I acknowledge on the record the phenomenal job undertaken by Mr Dalla-Riva, the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, in the negotiations. He has worked fairly and equitably, he has done an excellent job and he is to be commended. As he rightly said to me during an interchange between speakers in this debate, 'It is such a pity and very disappointing that the Labor Party has chosen to politicise this particular issue'. If we are to have some outcomes that reflect the \$200 million that we have set aside, Mr Dalla-Riva's negotiations, which he undertook fairly and openly, are to be commended.

Fair Work Australia delivered an initial decision, and it is interesting to look at and reiterate the key findings of the decision. It found that in the social and community services sector — I will use the acronym SACS — workers are predominantly women and are generally remunerated at a level below that of employees of state and local governments; that there may be a number of reasons for this difference, and that an assessment of the extent of contributing factors, including gender, needs to be made; that a male comparator is not required, nor is it necessary to establish that rates have been established on a discriminatory basis; that the fact remains that there is a large gap in many cases between the rates paid in the SACS industry and those paid in state and local government, and to the extent the gap is gender based we should take action to correct that if indeed we can; and finally that the gap is not only attributable to gender, although gender has an important influence. The full bench invited further submissions from the parties on the extent to which wages in the SACS industry are lower than they would otherwise be because of gender considerations.

Two weeks ago the commonwealth government advised the Victorian government that the commonwealth and the Australian Services Union, the ASU, had agreed to make a joint submission to Fair Work Australia, although very little information was provided to enable a proper assessment of the details or the effect of that submission.

I have quite a large document here, dated 17 November 2011, headed 'Fair Work Australia, no. C2010/3131 — in the matter of: application by the Australian Municipal, Administrative, Clerical and Services Union and others for an equal remuneration order', and subtitled 'Joint submission of the applicants and the Australian government on remedy'. Some may say that this was a backroom deal between the ASU and Prime Minister Gillard, but it does make very interesting reading, in fact very interesting bedtime reading. If any of us had got to bed last night, we perhaps could have read it when we got there, but in fact we all had very little sleep last night.

I refer to pages 14 and 15 of this document. Ms Pulford said a lot about this document and some of the issues in it and she put a lot of emphasis on the gender issue, but she left out quite a bit. This is the issue that I take umbrage with because, if we are going to have this debate, it is very important to have it as a really objective debate. It is a very important debate, and as women in this chamber we know that better than anyone — and Ms Pulford and I agree on many issues to do with the equality of women and indeed have been on the same side on women's issues in many cases. It is important that we have an objective debate on this, because all of us in this state want equality for women in every sense. As legislators we have an opportunity to do something about it. But it cannot be done in the heat of the moment with union bans and hysteria perpetrating myths. We need to make certain that we talk about it objectively.

I know Ms Tierney is going to be another speaker for the opposition, and I know she has a long history of involvement with the unions. I am quite certain that in her contribution she will bring up a number of pertinent examples, but it is important to be mindful of where we go from here, and we should be mindful of the Baillieu government having put \$200 million on the table to deal with this issue. We recognised and acknowledged it was an issue. We want to work to get a resolution on this issue, and it is really important that we get the rhetoric right. We can sit here and beat it up. As Ms Pulford acknowledged before, we have a vigorous audience in the gallery, but it is important for us to deal with this issue on the facts if we are going to get a proper resolution, because at the end of the day I think we all want to see a resolution.

I am going to read quite extensively from this Fair Work Australia C2010/3131 report, because it lays out the whole issue quite well. I have to say this is not coming from the Baillieu government; this is Labor through and through, and indeed federal and state Labor together with the unions. I am going to read from

page 14, and I ask for the indulgence of the chamber. It is important to understand the issue. I will mention from the outset the fact that the report says that gender is an issue. The report states under the heading ‘Gender pay cap in the SACS sector’:

2.34 In its decision of 16 May 2011, the bench considered the characteristics of SACS work and concluded:

We have already recorded our view that the workforce is predominantly female. We deal next with the female characterisation of work. There is much to be said for the view that work in the industry bears a female characterisation. In our view the applicants have established the following propositions:

- (a) much of the work in the industry is ‘caring’ work
- (b) the characterisation of work as caring work can disguise the level of skill and experience required and contribute, in a general sense, to a devaluing of the work
- (c) the evidence of workers, managers and union officials suggests that the work, in the SACS industry, again in a general sense, is undervalued to some extent, and
- (d) because caring work in this context has a female characterisation, to the extent that work in the industry is undervalued because it is caring work, the undervaluation is gender based.

That is the line of argument we are dealing with here. But in paragraph 2.35 at page 14 it goes on to say:

It is important to note that while caring work is one basis on which gender undervaluation of wages in the SACS sector can be identified, it is not the only contributing factor. The way this factor interacts with the unexplained gender pay gap is important.

I will remind members of what I said at the beginning of my contribution about how disappointed we are that the opposition is playing up the politics of that. In the notice of motion that Ms Pulford is arguing this morning she asks that the house:

- (3) further notes that FWA recently made a landmark decision recognising the role gender has played in the undervaluing of work in the community sector ...

In her contribution Ms Pulford intimated that that was the only issue, but this is not the only issue — and that is my point. The basis of this whole motion is that it is the gender issue that has caused this undervaluation of work in the community sector. But in their very own document they refute this, and that is the objectivity we need to put into this debate. Gender most definitely is an element, but it is not the only element. It is important when we are debating this motion to keep that focus and to understand that that is the base from where we are coming.

Going back to this document prepared by the ASU in its backroom deal with the Gillard government, in paragraph 2.36 at page 15 it says:

England, Virtue and Folber suggest that the extent to which caring work is undervalued because of the nurturant skill involved is a factor which should be added on top of the unexplained gender pay gap in order to ascertain the true extent of gender-based undervaluation in caring occupations:

‘Care work carries a wage penalty (that) cannot be explained by low unmeasured human capital or a disinclination to bargain for high pay amongst care workers, because these individual characteristics would presumably affect their pay in all jobs ... the same person earns less when in an occupation coded as care work than when working in other occupations’.

Once again we are developing the argument, but the argument in the ASU submission is I think equitable if you look at what we go on to in paragraph 2.37 on page 15, which states:

This imprecise interaction and layering of factors which contribute to gender-based undervaluation of wages emphasises that the task of identifying the full extent of the degree to which the wages in the SACS modern award are undervalued on a gender basis cannot be performed with precision.

And paragraph 2.38 on the same page states:

An assessment of gender-based undervaluation which focuses on the degree of caring work performed in the SACS sector will give one indication of the extent to which the work is undervalued. Such an exercise can never reflect the true or full extent of such undervaluation as some degree of undervaluation will always fall to the unexplained gender pay gap and cannot be measured.

I repeat: ‘cannot be measured’. When we are dealing with something as sensitive as this, as difficult as this and as challenging as this, we have to remember that we do not want to denigrate the work that the largely female workers do. It is exceedingly difficult. That has been acknowledged by the ASU. It is extremely difficult to understand and to value what this work is.

In my travels right around Victoria and in looking at many disability venues, some of which are so uplifting — it is a pity that we do not have time today, because I would like to talk about some of the fabulous and uplifting things that I have seen across the state — one of the things I have seen is that this very caring aspect should be put on the highest pedestal. There are certainly elements in disability, in mental health and in a whole range of areas where that extra mile of care makes the difference. We are talking about dealing with vulnerable people who have some challenging behaviours and challenging issues in their lives — and such care cannot be prescribed.

There is one example I know of in regional Victoria, and it is someone who for most of their life had lived in an institution. This person was fortunate enough to go into a group house; the resident is non-ambulatory and non-verbal. This person had never before been in a kitchen and for the very first time found out what a kitchen is. All of us in this chamber have probably stood in the kitchen when someone has been making a cake, licking a wooden spoon and absolutely relishing the smells and the textures of what is being prepared. This person had never before had that opportunity and now absolutely and utterly relishes the kitchen. The carers in that organisation spent a lot of time with this resident and made certain that the kitchen became a centre of delight. The kitchen became a whole new experience for him. He got to lick that wooden spoon, he got to do a whole range of things in the kitchen and he has had a fabulous experience which has enhanced his life.

It might seem trite, it might seem small to those of us who would take it for granted, but it is a very big and very important milestone for someone who has never before experienced something like that. How do you put a value on that? How do you put a value on the carers in that organisation? I am not suggesting for one minute that it was a male or a female carer; there were both male and female carers in this house and they all understood the care and compassion that was needed and experienced the fun and excitement of watching someone have this experience. This is important work, just as some of the challenging work is for those people who are at the front line at the coalface in Malmsbury.

Malmsbury is a very interesting facility in that it is an open prison. It is on a farm, it is in the country and it deals with a whole range of young offenders. Victoria has a very different program for dealing with young offenders: it has a two-track system, which works extremely well. We are the only state that has a system such as this, the aim of which is to prevent young people from reoffending. It is designed to help people get back into the mainstream community as quickly and as effectively as they possibly can. Some of the people I have spoken to at Malmsbury are offenders who have done such things as be the negligent driver in a car accident that kills their mates.

This is a particularly pertinent issue in that Mr Ramsay gave a very poignant members statement yesterday in this chamber about the young people who were killed in Penshurst last week. Mr O'Brien has given a very poignant members statement today as well. It is very difficult for all the families concerned in something so tragic. In this instance the driver was killed too, but in many instances the driver is not. The driver who kills

their mates is the one who ends up in Malmsbury in many instances. Just imagine how that must feel. Not only have you killed your mates, which is a lifetime sentence, but you are incarcerated as well. What sort of workers do we need to deal with someone who is having to process these types of experiences? We need very special people. The workers at Malmsbury are dealing with people who have had unexpected incidents occur in their lives. They have ended up at Malmsbury never ever having expected that that would be part of their life experience. How do we deal with that?

Those carers, those people, those workers at the coalface — they go that extra mile. They deal with people who are having a difficult time, and they are to be totally commended. That is another reason we have to make certain that what we are talking about in this debate today reflects what is happening at the coalface. We have \$200 million on the table. The proof is there: unlike Labor states in this country, the Baillieu government has \$200 million on the table.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Mrs COOTE — Mr Lenders is interjecting here. As he is a member of the Labor Party, I would like to remind him of what I said earlier in my contribution. I would like to reiterate again the Labor Party's track record and this myth that Mr Lenders, Ms Pulford and all the other members of the opposition like to perpetrate. Let me ask once more: what did the other governments across this country do in their budgets? I ask Mr Lenders: how many governments made specific budget commitments in their wage equity case? The Queensland Labor government did not, nor did the Tasmanian Labor government, nor the South Australian Labor government — none of those Labor governments did. There was not 1 cent from Mr Lenders's friend and former colleague the Prime Minister, Ms Gillard, and neither was there 1 cent from federal Treasurer Wayne Swan.

Let us get it on the record. The Baillieu government has \$200 million. We recognised the issue at the time of the election, we went to the election with it and we told the people of Victoria that that is what we were going to do, as we did with so many of our other election promises. We said in November what we were intending to do and how we were going to do it; we went to the electorate and the electorate voted us in on it. They put us in here because they knew that we were being open and transparent and not being surrounded by spin, and that is exactly what we have done — 130 policies with which we went to the election have already been fulfilled this year.

But let us come back to this particular issue. Let us come back to those very workers that the members opposite talk about in all those unions that they name and all of those people. Let me assure those unions. They should go and have a look at our budget, the first budget by the Treasurer, Mr Wells. They should go and have a look at it and see the \$200 million that is there. The Baillieu government put its money where it said it would with that \$200 million.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs COOTE — I suspect that Mr Lenders has had a very difficult time coming to terms with the fact that he is no longer the Treasurer and that is very concerning for him, and I do acknowledge how difficult being in opposition can be.

Ms Broad interjected.

Mrs COOTE — I hear Ms Broad as well, and Ms Broad also has some problems understanding that Labor is now in opposition. They are in opposition now and they have to go back and defend some of the things that they did not do. Members opposite had 11 years to fix this, but we did not see it.

Hon. P. R. Hall interjected.

Mrs COOTE — As Minister Hall says, we know we are winning the argument when we get such feeble interjections as we are getting on this issue from opposition members. We know that they do not want to acknowledge that we have the \$200 million on the table. Let me tell you, we are out there. I think it is very salutary to understand — —

Ms Broad interjected.

Mrs COOTE — Ms Broad, we all had a very late night last night, but it is important that we deal with this matter with dignity and objectivity, and indeed we are here today to talk about this motion that has been moved by Ms Pulford. As Minister Dalla-Riva has said, it is a great pity that the politics of this are being played out rather than us looking at the negotiation opportunities. The opposition prides itself on all of the union work that it has done for all these years, but its members are not prepared to sit down and negotiate. They do not want to have an objective discussion and debate about this issue.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order!

Mrs COOTE — Acting President, this is a very important debate, and I do not believe I need any assistance from the backbench of the opposition. I think it is timely to think about where we actually go from here and to take a moment to reflect, once again building on the \$200 million that I have mentioned in many parts of my contribution.

In relation to the commonwealth and ASU submission that we have got here, which was put in late last week, it is interesting to see that it is pretty thin when you go through and have a look at it. But as I read out before, there are some important elements that are actually overarching and should be considered — that is, not just zeroing in on one particular element.

The Victorian government will now consider the commonwealth's joint position with the ASU and seek further information to assess its financial impact and the proposed commonwealth funding. The Victorian government has been advised by the commonwealth that the officials will work through the details of the arrangements. At a meeting last week commonwealth officials refused to discuss the financial aspects of the proposal. Once again, as I said, it is a great pity that we are dealing with a whole range of myths — Labor is not prepared to do the negotiation at which it is supposedly so good. The commonwealth must provide full details of what level of funding it considers to be its fair share of the costs of the outcome it is proposing and to guarantee that its contribution will be ongoing.

This is a very important element, and the Labor Party is so good at doing this in the states and federally — it is really good at coming out with these great big-issue comments but then the funding devil is certainly in the detail. In this instance we are not certain what the commonwealth's ongoing contribution is going to be. It is like all those lapsing programs we found coming into government about which the members opposite made a song and dance, and yet they were not funded into the future. They are very good at spin but not good at the fine detail.

Ms Broad interjected.

Mr Ramsay — On a point of order, Acting President, Ms Broad is debating the contribution from Mrs Coote. There are ongoing and continual interjections. Could you ask Ms Broad to refrain from interjecting any further and to refrain from debating Mrs Coote?

Ms Broad — On the point of order, Acting President, I think it is well known that under the standing orders in this place interjections are unruly.

However, interjections can also be provoked by the contributions to debate of members in this place. Constant references to the opposition, other jurisdictions and the commonwealth government provoke interjections.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr O'Brien) — Order! There is no point of order. Interjections are disorderly. Speeches can sometimes provoke interjections and some level of debate across the chamber. I ask Mrs Coote to return to her contribution.

Mrs COOTE — Honestly, Ms Broad has been here for 12 years, and it is extraordinary if she is starting to get precious over the debate on a motion that the Labor Party provocatively put up. We have had a moment of Ms Broad being precious because she cannot cope with the political matters being brought up as a result of the opposition moving this motion. It is a Labor Party motion. If Ms Broad is so precious about all this, she should have talked to her colleague Ms Pulford and Labor should not have moved it in the first place. If she cannot cope with it, she should not sit in the chamber and interject. It is an absolutely absurd and unfounded interjection from Ms Broad. This is a place of debate and confrontation; it is a place where we bring up a range of issues. If members of the opposition did not want us to turn around and tell them the truth — that Labor did not put this money in, but the coalition went to the election with \$200 million on the table and has honoured that commitment — and if Ms Broad cannot cope with that, she should not have brought up the motion in the first place.

I would like to recap.

Mr Ramsay — Glass jaw.

Mrs COOTE — I quite agree with Mr Ramsay's very good interjection. That is exactly what it is, a glass jaw. The opposition can mete it out, but it cannot take it. If Ms Broad feels tired and emotional, I feel sorry for her, but this is a vigorous debate about an important issue to which the Baillieu government is very committed — —

Ms Broad interjected.

Mrs COOTE — We are not in a union meeting here, Ms Broad; we are in the Parliament of Victoria debating a significant issue.

Let us recap. The Victorian coalition government strongly supports the principle of gender pay equity. We have provided real support to this principle by committing \$200 million over four years in the last state budget to address the Fair Work Australia

decision. The Baillieu government will remain actively engaged in the proceedings before Fair Work Australia. We are still trying to determine exactly what the commonwealth has committed to and how it will affect services in Victoria. We await the details of the commonwealth's proposal and what it might mean, and we will provide advice to Fair Work Australia on what that proposal may mean for organisations that provide services to the most disadvantaged people across Victoria. The Baillieu government wants an outcome that addresses gender pay inequity in the community services sector. We will continue to work towards a fair outcome.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — It is difficult when we have these kinds of debates because the chamber becomes so divided. I understand this sector very well. I worked for the Western Region Health Centre for five years, and I was an active member of the Australian Services Union (ASU). I saw the kind of work that social and community services workers do. I worked in the older persons high-rise program dealing with people who had serious medical issues and people who were alcoholics and generally had no family support because they had lost all their ties. Sometimes I had to arrange other accommodation for them. It was a fantastic program, but it was incredibly hard work and we were extremely underpaid and undervalued. The Western Region Health Centre also provides services like HealthWorks, which operates a needle exchange and deals with people who have serious alcohol and drug addiction problems — often people who have dual diagnoses of alcohol and psychiatric issues.

While I was not in the chamber on the day Ms Pulford described — when the petition was presented and she felt there was disdain and acrimony towards it — I have experienced something like that a number of times in the chamber. Whenever you mention a union, you are immediately called a union stooge, with the implication that you cannot think for yourself and that you are talking from a union script.

I have been a union member since I first started work at the age of 18. I learnt about unionism from my parents, who were factory workers in the Latrobe Valley. It was often their union that supported them on health and safety issues, and because my father had a serious mental illness it was often the union delegate and union organiser who made sure that my father's pay was continued while he worked for the State Electricity Commission of Victoria and then the tramways. That is what unions have done for me. I find it quite offensive when members on the other side suggest that anybody who is a member of a union is not thinking for

themselves, is reading from a union script or does not know what they are talking about. I know what I am talking about because I have experienced what it is to be a member of a union.

I was an active member of the Australian Services Union for the five years that I worked at the Western Region Health Centre, and I continue to support union activities and the incredible campaign that the ASU has run on this issue. I will never forget the day ASU members marched up Bourke Street singing *She Works Hard for the Money*, because for me that sums it up — it is women who work in these industries, and we are talking about equal pay for women.

I have not heard from Mrs Coote as to what, exactly, the government would do. She has told us there is money in the budget. When will there be a line item? When will we know whether it will be used as an excuse to cut services, which are absolutely running on the smell of an oily rag now?

I do not understand what it is about the Liberal-Nationals coalition that makes it unable to understand that women are underpaid and underrespected in their workforces. I do not understand why the Liberal-Nationals coalition has such disdain for unions. Mrs Coote talked about the incredible work that people do in this sector. She talked about child protection workers, but in fact the government is in dispute with child protection workers; it is in dispute with nurses; it is in dispute with people who keep this state going on many different levels. The Greens will actively support the Australian Services Union's equal pay campaign, and we absolutely support this motion today.

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — I was not going to enter into this debate today, because my colleague Ms Pulford succinctly outlined why the opposition has moved this motion, but after the contribution from Mrs Coote I thought it was important to put a few matters about the pay equity case on the record — in particular, what the Brumby government had done — and to deal with some of the myths put forward by Mrs Coote about where the parties stand on this matter.

I make it unequivocally clear that the reason Ms Pulford moved this motion, as she said at the start of her contribution to the debate, was the cacophony of ridicule from the government benches back on 30 June when members got up in this house at the start of the day to present petitions from 10, 50, 100, 500, or whatever the number was, constituents who were calling for pay equity. Close to every member of the opposition had received petitions from constituents who

were calling for the government to support the pay equity outcome. That is what provoked Ms Pulford to put the motion on the notice paper for debate in this house. There is a marked contrast between Mrs Coote saying the government is serious, responsive and the rest of it and what this chamber was like on 30 June, when other opposition members and I presented those petitions.

That position was reinforced when, while opposition members were presenting petitions, Mr Ramsay started interjecting that all opposition members were parroting the same lines. If Mr Ramsay and other government members think that presenting petitions from constituents is parroting someone's lines, then I suggest he ought reflect on what is the role of a member of Parliament. If a petitioner asks you to present a petition calling for pay equity and you are howled down and accused of just parroting someone's line, that is grave disrespect to the petitioner. Let us get that on the record first; it is the reason Ms Pulford moved this motion.

Secondly, let us also put on the record where this issue came from. At a Labor Party conference last year former Premier Brumby said the first election commitment of a re-elected Labor government would be pay equity. He put it forward as a clear priority, that the first commitment made by Labor in the lead-up to the 2010 election was pay equity. He also made it absolutely clear in our discussions — and I had discussions with the Australian Services Union, the Health and Community Services Union and a range of others; and I also put on record that I am a member of the Australian Services Union and do not shy away from that — that we needed to learn the lessons from Queensland on how pay equity should be implemented and that the Victorian Labor government would fund the pay equity part for the portion of the workers it employed. We were clear with the sector about what we would do: we would support the case, and we had discussions going forward.

If Mrs Coote would talk to the Treasurer, Mr Wells — and I will give him credit; I assume he understands his budget papers — she would know there was a contingency in the budget papers for exactly that amount. These matters were difficult for us to quantify, as they are difficult for the current government to quantify, but there is a contingency in the budget for the commitment.

It is interesting to note what Mr Wells said when he leapt up and presented his Yates Partners shonky document that attempts to justify the election commitment: 'We will do exactly what Labor did; if it fits into Labor's budget, we will match it'. Let us not go

through any semantic nonsense; both sides of politics said they would do it. John Brumby came out first, followed by Premier Ted Baillieu and Mary Wooldridge, who is now the Minister for Community Services. That is not about one-upmanship; they are just the facts. Now we have the situation where the coalition has won the election, and it is its obligation, as it has said, to fix the problems.

The government has identified this as a problem, and it has an opportunity to fix it. We have the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and the Parliamentary Secretary for Families and Community Services in the chamber, and they have options to fix this.

What has happened since the federal election is that the government, just a week or so ago, has come out with an explicit commitment in this area. What this motion is doing is simply reflecting the historical disrespect in this chamber when opposition members present petitions in this area. The historical fact is that Labor put this issue on the table, Labor budgeted for it as well as it could in the circumstances and the then opposition members said, 'We will match that'. But they are doing nothing about it. Talk is cheap, and government members talk and they talk. Mrs Coote talks about all the people to whom she has been talking — and good on her; that is important — but what the sector expects is pay equity.

A process has been in place to address this issue over a number of years. It is now being embraced by the commonwealth government as well as by a number of states. Now is the time to deal with it and show some commitment. I do not think it is unreasonable for Ms Broad, Ms Pulford and others to be highly sceptical of the government's bona fides on this. Why are we sceptical? I specifically recall that when I was a minister at the time of the teachers enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations Mr Hall got up during general business in this place and subsequently the then Leader of the Opposition got up in the other place, and they said a coalition government would make teachers the best paid in Australia. That has gone from a commitment to an aspiration. While attaining the status as the best paid in Australia requires an increase of 8 per cent or 9 per cent, what is being offered is 2.5 per cent.

I get the reality of budgets and of being able to deal with matters, but I do not get how the government could make that commitment when it knew absolutely that it could not deliver it. What we are asking for is some commitment to the promise the government made in this chamber, which was budgeted for and which

was in the contingencies in the budget. Mrs Coote said in an attempt at one-upmanship, 'Kim Wells put it in; Labor didn't'. If that is the case — and I completely dispute that; I ask her to look at the contingencies — if the money is there, do it. That is the point we are making from this side.

The final thing I want to talk about is commitment. I will never let the government forget this point. Whenever it talks about pay equity, wages, fair bargaining or any of these sorts of issues, I remind it that the very first act, executive order 1 of the Baillieu government, was to increase the size of the cabinet by 10 per cent. Every time the Baillieu government comes out and says it cannot afford wages and cannot afford this or that, that it is bargaining in good faith, that the world has changed and the evil Julia Gillard has taken GST money, and talks about the evil trade unions and all the usual bogey people it puts up, I remind it that when the Governor invited Ted Baillieu to be the Premier, the very first advice — before Parliament was called and before cabinet met; before anything — was to increase the size of the cabinet by 10 per cent. Let us not hear from the other side about how times are tough and it is making hard decisions. The very first decision, executive order 1, of the Premier was to get Ms Lovell and Mr Dalla-Riva, or whatever the pair was, into the chamber to make them ministers, even though there might not have been the jobs.

We support this motion. It is partly about respect in this chamber. When opposition members table petitions on behalf of community sector workers the least they should be able to expect is that they be tabled with some respect. You do not expect the government to get up and endorse them, but it should at least show some respect. If Ms Pulford, Ms Broad, Mr Leane, Ms Tierney, Mr Elasmor or I lodge petitions, the least we should expect is that those citizens who bothered to sign the petitions are treated with some respect. That is the first part. What flows from that is exactly what Ms Pulford said: this motion is not just about those petitions, but they gave rise to our concern that this government is merely paying lip-service to this particular issue and is trying to find someone else to blame.

This is not an easy way to address years of systemic discrimination or the way this has evolved. This is not an easy solution. It is a graduated step based on what originally happened in Queensland, on what the Victorian Labor government did, on what the then opposition said it would do and on what the commonwealth is now doing. The commonwealth is putting money on the table to address over a period of several years an anomaly that has been there for a long

time and that was not picked up by the equal pay cases in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was not different pay for clearly the same job but different pay for jobs that were described differently but ultimately were the same.

This is not an easy issue, and no-one pretends it is. What we on this side are seeking is some respect and some commitment to a long-term process to address this systemic problem, not the inappropriate, disrespectful treatment that Ms Pulford and all of us got when all we did was come into this chamber with pieces of paper saying, 'Fifty or 100 of my constituents asked me to table this in the Parliament', and members opposite laughed us down in a cacophony of catcalls.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise to speak on Ms Pulford's motion. I do so because, like Mrs Coote, I have listened intently to this debate. I have to say at the outset that I find it quite extraordinary that this motion relates to claims of certain behaviour that occurred on 30 June this year. That is some five months ago. We have just heard Mr Lenders, in his contribution to the debate, talking about his disdain for members on this side of the house. If it was so appalling at the time and there is genuine concern from the opposition — —

Mr Lenders interjected.

Ms CROZIER — Mr Lenders, I am considering why it has taken five months for you to raise your outrage about this.

There has been a lot of discussion over many years. In fact there have been many newspaper columns written on the issue of pay inequality. Mrs Coote's contribution this morning reiterated the Baillieu government's strong support for the principles of gender pay equity. That has been the position of the coalition when in opposition and now in government.

In Ms Pulford's contribution to the debate she asked that the government take this matter seriously. I think Mrs Coote highlighted in her contribution just how seriously this government is taking this issue. We are going out there and speaking to the workers. Mrs Coote described a visit she undertook with the Minister for Community Services to Gippsland. That is what this government is doing — we are listening to people, whether they are workers or whether they are consumers. What the government has done in relation to this issue is exactly what it said it would do — that is, deliver on those commitments that we took to the Victorian people at last year's election.

Ms Hartland, in her contribution to the debate asked when this would be a line item. Can I remind Ms Hartland that in this year's budget the Treasurer — —

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Ms CROZIER — Oh, she is not in the chamber. Thank you for pointing that out, Mr Ondarchie. I am not sure how interested she is in this debate, but in any case — —

Mr Lenders — Acting President, I direct your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Ms CROZIER — I did draw attention to the fact Ms Hartland was not here. Thank you, Mr Lenders. I am pleased to say that there is a quorum, and I will continue on this very important issue in this very important debate. Page 50 of budget paper 3 presented by the Treasurer in May this year outlines the commitment of \$200 million to fund the forthcoming decision of Fair Work Australia for the social and community services sector, or SACS as it has been referred to. That commitment is a clear demonstration by this government of its support for this issue.

I would like to note a bit of history on this issue because Mr Lenders, in his contribution to the debate talked about the former Premier, Mr Brumby, having a clear priority in the lead-up to the election. The equal pay case actually commenced in March 2010. In the Labor budget in May 2010 there were no dollars attributed to this issue. I am sure Mr Brumby said a lot of things in the lead-up to last year's election, but I am just wondering how thought through they were. Mr Lenders says it was a clear priority. I am wondering when that clear priority came to his attention and indeed to the attention of the previous Premier.

The Liberal-Nationals coalition government put \$200 million into the budget over four years, so we have committed real dollars to the SACS pay equity test. As Mrs Coote has outlined, the Baillieu government was the party providing the support and the financial resources, not Labor. She did that very clearly and succinctly in her contribution to this debate and highlighted what the Gillard federal government is undertaking. She cited a number of very good examples of what this issue really boils down to. She made the point that we do not want to politicise this issue. It is too important to politicise. I think she spelt that out

clearly and she supported her contribution to the debate with facts.

Mr Lenders — It is too important to politicise, but you blame Julia Gillard.

Ms CROZIER — Mr Lenders, I have only been in this place for almost 12 months, but I continually heard your government blaming the previous Kennett government for 11 years.

Mr Lenders — You just said you are not politicising it, but you blame Julia Gillard.

Ms CROZIER — We are not politicising it, but Mrs Coote highlighted what the Australian Services Union and the Gillard government are doing in relation to this issue.

In terms of what the coalition is doing and its undertakings, this motion of Ms Pulford's has no basis, and I think that has been demonstrated in our commitment to provide \$200 million to deal with this issue. They are the facts.

Ms Pulford made a very good point in her contribution. She referred to last Wednesday as marking 100 years of women having had the vote in Victoria. I agree with Ms Pulford in relation to that; we have come an extraordinarily long way, and it is terrific to see that having been so over so many years. However, I want to take exception to the inference in her motion that Liberal-Nationals coalition members do not care about gender issues. This is absolutely wrong. The Liberal Party has a strong and proud history of having women involved at every level of the organisation, and in fact our founder, Sir Robert Menzies, ensured that there were equal gender rights across the organisation when the party was formed. We in the Liberal Party and The Nationals have a very equitable process. We preselect on merit, not on gender. Members will have heard me speak on this very issue previously in the house; I spoke on it in March on the centenary of International Women's Day.

I am very proud that the Liberal Party, along with The Nationals, has a very long and strong history in relation to gender-specific issues.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Ms CROZIER — I do not, however, want to dwell on those issues; I want to get back to the debate about this motion.

Mrs Coote interjected.

Ms CROZIER — Exactly! Where did they all go to? They were all on — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! Mr Lenders and Mrs Coote are holding a very interesting discussion, and I would be most interested in hearing it further, but not right now, because Ms Crozier has the call, and I do not think she needs any assistance from either member.

Ms CROZIER — I know Mrs Coote is passionate about this issue, as am I. She has proudly stood by her argument in relation to the actions she has taken. In this debate she has articulated clearly to the house the coalition government's strong support for the principles of gender pay equity, and I would like to reaffirm that support in relation to this issue.

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by Ms Pulford this morning. It is a timely reminder of an industrial matter that has been part of a community campaign for many years. It is a campaign for equity, and it is a campaign for justice. Equal pay has been talked about for many generations, but what do we mean by equal pay, and why do we not have it? Before this question can be answered it is important to understand what we mean by unequal pay and how it can be measured. It can be measured, firstly, by the direct comparison between male and female employees doing the same work but earning different wages and receiving different overtime rates and different access to overtime, rosters, bonuses and a whole range of other entitlements. It is also measured via the differences in pay between occupations and industry sectors which place greater value on certain types of work.

As the Equal Pay Alliance states, this difference in value is partly historical and emanates:

... from a time when women were not regarded as 'breadwinners' nor welcome in most parts of the workforce. 'Women's work' was, and still is, a term used to downplay the value of women's skills.

All these elements contribute to the wage gap we continue to have today. The wage gap is stuck at 18 per cent in 2011 — that is right; in this day and age we still have an 18 per cent wage inequity between men and women in the workforce.

Ms Pulford's motion draws our attention to the Australian Services Union's equal pay test case and the role and behaviour of the Victorian government. I am certainly not one for providing advice to this coalition state government, but with an industrial background of more than 25 years what I can say is that when it comes

to women making the decision to rectify an injustice and doing so on a collective basis the resolve women have can never be underestimated. To see this one need only look at the recent Baiada dispute. Once banded together, and regardless of age and social or cultural background, women are a formidable force.

The state government does not seem to know this. The ordinary voter out there watching the news or reading the newspaper might be forgiven for believing this government has deliberately attempted to take on women workers in this state in recent times. I say this because we currently have, as members know, the Australian Nursing Federation nurses dispute, the vast majority of those workers being women; we currently have the State Public Services Federation dispute, and again the vast majority of that membership is women; and we also have the teachers enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations taking place, where the government has walked away from its election commitment to make Victorian teachers the highest paid in the country, and again that profession is one where the majority are — yes, you guessed it — women. On the other hand we have seen an arrangement struck with the Police Association. For the record I state that I congratulate the Police Association on the agreement, and I certainly do not begrudge it its package.

What we have now is a government that is not prepared to put the wage increases and other conditions that it can afford to give to the police force on the table for other sectors, and of course those sectors — you have guessed it — are where there are a majority of women workers. The state government's position on equal pay has been a sad and sorry story. Not only has its election commitment been broken, it has also put a cap on the costs associated with equal pay, and this will most definitely lead to cuts in services and cuts in the number of jobs. It will result in fewer jobs for the women in the sector, and I just ask: is that what the government really wants?

But what I think is equally scandalous is the coalition's submission to Fair Work Australia on 29 July, which in some ways dismissed the role of gender and the way it is played out in the social and community services sector. I would assert that it also attempted to dilute and marginalise gender in the equal pay debate, and that is what galls me and absolutely affronts me. I submit that the submission turned the clock back beyond the original concept of equal pay and back beyond the campaign largely run by women in their fight for equal pay. In some ways I believe it created a whole new definition of 'back to the future', and it certainly lacked any understanding of systemic discrimination.

I suspect there are women on the other side of the chamber who are privately wringing their hands, because I know that for many years there have been women on both sides of the chamber who have fought side by side on the issue of equal pay — even as early as 1912, when women's minimum wage was first set at 54 per cent of men's wages. I think there would be some private mutterings amongst a number of women on the other side, because they know that they now have to argue gender and equal pay all over again within their own party. It is a sad day indeed when the work of so many is disregarded, and it is particularly so when significant parts of the equal pay campaign over the years have been bipartisan. That historical bipartisanship was thrown out of the door as soon as this coalition government was elected in November last year. It has walked away from the money; it has walked away from fixing equal pay; and it has walked away from women workers, particularly low-paid women workers.

The question is: what can be done? Essentially the state government needs to fulfil the election commitments it made to Victorian workers, it needs to value and increase the pay for what is historically known as women's work, it needs to uncap or remove the caveat of the \$50 million per annum for equal pay, and it needs to pay whatever is required to rectify unequal pay. Once that is done, the government needs to seriously rethink how it can provide a real and sustainable way to support Victorian workers, particularly those who are low paid and who are in gender-dominated workplaces. Trust has been broken in a serious way, and that trust cannot be easily rebuilt. But there is a way forward. The parties are back before Fair Work Australia next Monday, which will be an opportunity for the coalition to rectify its position. The situation has gone beyond the government playing hardball; this is a question about justice and about being fair. The government must stop trying to dilute or marginalise gender and using the historical context of women's work as a basis for unequal pay. The state government needs to follow the lead of the federal Labor government and do the right thing. It needs to stop talking about pedestals, it needs to stop the platitudes and it needs to stump up the real cash for justice and for fairness to prevail.

I commend the motion that Ms Pulford has put before the house this morning, and in doing so I also commend the members of the Australian Services Union on the shop floor, its organisers and other officials, other workers, other unions and other people in the community for keeping up the good fight to secure gender pay equity for this generation and for generations to come.

Mr O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — I have listened to the debate and I have asked to be on the speakers list to contribute briefly to the debate given the time constraints that this house is operating under. I need to say virtually no more than that I wholeheartedly endorse the excellent contributions that were made by Mrs Coote and Ms Crozier, which went to the heart of this issue — which is that the coalition government has been, will be and is right now absolutely committed to gender pay equity. We have committed to the \$200 million allocation in the budget, and we absolutely refute any suggestion that there is a deliberate attempt to take on the women of this state as suggested by Ms Tierney in her contribution.

I also refute and take offence at any suggestion that coalition members have expressed disdain, as is outlined at the start of the motion. I also lend the wholehearted support of my party, The Nationals, to gender pay equity. I oppose the motion for the reasons stated, and I support the issues that have been raised by Ms Crozier and Mrs Coote.

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — I am very proud to be able to participate in the debate today and to put on the record my very strong support for pay equity. In speaking in support of the motion I want to record my personal congratulations to the Australian Services Union on successfully highlighting the current pay inequity that exists in the social and community services (SACS) sector. I have a great deal of personal admiration for people who work in the SACS sector. They are people who are motivated by a passion for social justice and a desire to support some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community. They do so despite the fact that the work can be difficult, challenging, emotionally draining and financially inadequate. While I share that motivation with them, I am in the fortunate position of being adequately remunerated for my work, and I believe SACS workers should also be adequately remunerated for their work.

I find it astounding that in this day and age we still have a situation where there is an 18 per cent pay gap between men and women. This is a phenomenal disparity that urgently needs to be addressed. At a time when society has changed and we have evolved from having a traditional breadwinner to a situation where both partners in a relationship contribute fully in different ways, the reality of today's society should be reflected in pay equity. There are 150 000 SACS workers in Australia, of whom 120 000 are women. Workers in this sector have been underpaid for too long because their work has been viewed as being so-called 'women's work'. The SACS industry is predominantly

made up of non-government organisations that receive government funding to provide various services to the community. SACS workers are employed by community groups such as the Salvation Army, Wesley Mission, Yooralla, Melbourne Citymission, Scope and many other organisations that have a great deal of support from the community because of the work they do.

SACS workers who are members of the ASU (Australian Services Union) work in various roles across the industry, including in youth refuges, women's refuges, family support services, disability services, community legal centres, employment and training services, other services like Job Futures, Aboriginal organisations, community and neighbourhood centres, family day care centres, community transport services, HACC (home and community care) services, environmental organisations and many other bodies. This can be challenging work, because it frequently involves working with people in crisis situations — for example, working with victims of domestic violence or sexual assault. It involves supporting people with disabilities or counselling families who can be in quite dire circumstances.

A number of these workers, including youth and community development workers and those who work in the HACC program, work within the sectors covered by my shadow portfolio responsibilities. I have had the pleasure of meeting a number of them during the course of the year. Their passion and commitment to young people and those who are supported through HACC services, including elderly and disabled people, are commendable.

Labor has a strong record of achievement and significant investment in increasing opportunities, recognising hard work and supporting actions to improve pay equity. During the course of her contribution the Parliamentary Secretary for Families and Community Services, Andrea Coote, sought to rewrite history. I think it is important to give a very quick overview about what actually occurred last year. I was proud to be a delegate at the June 2010 Victorian Labor state conference when the then Premier, John Brumby, committed to supporting the SACS national pay equity case. He made a specific commitment of \$200 million over four years to implement this commitment.

In response to this commitment VCOSS (Victorian Council of Social Service) issued a media release on 19 June 2010, which says:

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) today applauded Premier John Brumby's commitment to fully fund

the outcome of the national pay equity case for the community sector in Victoria.

‘This is great news for the community sector ... It tells tens of thousands of workers in Victoria that their work is strongly valued’.

‘It also delivers certainty for VCOSS member organisations, in knowing that when pay rises are granted, they will be able to maintain their staffing and the diverse range of services and programs to vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians’.

In the media release there was a call to the then state opposition to make a similar commitment. Let us be clear about this: without former Premier Brumby’s commitment, the coalition would not have done anything in this area.

During the state election Victorian Labor issued an election policy entitled *A Fairer Victoria — Real Support Real Gains*. In a press release it said:

We believe in a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work.

John Brumby was reported to have said at the time that that was why a future Brumby Labor government would back Fair Work Australia’s position on this pay claim. He also said:

We will factor in any wage increases to our service agreements with community services organisations and ensure those wage increases are passed on to workers.

This emotionally taxing labour — often performed by women — is critical to the fabric of our community. And the value of this labour is not always reflected in the pay they receive.

The coalition moved to match this commitment. In days prior to the election the then shadow Minister for Community Services, Mary Wooldridge, gave an assurance to VCOSS and members of the ASU that if the cost of delivering on the Fair Work Australia decision was in excess of \$200 million, the Baillieu government would meet the shortfall — —

Mrs Coote interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — She certainly did a very good job. I am looking forward to Ms Pulford summing up the debate after lunch.

In an interview the shadow Minister for Community Services, Mary Wooldridge, did with VCOSS, CEO Cath Smith on 24 November 2010 she said:

I know VCOSS has said it thinks it will be more than \$50 million, and the ASU (Australian Services Union) and (other) unions have said that as well ... We’ve been very clear: we’ll be making financial commitments in our policies in relation to supporting that claim and, if it’s more than that, then we will be funding and supporting it.

That was a pretty clear-cut commitment to implement the case before Fair Work Australia without any specific provisos or limitations around a particular quantum. However, in its March submission to Fair Work Australia the Baillieu government argued that services would be cut and jobs would be lost if the sector’s pay claim was successful.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms MIKAKOS — I will be coming back after lunch, Mrs Coote. True to form, the Baillieu government has gone back on its commitment and broken its promise to VCOSS workers, just like it did to Victoria’s teachers. On 8 June this year I attended, with many of my colleagues — —

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development: correspondence

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. The minister has now had 24 hours to reflect on what she said to this house yesterday. I again refer the minister to her letter to the Take a Break petitioners, an example of which I provided to her yesterday. I simply ask: is it the minister’s position that in response to a petition it is acceptable to use departmental resources, which is what her ministerial office is, to attack the opposition and push the agenda of her federal Liberal colleagues?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — Yesterday the opposition referred to — —

Mrs Coote — On a point of order, President, there were people in the gallery making visual signals. We saw them threatening me from up in the gallery. Some of my other colleagues may have seen that — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Can the member determine who those two people are?

An honourable member — They are out of here.

The PRESIDENT — Order! They are not to be admitted to the proceedings this afternoon. We will not accept intimidation or attempted intimidation of members.

Hon. W. A. LOVELL — Yesterday the opposition referred to a 2006 Auditor-General's report about advertising and communications. The opposition said the Auditor-General had included guidelines in the report that related to correspondence. The guidelines that were included in that report were not the Auditor-General's at all. They were the 2002 Department of Premier and Cabinet guidelines for advertising and communication.

These 2002 guidelines were updated again in 2009, and the opposition should be well aware of this, particularly Mr Pakula, who is a former minister, and Mr Lenders, a former Treasurer. I am advised that the correspondence is not classified as advertising or communication under the 2009 advertising and communication guidelines of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The DPC has advised that ministerial correspondence is a direct and personalised response from a minister, the content of which is at the discretion of the minister.

With respect to the preparation and distribution of correspondence, as the opposition knows, ministers have ministerial office budgets which cover items such as ministerial correspondence. It was through my ministerial budget that the Take a Break letters, dated 4 November, and other Take a Break letters, were distributed. I will always provide direct, genuine and unhindered responses to constituents and people who have taken the time to write to me.

Supplementary question

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — We did not make reference to any specific Auditor-General guidelines in our questions yesterday, so the minister has sought to presume particular things. The minister's answer is quite extraordinary in that she has in effect said that she has absolute discretion to put anything she wants in her letters, including partisan material. Is the minister saying that she can put anything she chooses, including a partisan attack on a member of the opposition, references to coalition — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I pick Ms Mikakos up in the first instance on the fact that in question time yesterday there was reference to the Auditor-General in the opposition's questions.

An honourable member interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! There very clearly was.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — On a point of order, President — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Pakula is pushing it!

Hon. M. P. Pakula — If the President is going to make assertions from the chair, there were references to the Auditor-General; there were no references to any 2006 Auditor-General's guidelines, as the minister suggested in her answer. The minister has presumed what guidelines the opposition was referring to and then sought to hit down a straw man that was not created. We do not contest that we mentioned — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! There is no point of order. Mr Pakula is debating, and this was the very point I was going to come back to Ms Mikakos on in terms of her posing a supplementary question. The fact is that all I said — and I do not wish to go into pedantics — was that the opposition did refer to the Auditor-General yesterday and the minister was therefore entitled to pick up on whatever was said. What Ms Mikakos was saying was that there was no reference to the Auditor-General yesterday. The point is that in posing the supplementary question Ms Mikakos was now moving into a debate. She was not posing a question, she was debating. I ask her to come back to posing a supplementary question, as such.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — On a point of order, President, we have in this place on numerous occasions been told by both you and previous presiding officers that supplementary questions need to relate either to the original question or to the minister's answer. What Ms Mikakos was doing was not debating; she was directly referring and directly relating her supplementary question to the specific answer that was provided by the minister and commentary from the minister in her substantive answer where she talked about her discretion.

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — My point of order is that it cannot be the case, surely, that on the one hand it is inappropriate to have a setpiece pro forma supplementary question, but on the other hand inappropriate to have a supplementary which does what the Parliament envisages supplementary questions should do, which is pick up on and relate directly to the substantive answer.

Hon. D. M. Davis — On the point of order, President, it is clear that what Ms Mikakos was doing was giving a diatribe. It was a debate, it was lengthy and longwinded, even if it was on the matters mentioned in earlier points on these questions.

Nonetheless, it was not a question; it was a long diatribe, a debate.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I do not need descriptions such as ‘diatribe’ coming into points of order on matters where I am making a decision. Mr Pakula is right that there is an ability to put supplementary questions into context. It is expected that supplementary questions will be relevant both to the original question and to the answer that has been given by a minister. In that context, yes, there is consistency in this house over a long time, certainly since supplementary questions were introduced into the practice of this house. My concern is that I think Ms Mikakos overstepped the mark on this one in terms of the way in which she posed that supplementary question. She stepped outside the realms of context and response and was making a debating point. That is going to always be a matter of judgement.

I accept the basic premise of Mr Pakula’s point of order and uphold that. I suggest that on today’s judgement I had a different view of where Ms Mikakos was headed with her supplementary question. I ask Ms Mikakos to continue with her supplementary question.

Ms MIKAKOS — Thank you, President. I was expressing astonishment at the minister’s answer. My supplementary question is: is the minister saying that she has absolute discretion to put anything she wants in letters coming out of her ministerial office, which is funded by Victorian taxpayers?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — We are written to by a number of people, including a number of housing constituents who have been on waiting lists for many years because the former government failed to house them; we are written to by housing constituents who have other complaints about neighbours et cetera; we are written to by people who have children who may not be able to access a kindergarten place or are seeking early childhood intervention service funding. We are written to on a number of issues, and we are also written to by the Parliament to notify us of petitions that are tabled in the Parliament. We take very seriously the people who write to us or who petition us. They deserve an answer, and we will correspond with those people to provide them with an answer.

Ordered that answers be considered next day on motion of Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan).

Information and communications technology: government initiatives

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I direct a question without notice to the outstanding Minister for Technology, the Honourable Gordon Rich-Phillips. Can the minister inform the house of the Baillieu government’s plans for the ICT sector?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Minister for Technology) — I thank Mr Davis for his question and for his interest in the ICT sector. ICT in Victoria has been one of the great success stories of the Victorian economy, and it has been a success story because of bipartisan commitments by successive governments back over two decades. In the 1990s Victoria was the first jurisdiction anywhere in the world to have a minister for multimedia. That commitment to the ICT industry has continued through the last two decades, and that is one of the key reasons why Victoria is able to successfully attract investment in the ICT sector. It is because the ICT industry knows that there has been a common thread and a common commitment through successive governments in this state over two decades to support investment in that sector.

We have seen the results of that ongoing support. Victoria now has a direct ICT workforce of around 85 000 people. It is an industry that contributes around \$29 billion to the Victorian economy and around \$2.5 billion to Victoria’s export performance. We have the ICT employment market growing at double the national rate, and we produce more ICT graduates than any other state or territory in Australia. We have had a great success story in ICT over two decades, and the Victorian government — the Baillieu government — is committed to continuing that success story.

In recent weeks I have been very pleased to release Victoria’s technology plan for the future, which is a plan aimed at bringing together the convergent opportunities of biotechnology, ICT and small technologies. Last week I was pleased to release the third and largest element of that plan, focused on ICT. The ICT element of Victoria’s technology plan for the future has two key focuses, one of which is to develop capability within the ICT sector itself through developing skills in the sector, through developing export capability in the sector and through promoting investment in the sector. The other element is around promoting the use of ICT in the broader economy to drive the productivity agenda. This is incredibly important to Victoria’s future prosperity. We have seen over the last 15 to 20 years the role that ICT has played in driving productivity and in reforming business processes in this state and around the world. There is

further potential for that, and the Victorian government is very committed to driving that.

That is why the plan includes initiatives such as the new Digital Futures Fund to support collaborative projects to develop diffuse new ICT capabilities and projects such as the new ICT skills initiatives to develop interest in ICT careers, to develop the types of courses that are available for ICT graduates and to promote more mature-age people in the existing workforce into ICT careers. We have also expanded the Technology Trade and International Partnering program in terms of making more opportunities available for ICT companies to take their opportunities to the wider export market.

The government is committed to building on our very successful ICT sector. It has been a great success story for the Victorian economy, and under the Baillieu government that great success story will continue.

Qantas: industrial dispute

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations. I refer the minister to his previous answer about the Qantas dispute. Apart from the government's application to terminate the bargaining period, what steps has the minister or his office taken to deal with the actual matters in dispute and assist with its resolution?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations) — I thank the member for her question, because obviously the Qantas issue is a matter that we took very seriously before Fair Work Australia. I might just remind members that we had as a government been calling for the federal government to intervene and to terminate this dispute. Despite the fact that the Premier wrote, with New South Wales Premier Mr O'Farrell, to the Prime Minister seeking that she use the powers within the Fair Work Act to terminate the dispute, in fact there was no action taken. When there was a dispute and Qantas grounded the airlines, what did we do? We went down to Fair Work Australia and we lodged our application to terminate the dispute immediately.

What did the federal government do? It went down to suspend or terminate the dispute. In fact it argued that it should be suspended. We argued very strongly that the matter should be terminated. That is what we did. We stood up for the rights of Victorians. We stood up for the tourism industry. We stood up for the economic benefits of this state. We stood up as a government for what we saw was important: for the Qantas dispute to be terminated. The member asked what we did. That is

what we did. We went down there on the Saturday night to terminate that dispute.

It was interesting to note that there was a certain federal minister by the name of Mr Shorten who rolled up the next day. Mr Shorten obviously had got his riding instructions, and he needed to be there the next day. We were there; we were down there on Saturday night. We were there standing up for the rights of the economic — —

Hon. M. P. Pakula — Were you there?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — I was there, Mr Pakula. You might have been out there with your union mates doing something else, but I was there standing up for the rights of the Victorian economy, I was standing up for the rights of the industry and I was standing there seeking to terminate that dispute. We achieved that. The dispute has been — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! A few too many people are talking in their sleep this afternoon. The minister, to continue.

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — It is important to put on the record that that is what we were doing. We were standing up for the rights of business, for industry and for tourism. At the time — the time of the Spring Racing Carnival — we believed that that was the appropriate course of action.

I remind those opposite that there is an element of selective amnesia affecting some in the Labor movement about the history of this industrial dispute. Negotiations between Qantas and its workforce had been under way since August last year, and the subsequent disruption resulting from industrial action in support of union claims had been significant. In our judgement the impact of this dispute was highly damaging, the negotiations were at a stalemate and the situation was only going to get worse in the weeks and months ahead. We had direct evidence of this in the public statements of the union leaders themselves. If members remember, during the dispute on 24 August a website known as PPRuNe was used by the pilots and the engineers. The secretary of the licensed engineers union, Mr Steve Purvinas, said the following:

Just take it easy, guys. We will bake them slowly.

This is their union. This is what they believe and what they stand up for: 'We will bake them slowly'. This is why we stood up for the rights of Qantas. We stood up and terminated that dispute, because we knew that this

was going to cause long-term sustainable damage to the Victorian economy.

Supplementary question

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — To use an expression that the minister is fond of using, it would appear that his ears have been painted on, because the substantive question was: what action has the government taken apart from the application to terminate the bargaining period? I take it from his answer that the minister and his department have perhaps done only that, so my supplementary question is: why has the minister or Workforce Victoria not been assisting the parties to resolve the Qantas dispute?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations) — For all the attempts of the Labor Party to vilify one party and one party only in this dispute, the fact is the union leaders themselves have stated explicitly and repeatedly their intention to engage in a long and bruising industrial campaign. In the view of the Baillieu government, the damage had become too great and the risk of much worse damage was too great to allow this to continue. It is a pity that the commonwealth government did not come to the same realisation much sooner.

In terms of the processes, Fair Work Australia had made its determination to terminate on the submission that the Victorian government made in concert with the New South Wales government. Did the Queensland government make an intervention? No. Did the South Australian government make an intervention? No. It is just amazing that the Labor state governments did not, but we did.

Information and communications technology: former government performance

Mr ELSBURY (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Health, the Honourable David Davis. Can the minister inform the house of the state government's response to the Ombudsman's report on major ICT projects as it relates to the health portfolio?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I know my colleague has made some comments concerning the Ombudsman's report on ICT, but what is very clear from the report is that the Ombudsman carefully examines matters around ICT, in particular in the health area. The HealthSMART system is a system that was put in place by the previous Labor government in 2003. It is a system that was originally set to cost \$320-odd million. However, the Ombudsman indicates that to

complete it as originally envisaged would cost \$566 million. There is no question that the HealthSMART ICT system is well behind time and well behind budget. Like other ICT projects under the previous government that Mr Rich-Phillips has referred to, it is clear that that project has not been well managed across a number of governments, including both the Bracks and Brumby governments. That project is an important one in the sense that ICT is very important to the future of health care. Mr Rich-Phillips made points about the significance of ICT to the Victorian economy and — —

Mr Jennings — That's why you back it in. You are going to back it in, aren't you?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — What I am going to say, Mr Jennings, is that your government seriously mismanaged the ICT project. I have got to say the project has — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — We will make further statements about the future of ICT. I will tell you who botched this system — it was Daniel Andrews, who is now the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly. He is the one who botched it. He is the one who managed it over the last four years. He is the one who was responsible for the huge blow-out in the ICT system called HealthSMART. He is the one who has got to take responsibility for the mismanagement of the health ICT system.

Mr Jennings — You do!

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — No, Mr Jennings, you do. You have to take some responsibility as well. Mr Andrews did not know how to manage that system. He did not understand how to manage that system. He allowed it to drift on and blow out massively. It was massive mismanagement of the system, mismanagement that has caused tremendous — —

Hon. M. P. Pakula interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Pakula has been overzealous today, I think, in prosecuting his various views. I ask him to show a little bit more — —

Hon. M. P. Pakula — I will lower the tone.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Thank you.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — What is clear from the Ombudsman's examination of this system is that there are still serious problems in it — for example, he points

to clinical issues about the effectiveness of the system. He points to issues about the implementation. He points to the failure to implement it according to the original scope and to the failure to fully cost it.

Mr Jennings — He says the scope and budget should have been bigger.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — He says there was no business case when the thing was launched. Imagine launching a \$320 million project with no business case. That is what those opposite did in government. There was no business case, but there was a \$320 million project — no wonder it ran off the rails and crashed into the wall. It has got to be picked up — —

Mr Jennings — You're verballing them.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — I am not verballing them. He said there was no business case, and that is the fact. Labor governments cannot manage these things. They cannot manage large projects, they cannot manage money. Daniel Andrews is going to wear this. He has to take responsibility for this.

Industrial relations: consent arbitration

Mr JENNINGS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question today is to the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations. Whilst the minister may have an interest in the nurses enterprise bargaining agreement, my interest in asking him this question today is in his role as the custodian of government policy in industrial relations. Does the government have a policy, as it is applying in the nurses case, not to accept or agree to a process of consent arbitration before Fair Work Australia?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations) — I thank the member for his question. As he is aware, questions about the industrial relations framework in terms of his responsibility, in relation to the nurses dispute, are obviously questions that are properly directed to the Minister for Health. What we seek as a government in the industrial framework is a balanced, common-sense approach to industrial relations and the resolution of disputes. This government wants what is best for Victoria and its people.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — Stop reading your answer!

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — Mr Pakula has already been told to calm down, and I am telling him he ought to calm down, because, as I said, the Victorian government will advocate a balanced, common-sense

approach to industrial relations and the resolution of disputes.

Supplementary question

Mr JENNINGS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — If the intention of the government is to have a balanced approach to industrial relations outcomes, does the balanced approach in the government's adoption of the options that are available to it in terms of the provisions of Fair Work Australia include agreeing to consent arbitration processes, or is the government exclusively selective in its application of Fair Work Australia provisions based upon draconian sanctions and on compulsory arbitration being enforced within this situation?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations) — I thank the member for his question, because again these are matters that will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Our approach is to have a balanced, common-sense approach to industrial relations and the resolution of disputes — pure and simple.

Housing: Norlane development

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Housing, who is also the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, and I ask: can the minister outline the detail of her recent announcement to provide much-needed new public and affordable housing in Norlane in North Geelong?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — I thank the member for his question and for his ongoing interest in the northern suburbs of Geelong. I was delighted on 15 November to go down to Geelong with members for Western Victoria Region David Koch and Simon Ramsay and the member for South Barwon in the other place, Andrew Katos, to announce an \$18 million investment in public and affordable housing in Norlane. Over the next four years in partnership with local builders from the Geelong area we will deliver 320 new homes in the Norlane area. This will result in 160 new public housing properties and 160 affordable private homes.

Work has already begun on this project. Fourteen of these new homes are under construction, and we will deliver the first of those new homes in December. We will also demolish the derelict concrete walk-up flats in Yooringa Avenue, and that initiative has been met with great applause from the community. We will establish a display village to display affordable homes from a

range of local builders that young local families will be able to afford to buy and build in Norlane.

This initiative to provide affordable housing options will particularly target young families. The project is complemented by other Baillieu government commitments in the North Geelong area, including a work and learning centre in North Geelong and our commitment, with the City of Greater Geelong, to deliver a structure plan for Corio Norlane. We have already established a community advisory committee, which will be chaired by a member for Western Victoria Region, David Koch, to facilitate community input into the development. This project puts planning back into the hands of the local council, removing the call-in application from the former government.

How has this announcement been received in Geelong? It has been received with great applause. In last Wednesday's *Geelong Advertiser* the Committee for Geelong's Peter Dorling was quoted as saying:

It would have to be one of the most significant announcements in Geelong's recent history ...

In the *Geelong Independent* on Friday Norlane resident Lisa Peppers, who 'opposed Labor's plan but welcomed the coalition's project', was quoted as saying:

I'm particularly thrilled that the three and four-storey developments are not going ahead ...

Those were the developments proposed by the former government.

An article in the *Geelong Advertiser* on Saturday, titled 'Ted's team earns promising praise' finished by saying:

The government put a final line under its first year in power by this week announcing an \$80 million project to revitalise public housing in Geelong's northern suburbs.

That's not a study or a review, it's actually under way with the first 14 houses completed before Christmas and is probably the first real indication of the sort of government Ted Baillieu wants to lead — one that is interested in doing the job rather than spruiking it —

like the former government.

I have also received a letter from the local ward councillor, Kylie Fisher, who said:

I write to thank you for your government's announcement in Geelong on 15 November ...

... I am absolutely thrilled with this news. The information you provided at the announcement in respect to the type of housing and locations proposed for redevelopment are most appropriate ...

Please be assured of council's support...

The mayor also welcomed our announcement, saying — —

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

Questions interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT — Order! I take this opportunity to welcome to the gallery a visitor who I think has probably come here more than some members, Mr Diego Velasco von Pilgrim, the Chilean Consul General. He has spoken as many times as at least one Labor member in a previous administration. On this occasion Mr Velasco von Pilgrim brings with him a delegation from Chile which is looking at a range of policy and administrative activities of the Victorian government in terms of drug and alcohol abuse, particularly education programs and enforcement methods associated with driving, and to some extent workplace practice.

They are here for several days. They come following a meeting that several members of this house had with some members of that delegation back in Santiago earlier this year when we discussed various Victorian programs with them. We are very pleased to see them come here to follow up on that visit and to investigate some of the things that we have been doing in Victoria, which they have very kindly said to us are in effect leadership positions in the world. We welcome them, and we are very pleased to see the Consul General again.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Questions resumed.

Community sector: wages

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations. I refer to the announcement by the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, a couple of weeks ago that the federal government would support the Australian Services Union (ASU) claim of wage justice for low-paid workers in the community services sector by putting in a joint submission to the social and community services pay equity case, and I ask: will the Victorian government support the joint submission?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am conscious of the motion that is still being debated in the house; however, I do not believe this question anticipates the outcome of that motion, so I will call on the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Mr Dalla-Riva, to answer the question.

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations) — I thank the member for his question in light of the importance of this particular issue. As I said before the last election and as we maintain now, this government values the work being done by community sector workers, who are predominantly women, and acknowledges that often it is incredibly physically and mentally demanding work. We have consistently stood by our commitment to provide \$200 million towards the outcome of this case. This is in contrast — —

Mr Lenders interjected.

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — I take up the interjection from the former Treasurer, Mr Lenders, who in contrast allocated not one red cent. Members of the former government talked about it. It is probably very similar to their capacity for ICT, according to the Ombudsman's report. They spoke about it, but did not allocate any money for it. What we have here, of course, is our commitment of \$200 million over four years. It is in the budget; it has been allocated. This is in contrast to the former government — —

Hon. M. P. Pakula — On a point of order, President, the question was very carefully crafted in order to avoid anticipation. Given that the motion before the house talks about funding, I specifically did not ask about funding because I did not want to get into the question of anticipating the debate. Despite the fact that my question is about whether the government will support the submission, the minister is now anticipating the debate by dealing with the issue of funding. That was not in any way part of the question. The question was about whether the government would support the joint submission.

Hon. D. M. Davis — On the point of order, President, it might be a little cute to suggest that the submission is not about funding, but making a submission of that type inherently carries with it funding responsibilities. There are clear commitments there, and I think the minister is quite in order to respond in that way. It might be that whilst technically the member's question would fit deeper into the matter, it seems to me the minister is quite at liberty and is well within his rights to answer a question in a full way that looks at all aspects of it.

The PRESIDENT — Order! When the question was asked I considered whether or not there were any concerns with our practice in regard to anticipation of matters before the house, particularly considering that the debate has been held today and is not resolved. I gave consideration to that and, as I indicated to the house, it was my view that Mr Pakula's question did not trespass on that particular practice of the house. I am in a position where, as I have indicated previously, a Presiding Officer cannot direct a minister on how to answer a question. In many ways the anticipation rule probably is more strictly enforced in respect of the question than the answer. That is probably because of the context in which a question is put determines whether or not it is trying to elicit further information that might impact on the debate.

In terms of an answer, a minister still needs to be mindful of anticipation. I understand the point made by the Leader of the Government. I think that in putting his question Mr Pakula would also understand that the substantial basis of a submission in respect of this matter or other matters would obviously go to the question of cost, government resources and the capacity to meet certain decisions that might be made in respect of wages, conditions and entitlements. To that extent I think the minister is entitled to make some remarks in this area.

I am also mindful that part of the substance of the debate that is currently before the house is to admonish the government and government members for the manner in which they are alleged to have responded to petitions and other matters associated with the claim as distinct from necessarily the claim itself. I know the motion goes to other points, but it is a multipronged motion in that sense. When I look at it from that point of view the motion before the house at the moment does not talk about funding. In my view it is appropriate on this occasion that the minister continues with his answer along the lines that he has been answering the question.

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — In terms of the commonwealth and the ASU's joint submission to Fair Work Australia, of which I have a copy here — —

Mr Lenders — Have you read it?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — I would, Mr Lenders, but I only had 3 hours sleep. I thought it was important that I had some sleep.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — It was in relation to the debate. In the context of this significant document,

we are disappointed we were not consulted, as the statement appears to be inconsistent with the earlier commonwealth submission around the contribution and the Queensland rates. We also know the ASU has put a series of different rates forward, and we are studying the details to assess the financial impact of this agreement that we were not involved in. The commonwealth has indicated it will contribute a fair share, but we need to know whether that will be a full and continuing share. The Victorian government has called for the commonwealth to provide an assurance that 'fair share' means full and continuing funding. We are committed, though, to work with Fair Work Australia to reach a final determination.

Supplementary question

The PRESIDENT — Order! In phrasing his supplementary question, Mr Pakula can be mindful of the remarks that I made in response to the minister's answer. Therefore he has a little more leeway than he had on his substantive question.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I am sure I will not require it, President. I am going to confine this as much as possible to help the minister to resist the temptation to stray.

I note that in his answer the minister said he was disappointed that he had not been consulted by the commonwealth and the Australian Services Union, so I ask: in terms of the instructions that have been provided to representatives of the Victorian government who are before Fair Work Australia, has the minister provided them with instructions either to support the joint submission, oppose it or remain silent on it? If so, can he advise the house of what those instructions are?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations) — I note that the barrister, Rachel Doyle, was appointed by Mr Pakula when he had the role of industrial relations minister. I note that we still maintain Rachel Doyle as our barrister for the case. What we are saying is that in the context of this deal that was done without the states' engagement and without Victoria in particular, we are trying to assess the financial impact that this will have. We are seeking some assurances from the federal government that it will contribute a fair share. We still do not know what that means in the context of this submission, and we will be working with the commonwealth and with others to try to get to a final determination with Fair Work Australia.

Industrial relations: minimum hours

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, the Honourable Richard Dalla-Riva, and I ask: can the minister advise the house of any further impact that the Baillieu government's intervention in the minimum shift case has had on secondary students working casually after school?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations) — I thank the member for her question, because somebody who has worked in business would understand that this government has made clear its commitment to a balanced and common-sense approach to industrial relations, with a focus on fairness, productivity and genuine flexibility for parties.

Earlier this year, in my capacity as Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, I intervened on behalf of the Victorian government in the National Retail Association (NRA) case on after-school work for students. I remind those opposite that the Victorian government was the only state to intervene in this case, but it did so because it felt that it was important to support calls by national retailers for greater flexibility. The Baillieu government does not believe commonwealth laws should be making it harder for small businesses to employ students, especially in regional Victoria, and harder for students to get after-school work.

A few months ago Fair Work Australia took these factors into account and agreed with the submissions of the NRA and the Victorian government. This Fair Work Australia ruling, which allows for a 1½-hour minimum engagement for student casuals, represents a victory for common sense.

To this end it would appear that others outside of Victoria also appreciate what the Victorian government has done because of the need for flexible working conditions that allow secondary students optimal opportunities to engage in casual work at hours suitable to their circumstances. Mrs Kronberg might ask where else this has been adopted. Where else has this been adopted but in the Labor Party-governed state of Queensland?

Mr Patrick Batch, a veterinary surgeon, sought a variation to the veterinary services award. He submitted that the inflexible 3-hour minimum engagement period under the award operated unfairly, given that a number of his employees were students who were generally not

available to start work before 4.00 p.m. and yet the business closed its doors each day at 6.00 p.m.

The presiding commissioner looked to the full bench decision of the retailers case, and he held in favour of the veterinary surgeon. Unlike Victoria and unlike the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, no other parties opposed the application to vary the award. No other person varied the award. No other parties made submissions to Fair Work Australia to argue against what is clearly very good for business and very good for secondary school students. This decision shows that the common-sense and balanced approach of the Baillieu government to industrial relations is being recognised beyond Victoria's borders.

Public sector: government wages policy

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations. Right now negotiations are proceeding for an enterprise agreement with the Community and Public Sector Union to cover tens of thousands of public servants, including staff who work at Parliament. There is a dispute under way and the matter has been before Fair Work Australia, and I am wondering if the minister can outline to the house exactly what role he has, as Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, in the efforts to bring those negotiations to a conclusion.

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations) — As I have indicated before, this is a question that ought properly be directed to the Minister for Finance, who has carriage of that. In terms of our approach, we are seeking a balanced, common-sense approach to industrial relations, and we would seek the resolution of any dispute to be in the best interests of Victoria and its people.

Supplementary question

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the minister, and I have listened to all the answers he has given today — to the fact that his officers have no role in assisting the Qantas parties, to his refusal to enunciate a policy position in relation to consent arbitration and to the answer he has just given now. With regard to the biggest enterprise bargaining agreement over the life of this government, the minister says that as the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations he in effect has no role to play and that it is a matter for the Minister for Finance. I am compelled to ask the minister: in the 60 seconds that he has is he able to succinctly outline for the house exactly what his

responsibilities are as Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations) — That is a new question.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — No, it is not. It is directly related to the first answer.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Minister Dalla-Riva can answer the question. I accept that it is not an entirely expanded new question but a reflection of the matters that have been raised in the context of the other questions he has been asked today, and therefore the question is valid.

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — I am pleased that Mr Pakula has asked this question. He asked about Qantas. I intervened there as industrial relations minister. We spoke about social and community services. I intervened; it is my application, my process. We spoke about the National Retail Association. I intervened and we got a great decision for industrial relations in this state. Mr Pakula seems to think that industrial relations is specific to one area, but it covers a variety of different areas.

I am glad he asked the question about the role of employment, because I think it is important to put on the record that since the Victorian coalition government came to office — that is, since last December — employment has risen by 22 900 jobs. In terms of my role as employment minister, we have generated jobs. We have had Nexteer Automotive Australia where we have generated 250 jobs. We are creating and generating jobs for Victoria.

Dandenong: Little India precinct

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning, and I ask: can the minister outline to the house what action the Baillieu government has taken to address concerns raised by traders in the Little India precinct in Dandenong?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I thank my colleague Mrs Peulich for her question and her concern for the Little India traders and for the viability of this precinct in the long term. As the house would be aware, the Little India precinct, which is in and around central Dandenong, comprises 27 traders operating mixed retail shops, food shops and other — —

Mr Somyurek — Have you ever been there?

Hon. M. J. GUY — Mr Somyurek, malicious bulls disrupt the whole herd — that is a Ukrainian proverb that you should learn — so calm down for now. I am about to get to the answer. I have been to Little India a number of times, and I am keen to ensure that the traders in Little India are fully aware of what this government is doing to make it easier for them to operate.

This is another planning mess that I have inherited. It resulted from the compulsory acquisition of properties during the era of the previous planning minister, Mr Madden, now the member for Essendon in the Assembly. Those properties have been acquired and no end date has been given as to when they will eventually be demolished and moved on. A number of obstacles have been put in the way of those traders' ability to operate.

Mr Somyurek interjected.

Hon. M. J. GUY — This government has moved clearly and quickly. We have spoken to traders a number of times. I have been down there a number of times. The head of Places Victoria, Mr Clarke, has been down there number of times. We have talked to traders about those issues. We have put them together directly with the head of Places Victoria to resolve some of these issues. They are not easy to resolve thanks to the previous government's compulsory acquisition. Mr Somyurek, who has been interjecting, did not raise a single one of these issues in the previous Parliament.

We have sat down and developed a new website for the traders so they can get their message across and a self-guided tour brochure so people know what is where. We are embarking upon an advertising campaign in tourist and Indian media to alert people to the presence of the precinct — that it still exists. We are in discussions with the council and with VicRoads in relation to better signage. We are putting in place new signage throughout the central Dandenong precinct. We are doing what we can to ensure that people know that the precinct is operative, it is there and it is happening and that the precinct can get on with business.

As I said, these issues have been around for some time. The previous government could have resolved these issues — —

Mr Somyurek interjected.

Hon. M. J. GUY — You did not do very much; in fact you did nothing. You behaved like a feudal landlord, Mr Somyurek. You should learn from my 91-year-old babushka: Ти мокрі курячі — you are wet chooks. You had the chance to perform, and you did

nothing. We are doing something. We are not wet chooks. We are getting on with the job, helping the traders and putting in place — —

Mr Somyurek — On a point of order, President, the minister has used a language that this house does not recognise.

The PRESIDENT — Order! It would have been more apposite if the minister had used a proverb from Uttar Pradesh, Kerala or somewhere like that rather than from Eastern Europe, but nonetheless I ask the minister to come back to the substance of his actions to address these issues in Dandenong.

Hon. M. J. GUY — As I said, this government understands the pressures that traders have been placed under. We have met with them a number of times, we are doing what we can to resolve those on-the-ground issues and to ensure that in the first instance people know Dandenong's Little India precinct is trading, is operating well, is a place to visit and is a terrific addition to central Dandenong. This government is doing the work to help those traders continue running their small businesses, unlike the previous government, which tried to shut them down.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I wonder whether the minister has any update on the matter he took on notice last week, which was the issue about ministers providing answers which say that a whole-of-government response will be provided. He was going to ascertain for me the form and the timing of those whole-of-government responses. I wonder whether he has an update on that.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I will have an update for Mr Pakula tomorrow.

Sitting suspended 12.59 p.m. until 2.03 p.m.

COMMUNITY SECTOR: WAGES

Debate resumed.

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My contribution to the debate was interrupted by the lunch break. I know everyone requires a mental health break occasionally, and after last night's farce I would not deprive anybody of an hour for a mental health break, particularly for the staff in this building.

I was proud earlier this year to attend with many of my Labor colleagues the Australian Services Union's national day of action for equal pay for community sector workers. Despite the rain, there was a significant turnout to that rally. The rally was held in response to the decision of Fair Work Australia on 16 May that social and community services workers are not receiving equal pay and that a significant cause of this pay gap is gender as well as other factors. I have been pleased to see that the federal government has been willing to move quickly on this issue. The Prime Minister announced on 10 November that the Gillard federal government will commit \$2 billion of additional funding to support the approximately 150 000 SACS workers in Australia, who, as I indicated earlier, are some of the lowest paid workers in the social and community services sector.

It has been recognised by the federal government that there is a need to move on pay equity, and there are significant and tangible moves afoot at the federal level. However, the SACS workers and the delivery of services and programs depend on state government funding as well. That is why Ms Pulford has moved this very good motion today. The motion relates to the backflip by the Baillieu government, which represents the harsh reality of what this government is about — that is, service cuts and jobs cuts. I am very concerned that the government has made promises in this area with no intention of following through on them. The sentiments around the issues of supporting pay equity which were earlier expressed by the parliamentary secretary, Mrs Coote, also need to be supported financially. The government needs to put its money where its mouth is, so to speak.

The point I want to conclude on is the following comment made by the Australian Services Union assistant secretary, Lisa Darmanin, in a media release of 16 November:

Community workers are committed to being there for vulnerable Victorians and those in crisis, but the Baillieu government's broken promises of adequate support and funding for this sector puts help at risk for all of us. If caring work was properly funded, community workers could continue to be there for those in need.

Fair Work Australia has already ruled that the reason people who work in this sector are paid less is because the industry is dominated by women. This is unfair. People who work to improve the lives of those with disabilities, victims of domestic violence and vulnerable children want to see a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

That quote sums up very well what this debate is all about. If we are serious about supporting those workers who work with the most vulnerable in our community

and we want to ensure that they do not leave the workforce because they feel they are undervalued, then we need to ensure that they are appropriately remunerated. Achieving equal pay for community sector workers is crucial in ensuring that the sector can deliver the quality services that are so important to our community. This government is failing SACS workers and the people who rely on those workers each and every day, and I urge the house to support this motion and to support SACS workers today.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I thank members for their contributions to this debate. I will wrap things up briefly with a couple of quick points. Mrs Coote put on a brave face when making a case for the government. That is to be commended — the Wednesday brave face! Mrs Coote talked about the child protection workers in Gippsland and the people she has met at the juvenile justice centre at Malmsbury. She also talked about the government's election commitment and made some assertions about the commitment that Labor had made to fully fund any decision. It is important to note that Labor had made provision for the decision — —

Mr Lenders — Absolutely!

Ms PULFORD — 'Absolutely', said the former Treasurer. Further to that, it is very difficult for the government, on the one hand to say there is \$200 million over four years and that, in the spirit of Mr O'Brien's contribution, it is going to fully commit to that funding when on the other hand we do not know what it is going to cost because the decision has not been made. Mrs Coote cited, state by state, each jurisdiction's response or perhaps lack of response to a decision that has not yet been handed down.

It is very hard for anyone to put a cost on this decision until the umpire, Fair Work Australia, has made its final position clear. Mrs Coote was being a little selective with the facts in her presentation. This is not something that will fill social and community sector employees with any great confidence that the government will fully fund any outcome. Government speakers, including Ms Crozier, also talked about the \$200 million commitment. I think that is an important point to make as a rebuttal.

I also note that the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations indicated in question time that he has not provided instructions one way or the other on the joint submission of the Australian Services Union (ASU) and the commonwealth government that was presented to Fair Work Australia on 17 November, so

the opportunity still exists for the Victorian government to do the right thing.

The employees at the juvenile justice centre in Malmsbury are not covered by the ASU pay equity application and this test case because their work is covered by the Community and Public Sector Union.

On a final note, I would like to pay tribute to Linda White, Lisa Darmanin, Lloyd Williams, Senator Jacinta Collins and countless others for the work they have done on what is a historic moment in wage justice for Victorian workers. I also wish very well the people who work in the social and community sector for the important work that they do in caring for the most vulnerable Victorians in our community.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 18

Barber, Mr	Mikakos, Ms
Broad, Ms	Pakula, Mr
Darveniza, Ms	Pennicuik, Ms
Eideh, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Pulford, Ms
Elasmar, Mr	Scheffer, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Hartland, Ms	Somyurek, Mr
Jennings, Mr	Tarlamis, Mr
Leane, Mr	Tee, Mr
Lenders, Mr	Tierney, Ms

Noes, 20

Atkinson, Mr	Koch, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Coote, Mrs	Kronberg, Mrs
Crozier, Ms	Lovell, Ms
Dalla-Riva, Mr	O'Brien, Mr
Davis, Mr D.	O'Donohue, Mr
Davis, Mr P.	Ondarchie, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Drum, Mr	Petrovich, Mrs
Elsbury, Mr	Peulich, Mrs
Finn, Mr	Ramsay, Mr
Guy, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr

Pair

Viney, Mr	Hall, Mr
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Motion negatived.

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (SERIOUS MISCONDUCT) AMENDMENT BILL 2011

Introduction and first reading

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978 in relation to the imposition of a serious indictable offence for the serious misconduct of members of Parliament and for other purposes.

Read first time; by leave, ordered to be read second time forthwith.

Statement of compatibility

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Members of Parliament (Serious Misconduct) Amendment Bill 2011 (the bill), in accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (the charter).

In my opinion, the bill as introduced to the Legislative Council is compatible with the human rights protected by the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

The main purpose of this act is to amend the Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978 to create a criminal offence for the serious misconduct of a member of Parliament.

Human rights protected by the charter that are relevant to the bill:

The bill positively engages and fulfils the right of the public to participate in public affairs (section 18 of the charter) by providing for criminal penalties where elected representatives commit serious derogations from applicable standards of conduct.

By providing for a term of imprisonment, the bill engages section 21 of the charter.

The introduction of a criminal offence reflects serious deleterious effects that a major breach of the trust and responsibility held by elected representatives has on the public's right to have their will properly expressed through their elected representatives.

A sentence of imprisonment imposed under the bill would of course be subject to appropriate safeguards designed to protect the rights of individuals subject to Victoria's sentencing scheme, including the proportionate exercise of sentencing discretion and rights to appeal.

Accordingly, providing the sentencing option of imprisonment constitutes a reasonable limit on the right to liberty expressed in section 21.

Section 26 provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which he or she has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law.

Subclause (4) of the new clause 3A clarifies that this new offence does not prevent or derogate from any existing criminal or civil proceedings for which the member may be liable.

A separate, principal criminal offence is not a necessary antecedent for an offence under the bill. As a matter of criminal procedure it would therefore be open to the

prosecution to charge an accused with multiple offences in relation to one set of factual circumstances.

In my view, this does not infringe the right against double jeopardy.

Conclusion

In my opinion, the Members of Parliament (Serious Misconduct) Amendment Bill 2011, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights protected by the charter act.

Second reading

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

The regulatory regime for members of the Victorian Parliament currently consists of six loosely worded subsections in the code of conduct, in part I of the Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978. If one compares this code with the obligations on the public sector, profit and not-for-profit corporations, doctors, nurses, teachers, lawyers, councillors or child-care workers, it is clear that members of Parliament, their staff and the ministry and their staff need to be brought to a level commensurate with our significant responsibilities and the public trust that is placed in us.

This bill only makes a start to what should be a wide-ranging review involving all 128 members of Parliament. This bill starts the renewal process in the most important area by creating an offence for the serious misconduct in relation to a member's office.

Since social economist Gary Becker's seminal work in 1968, most economists have regarded crime as a function of the expected benefits weighed against the expected costs. When the potential gains from corruption are high, we should expect to see more of it. Conversely, when the penalties are large, or detection is likely, we should expect to see less corruption.

This bill will help to ensure corruption does not rear its head in this Parliament by increasing the threat of imprisonment or serious penalties.

The indictable offence created by this bill is rigidly based upon the common law offence of 'misconduct in public office'. The Crime and Misconduct Commission in Queensland, with the support of the Director of Public Prosecutions, recommended such an offence be put into statute. This bill used the same recommendations as the basis for the elements of the offence.

These elements are: a member of Parliament, in the course of or in relation to their public office, wilfully misconducts themselves by act or omission, without reasonable excuse or justification and where such misconduct is serious, not trivial, having regard to the responsibilities of the office and the office-holder, the importance of the public objects which they serve and the nature and extent of the departure from those responsibilities.

The bill gives the judiciary a wide discretion to determine if the misconduct is serious and provides a solid foundation for law enforcement authorities to pursue their prosecutions based upon the common law.

The offence carries a level 6 maximum penalty of five years imprisonment, 600 penalty units (\$73 284 this financial year) or both. This penalty mimics the level inserted in 2009 into section 76D of the Local Government Act 1989 for a councillor's misuse of their position.

This is a modest bill that only attempts to plug the most serious of gaps in the regulation of the conduct of members of Parliament. I urge the Parliament to work in a multipartisan manner to develop a comprehensive, modern version of the code of conduct and register of interests. I look forward to the commencement of such a review.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan).

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 7 December.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Legislative Council by 12 noon on Tuesday, 6 December 2011, a copy of the report by Grant Thornton on educating year prep to 12 students with an autism spectrum disorder in Western Metropolitan Region, commissioned by the department of education.

I will be quite brief in my remarks, because I think this is an extremely straightforward proposition. I am calling for the documents on an issue that is very important to families in the west — the provision of education to the growing number of students with autism spectrum disorder. On 12 September I emailed the minister asking for these documents; not only did I not receive the documents but I did not receive a

response of any kind. I must therefore now call for these documents in the Parliament.

During the election campaign last year the Baillieu government promised families in the west that a prep to year 12 school would be provided for students with autism. In addition the western metropolitan region strategic autism spectrum disorder plan was developed to guide delivery of education to students with autism across the west. A scoping study, which I will hereon refer to as the review, was also undertaken to feed into this plan.

One year into the Baillieu government's term, and more than a year since the review began, families in the west are still waiting. They were informed that the review would only take 3 months, then it became 5 months; it took nearly 8 months to do even the public consultations, and it is now more than 12 months since the review commenced. The review has been completed, but its contents are not publicly available. In fact the minister has now been sitting on the report for some three months. Again, families were informed that the results of the review would be made public by the last week of September or the first week in October, but they are still waiting.

I am calling for these documents because the families in the west deserve accountability and transparency. We need to see the recommendations of the review so the government can get on with the job of delivering a better education service to families. We need to see what the review says about the number of students with an actual diagnosis of autism, how well the current system is serving them and how we can improve meeting their educational needs. Families in the west deserve the best available education for their children. I have met with many of these families and visited their homes. I see that they work incredibly hard to give their children the best possible outcomes. As I said, a commitment was made to establish a P-12 school in the west. It was a very strong commitment made during the election campaign, which has not been fulfilled. I am asking for one document from the government, and I hope we will be able to achieve that today.

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to speak on behalf of the government, in the first instance at least, on Ms Hartland's motion. In its usual fashion the government will not oppose the motion citing the usual caveats that have been articulated previously around these motions. I note Ms Hartland's comments about this matter in her communication with the minister.

The broader issue here is of children with special needs in specialised education settings, which is obviously important and an issue which all members of Parliament would be all too aware of. In my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region there was a significant campaign prior to the last election for a new special school in the Casey-Cardinia growth corridor. I was pleased that the then shadow minister, the member for Nepean in the Assembly, Mr Dixon, announced that, if elected, a new government would build a new special school in Officer. I am pleased that in the Baillieu government's first budget funding has been provided to facilitate that. The SS4CC group, which was organised to campaign for and assist with the delivery of a new special school, has been working very closely with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to help plan and develop this new school. As I understand it, off its own back it has visited a range of different special schools throughout Victoria looking for best practice.

As members of Parliament we are all acutely aware of the demands of and the challenges faced by students with specialised needs. I am pleased that in its first budget the government delivered a record investment for special schools. A total of \$78.3 million was allocated to share among 11 special schools and autism schools in Victoria, including \$60.3 million of new funding to be delivered through the 2012-13 budget. I am sure my colleague Mr Finn will have more to say about the school project in question, as it is in the electorate he shares with Ms Hartland. But it is fair to say that the government is keen to deliver on this commitment because it understands the demands in this area.

With those words, the government will not oppose Ms Hartland's motion. As a member of the government I look forward to working with the communities in my electorate to deliver improved specialist education for children with special needs.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — The opposition supports this motion, which calls for the report to be tabled. The review was committed to by an education minister in the previous government, which took the position that this review should be completed by early this year. It appears that it has taken a bit longer than that, but it is important that it is right. Had the previous government been successful at the last election, it would have used the study to determine the best way forward for the education of children with autism in the west, therefore it is easy to support the motion. I am pleased that Mr O'Donohue said it would be supported by the government, so the report can be tabled, as Ms Hartland's motion states, on Tuesday,

6 December. I understand that a lot of people in the west have been keen for the report to be released so they can see what outcomes have been suggested. As I said, it is quite easy for the opposition to support the motion.

The member for Altona in the other place only recently called on the Minister for Education to release the report. She stated that parents of children with an autism spectrum disorder in the west had been campaigning for a better deal and were keen for the report to be released. I have spoken to the members for Williamstown and Niddrie in the other place; they have had a lot of contact with parents around this issue to the point where, I understand, the member for Williamstown held a well-attended forum — nearly 300 people attended — to discuss issues around autism. It is a great way to communicate to the community. I am a bit miffed that he has been questioned by the Department of Parliamentary Services about his use of communication money to hire a hall, but that is perhaps an issue for another day. I cannot think of a better way for a member of Parliament to communicate with their constituents than face to face and by making experts available so they can discuss particular topics.

I understand that before the election, when the coalition was in opposition, it took a different position — that it would establish a new P–12 school in the west. I understand that a few people in the west are nervous about the project coming to fruition. I understand there is \$4 million in the budget to go towards the project. I suspect the government will make further announcements regarding further stages of funding of that particular project.

During the last Parliament I made a number of contributions in this place on behalf of some parents from the eastern suburbs, particularly the Knox area, who were championing a similar school to the school people in the west are championing. I know that school has been funded and will end up being a state-of-the-art facility for this type of education. Building that school cost \$16 million. As I said, I expect that more funds will be used to build a similar school in the west.

I understand people have looked at different types of schools. I am sure people in the east considering an autistic P–12 school have spoken to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development — I do not need to encourage them to do this; I think they have already done this — about the plans, scope and types of classrooms available for this type of education.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I rise today not just to not oppose the motion but to support it,

because if there is one thing we need more of in regards to autism, it is information. Information is the one thing that we are lacking in buckets, and that lack of information should not be at all surprising.

Until eight and a half years ago I did not know much about autism either. I knew that such a thing as autism existed; I knew it was something that I did not want to have anything to do with. But apart from that I was like everybody else: I did not know how bad this affliction could be. Then my son was diagnosed with autism. He is now 10 years of age. For about eight and a half years we have had knowledge of his position on the autism spectrum — if you want to put it in those terms. That is when the challenge started.

I have to say to members of the house that I still do not know as much as I would like to know about autism. I do not think anybody does, otherwise we would have gone a lot further towards a cure than we have. At the moment we do not even know what causes it. We do not know what physical links inside the brain result in this particular affliction; we do not know very much at all. The only thing we know is that this is a silent affliction. It is extraordinarily difficult for parents, because there is no wheelchair and there is no sign to the outside world that these children have a problem. To all of the world they are the same as every other child running around. When they throw a tantrum in the supermarket and when their particular affliction comes out in ways that are not particularly joyous, I have to say the outside world is prone to make a very quick judgement.

The parents of these children have it pretty tough already. The last thing they need is the judgement of others. These kids are not just naughty boys or girls who need discipline; these are children who have a major problem that we must address. There are a lot of problems around. This autism problem is relatively new, but it is something that we must address.

On Wednesday, 26 October this year, on the ABC program *The World Today* the compere Eleanor Hall — I am not familiar with her or this particular program — pointed out that, according to her:

Figures just released in New South Wales show a dramatic increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism who are going through the public school system.

In the past eight years the number of students with autism quadrupled —

I repeat: quadrupled —

to more than 8000.

Brian Smyth King is the director of disability programs in the New South Wales Department of Education and Training. He said in this program that:

The numbers have increased quite dramatically. We've had just over 2000 students in 2003 through to over 8000 students this year.

Those figures do not surprise me, because anecdotally I am hearing a similar story in Melbourne and other parts of Victoria. There is no doubt that autism is on the rise.

Penny Beeston, who is the CEO of Autism Queensland and the director of the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders, made the following observation:

I think that the education systems across Australia were never designed to support the increased prevalence of children with autism in mainstream classrooms, and I do believe that it has caught probably all education systems unawares.

And there is a lot of catch-up required and part of that will be that all mainstream teachers, whether they are primary or secondary or even prep school teachers, need to be trained in how to support children with autism in their classrooms.

This should be a blanket targeting of all teachers who are going through teacher training as well as professional development of those teachers who are already in the system.

That is clearly one view, and it is one that I would not discount by any measure because, as with every child, one size does not fit all. It is important that parents and families are given some choice of education for their children with autism, because each child is different; each child has a different degree of autism. Some children can be pretty close to that dreadful word which I hate to use but will use anyway — that is, 'normal'. We can have some who are sitting in the corner rocking back and forth, banging their heads against the wall, and then we can have everything in between. It is not something we can make a blanket statement about; it is not something about which we can say 'Righto, this is what we are going to do with kids with autism'. There are various degrees, and that is why it is known as autism spectrum disorder, because its range is far and wide.

I feel very much for parents who have children with autism. To have one child with autism is bad enough, but I know a number of parents who have more than one child with autism — some have three children with autism. I honestly do not know how they cope. I know how difficult it is for our family with our little bloke from time to time. I cannot begin to imagine how parents with two or three children with autism manage. They are true heroes in my view.

For those who are not aware of how autism manifests itself, it is, I suppose, an attack on the social skills of the child. Children have no fear of anything. Our son was and still is from time to time what is known as a 'runner'. They are children who have to be kept inside and almost locked up in a confined space for fear that they will run onto the road in front of a car. They have no fear; they will just run. They do not care where they are running, they just want to run. I recall that a few short years ago one of our son's classmates was killed when hit by a train at the Strathmore railway station. He liked trains, and he went down to the station. He got in front of the train, and he did not make it.

As parents of children with autism, that is what we live with every day. We have to know where our child is every second of every day. Even when we think we have our homes almost fortified and even when we think they are safe in their own homes and cannot escape, these kids will find a way. You have to remember that these kids are pretty clever, they are pretty bright and they will find a way to get out.

I well recall one incident some years ago, and I still get chills when I think about it. Liam, our son, decided he would open the garage door. We have a roller door, and he decided he would use the button inside the house to open the door and go outside. But he also took his little sister, who at the time was an 18-month-old toddler. In our panic to get the little bloke back inside we did not realise that she was gone. She had wandered down to the main road. It was only an act of God that saved her. That is what parents of children with autism live with every day. That is something that is a part of life. To take your child to the local bistro for dinner on a Friday night is a major achievement. If you get them to sit in the one place for long enough to eat their dinner, you feel like doing a lap of honour. Things that everybody else regards as pretty normal are a major challenge for families of kids with autism.

It is not just the parents who are affected, I have to say, because the siblings cop it as well. I am pleased to say there are a number of programs that support the siblings of children with autism. They are much needed by those siblings, I can assure you, because they cop it, and sometimes physically. They are sometimes on the receiving end of that anger and frustration that manifests itself in physical violence.

Autism affects every member of the family. It is not just the immediate family either; it often affects grandparents, aunties and uncles. It will affect, disrupt, threaten and even destroy families in a way that in itself is insidious and to the outside world totally mysterious. To those of us involved it sometimes is quite

mysterious as well. It has that rock-in-the-pool effect — the rippling effect when you throw a stone in the water. That is what autism does to families.

It is therefore extremely important that we get as much information as we possibly can about children with this disorder, even the numbers of the children affected. I would have thought it was pretty basic. I am not sure why we do not have the numbers as yet — for example, we do not know how many children with autism there are in Western Metropolitan Region. We do not know how many kids have autism. I do not know why we do not know. I am hoping this motion might flush that out, because it seems that is a pretty basic level of knowledge that would help us enormously.

It is a truly great challenge for families, a truly great challenge for society and a truly great challenge for the education system, because we now have thousands of children with autism flooding the education system, and the education system is not prepared for them, not by a long shot. As I mentioned earlier this year in this house, I suppose that largely comes from those who head up the education department over the road in Treasury Place, because this is something new, and bureaucrats, generally speaking, do not like change. They do not know how to handle autism or what they need to do to handle this tsunami that is starting to hit us now. They just do not know what to do.

I have promoted and continued to promote the IDEA (Innovative Developments in the Education of Children with Autism) program, which has been trialled at Moomba Park Primary School in Fawkner. I think it is an excellent program. I believe that this program will be the answer, or a major part of the answer, for thousands and thousands of families throughout Australia. I believe that given a chance the IDEA program will lead the world in turning around the lives of so many people who otherwise would disappear down the drain. I am not just talking about children with autism; as I mentioned earlier, I am talking about the families as well.

I have absolute faith and confidence in the IDEA program. I very much hope — and I continue to lobby the minister on this — that the government will give this program the support that it deserves, not just at Moomba Park and throughout Western Metropolitan Region but right throughout Victoria. Once people see the success of the program and once parents vote with their feet, I have no doubt that we will see very great benefits very quickly and parents will want their children in this program. Once that happens, I have not the slightest doubt at all that it will take off in a fairly

big way. The other added attraction is that it is cheaper than traditional autism-specific education.

In the meantime, as Ms Hartland more than alluded to, we have a history of difficulties with autism-specific education in the western suburbs, particularly in Western Metropolitan Region. For some years now we have had very little formal autism-specific education in Western Metropolitan Region. The Western Autistic School provides four years of education. In the north, the south and the east kids have been given 12 years of education. In the west they are given four. I think that is wrong, I think that is discriminatory and I think that stinks, so before the last election the Liberal-Nationals coalition gave a commitment that we would build a P-12 autism-specific school in the western suburbs. That is a commitment that we stand by and that we have already allocated funds to, and let me assure members that it is happening. I have received a personal guarantee from the minister that it is happening. We have said that will happen in our first term.

I am pushing very hard because I know the time difficulties and I know that we need this school as soon as possible. I know the urgency with which parents are viewing the building and the opening of this school. There are some who have gone about — in a hysterical manner, I have to say — causing great distress to a number of parents by saying, 'It is not going ahead'. Some of those are involved in autistic education in the west. That is very sad; it makes me angry but also very sad because it is not necessary. We had a demonstration out the front here a couple of weeks ago by people demanding that the school be built. There is no need for that to happen because the school is being built, and I am very hopeful there will be an announcement on that very soon.

There needs to be a cultural change in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; there are no two ways about that. People in the department are behind the times; there is no question about that. Some of them need a bomb under them — in the nicest possible way — and they need to be informed and to be aware of what is going on in the real world. They need to be aware of what this disorder does to children and their families. I hope that people in the department will take advantage of the opportunities — there is no shortage of opportunities — that are given to them to come up to speed on this issue, because it is a matter that is huge now but will become much bigger in a few short years ahead. I fear to think what sort of problems we will face in 10 years time if we do not act now.

Having said that, I support the motion moved by Ms Hartland, and I hope this information that is provided by the department will go some way to providing answers and much-needed support for families and children affected by autism in the western suburbs of Melbourne.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — Like my colleagues Mr O’Donohue and Mr Finn, I rise in support of Ms Hartland’s motion. I acknowledge Ms Hartland’s contribution to this debate and Mr Finn’s contribution, which we have just heard. Mr Finn gave a description of his experiences as a parent and described some of the challenges he and his family face on a daily basis, which put the issue in perspective.

I also acknowledge the Minister for Education, Martin Dixon, and the Minister for Community Services, Mary Wooldridge, in relation to this issue. In particular I acknowledge Ms Wooldridge for her interest in and support for people with autism; it is her area of responsibility to coordinate work across the various relevant government departments that will improve our response to people living with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families. I know the minister is very supportive of people with autism spectrum disorder and their families and their ability to participate in the community and have equitable access to opportunities such as education and community interaction and involvement.

On 2 April I had the great pleasure of joining Ms Wooldridge and Graham Watt, the member for Burwood in the Assembly, in a march from Peanut Farm Reserve in St Kilda to the Lower Esplanade in St Kilda to mark World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD). The World Autism Awareness Day website has information about the large numbers of people who are affected by autism and the pervasive nature of this disorder, which Mr Finn so aptly described. The website states:

World Autism Awareness Day shines a bright light on autism as a growing global health crisis. WAAD activities help to increase and develop world knowledge of the autism epidemic and impart information regarding the importance of early diagnosis and early intervention.

In his contribution Mr Finn said that he had only come across autism spectrum disorder not so many years ago through his personal circumstances. I note that World Autism Awareness Day was created in 2007, only four years ago, so it is a relatively new way for many people to come to understand this disorder further. I know that many members, including me, have family members and friends who have children with autism, so its incidence is increasing for whatever reason and we

need to comprehend the scale of the numbers of people involved, as Mr Finn so aptly pointed out.

I am pleased the Baillieu government has a plan to enable greater participation for people with autism. The government’s plan for community services sets out pathways and provides a whole-of-life model for people with autism spectrum disorder that will enable transition points throughout people’s lives. There are six key areas that the minister has identified in conjunction with the Department of Human Services. They are: making it easier to get support; strengthening the autism spectrum disorder expertise in the workforce; extending and linking key services and supports, especially during transition; enhancing and providing appropriate educational opportunities; facilitating successful participation in the community; and developing a robust ASD evidence base, which relates to a lot of the data Mr Finn was speaking about and helps provide an understanding of the true figures.

The government’s plan for education also referred to the provision of a range of educational options for students with ASD. In that respect my colleagues Mr O’Donohue and Mr Finn spoke of the government’s commitment to supporting increased funding for students with disabilities, and that includes children with autism. I note that in a media release of May this year the Minister for Education announced increased funding of \$20 million in the 2011–12 budget and \$44 million in 2012–13 to support students with disabilities. The coalition government will be providing a total of \$156 million in new funding over the next four years.

The government is providing support in a number of other areas, but in terms of Ms Hartland’s motion the government will fulfil its commitment to invest \$4 million in services for students with an autism spectrum disorder in Western Metropolitan Region. I think we are all in agreement that that is a very good initiative.

There are several good examples of institutions that are enabling students with disabilities to integrate, and I bring to the attention of the house the Currajong School in East Malvern, which is in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region. This is a terrific example of an independent school that provides a positive environment for children with various levels of broad spectrum disorder. It does not go to year 12; it goes from prep to year 8. The staff at Currajong School should be congratulated on what they are doing and giving parents and children choice in that facility. I will not say anything further in relation to Ms Hartland’s motion, but along with Ms Hartland and other members

who have spoken on this issue, including Mr Leane, I add support to the motion.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I also rise to speak on the motion. I will give an outline of the strong support the Baillieu government has provided for special schools in Victoria while focusing on addressing some of the issues associated with special needs students. Mr Finn has outlined the huge growth in the number of students who are diagnosed with various disorders, including those diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). There has been exponential growth in numbers, and clearly the expertise and resources available to provide the level of support that each and every child deserves are not often available.

The strong support of the Baillieu government was reflected in the 2011–12 budget, which made the largest single investment in special and autistic school capital works in more than a decade, with \$78.3 million in funding provided for 11 schools together with an additional \$156 million invested in the program for students with disabilities to meet the growth in demand. It was a commitment and a package that was warmly welcomed by the Victorian community. Obviously parents campaigned in various pockets of Victoria. One of those was in my region — the Casey-Cardinia area that Mr O’Donohue mentioned. There was a commitment made to build a special school in Officer.

As the Parliamentary Secretary for Education, I was recently asked to chair the ministerial advisory committee for students with disabilities and additional learning needs, and although that committee task force has not yet met, I am pleased to work with experts in the field to look at how we can expand our capacity, meet rising demand and sustain the amenity of suitable school facilities for vulnerable students and families.

The report Ms Hartland refers to was part of Western Metropolitan Region’s regional autism spectrum disorder strategic plan to inform prep to year 12 ASD educational provision in Western Metropolitan Region. As the report’s website indicates, the Victorian government is committed to ensuring that within its resources students with an ASD will be able to access the educational options that best meet their needs. With the exponential growth in the number of ASD diagnoses, resources are obviously not keeping pace. Options could include specialist autistic schools, mainstream schools with supports, specialist settings within mainstream schools auspiced by a specialist autistic school, special schools, special developmental schools or any combination of the above. As Mr Finn stated, if you are a parent of a child with an autism

spectrum disorder, there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. There are different combinations and different solutions to best meet the needs of that child.

In Western Metropolitan Region the number of students currently supported who have an ASD as a primary disability has steadily increased from 2006 to 2010, and 77 per cent of ASD students supported in Western Metropolitan Region are in their primary years. In the future obviously increased pressure will be placed on secondary schools to provide for students on the spectrum. Fifty-five per cent of students with an ASD who are supported in Western Metropolitan Region in years prep to 3 attend specialist schools. Of supported students in years 4 to 12, 86 per cent attend mainstream schools. Seventy-five per cent of supported students with an ASD live in the local government areas (LGAs) of Wyndham, Melton and Brimbank. Despite services provided by mainstream schools and ASD-specific support programs and outreach services, these LGAs do not contain a relative proportion of ASD-specific and generalist specialist support services.

As has been reiterated by others, when we came to office the ministers were shocked at the state of Victoria’s special and autistic schools. Clearly there is a huge backlog affecting the most vulnerable children in Victoria. They have mostly received nothing year after year, and we are trying to turn that around. The government has indicated that it will fulfil its commitment to invest \$4 million to establish a P–12 school for students with an autism spectrum disorder in Western Metropolitan Region. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has conducted a scoping study to explore how best to invest the coalition’s \$4 million as part of a wider assessment of need in the region. Findings of the study have been published on the department’s website, so there is not a complete absence of information in the public domain. Indeed I understand from some of the parents who might have been involved in the consultation that there is a good deal of personal material about which there may be some sensitivity and which parents may be reluctant to disclose.

What is important is that the findings of the study have been published on the department’s website for anyone who is interested to look at. The coalition has been considering options for establishing the P–12 ASD school, and I understand that an announcement will be made shortly. No doubt Mr Finn will be breaking open a bottle of champagne when that occurs.

If you look at the department’s website — as updated on 9 August 2011 — it says:

The department is committed to ensuring, that within its resources, students with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) will be able to access the educational option that best meets their needs.

It goes on to mention the specific study that is the subject of this motion and says:

As a key component of this scoping study, the parent/carers and community were invited to take part in a consultation process to provide feedback. An independent provider, Grant Thornton, has been contracted to coordinate the scoping study including the consultation process.

Often when these things are undertaken the raw data is not all released. However, obviously, as Mr O'Donohue mentioned, there are processes that will be worked through and all of those things will be considered, as has happened with other production of documents motions in the past. As I said, though, it is not a secret report. The conclusions are on the website for all who are passionate about this issue and want to see the state government of Victoria better meet the needs of the growing number of students who are affected by ASD. The report is there for all to read.

With those few words, I will conclude. I look forward to seeing the coalition government provide even more services and resources to Victoria's neediest children.

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — It is with pleasure that I follow Mrs Peulich in speaking on this motion and take up the opportunity to put on the record what the Department of Human Services is doing in this state as far as autism is concerned. Autism is a very concerning issue. There is no doubt that the numbers of people affected are growing, and we have seen the tensions that causes in the community. It would seem to me, from speaking to people right across the state, that there are several aspects to the issue of autism.

If you were to look at it as a graph, you would see that there is a continuum of people affected, from those who have got some profound issues right through to people who have just been diagnosed. Where on that continuum do we put the buckets of money that need to be provided to address this problem? The people who have a child who has just been diagnosed with autism say, 'Give us the money now; it is a really good opportunity to work with our child and make certain that that child becomes as integrated into the community as possible'. The people who have high-achieving children with autism, who are older, say, 'Give us the buckets of money, and we will make certain that our children are good, integrated members of the community'. I can see both arguments.

Having said that, you also get different approaches within the first cohort. There are two schools of thought within the cohort of parents of children who have just been diagnosed or who are very young. One group is saying, 'We want our children to be integrated into the mainstream schooling situation', and the other stream is saying, 'We would like to have a specialist school for our children because we think that is a better opportunity'. We are a government about choice, and it is important that those choices and opportunities are there for everybody in this particular area.

Autism is a very complex issue. I have seen some people in our state who have some very severe and challenging disorders that do require they get a huge amount of specific help. Mrs Peulich spoke about the educational aspect of what our government is doing, and I know Mr Finn is very passionate about this issue and is very eloquent on this issue, but I would like to get on to the record what it is that the Department of Human Services is doing, as we speak, in relation to autism in Victoria.

Disability services is leading the development of a revitalised work plan for 2012 with a stakeholder group and departmental representatives. Beyond 2012 it is intended that the broad areas of work in relation to autism will be identified for priority focus within the state disability plan 2013–16. Disability services have also been progressing a number of initiatives under the plan. These include ASD training for disability case managers and accommodation staff — training has been rolled out to ensure that staff are well equipped to work with people with an autism spectrum disorder — and ASD research grants. To develop a robust evidence base about ASD, non-recurrent funding was provided for four research projects. Those were a project to support transition to and participation in tertiary education for students with ASD at La Trobe University; a parent education and skills training intervention for young adults with autism at Monash University; an evaluation of the travelling teacher services at Monash University; and research on depression, anxiety and stress in adolescents and young adults with autism spectrum disorders conducted by Deakin University. It is very important to have evidence-based research if we are going to make proper policy into the future that is representative of the needs of this whole sector.

I would like now to discuss DHS funding of autism programs in the period 2011–12 through to 2013–14. The total amount of funding for a behaviour support pilot program will be \$2.709 million; for case consultant practitioners, \$3.609 million; for research grants — a very important element — \$877 316; for the

information service, \$243 132; and for ASD training, \$616 316. It is important for members to see that funding has been put towards this very important issue.

It has been said before that a cross-government working group has been established whose role it is to drive the work forward across various government departments to support the interdepartmental committee. It is very important that this government wants to ensure that there is cross-government coordination and cooperation. I was pleased to be part of a group of coalition MPs who joined together to look at this concerning issue and the way forward to achieving a better integrated approach to autism across all departments. It is becoming a working group; the members of the group are very passionate and concerned about making certain that these interdepartmental groups do what they say will do.

I will not go much further, because a lot has been covered today. But I would like to put on the record my praise for a particular group — the Mansfield Autistic Centre and the travelling teacher service. It is an excellent program. As I have said before, there has been a Monash University evaluation into this program and a paper was presented in Perth earlier this year. I commend the managers of the Mansfield Autistic Centre and the travelling teacher service. I think it is important that we understand that the ‘travelling’ part of this title means that the teachers go to live with a family in a residential situation. They deal with that family and the family member with autism. They deal with the entirety of the issue and how that family is going to function.

As I said earlier, families all have a different approach. Some of them want to be integrated into the mainstream and others do not want to be integrated into the mainstream, but the really important point here is that this travelling service works with families in rural and regional Victoria; it does a lot of work in Gippsland and a lot of work in Ms Lovell’s electorate in the north of the state. The teachers deal with the families — their tensions, their challenges, their dreams and their wishes. I think this is a very important aspect of the service, because autism does not just affect the people with autism — it affects their family members, it affects how they go on holidays and it affects how they integrate into their community; and all of this has to be looked at as well. It does not all come back to huge dollops of funding from government departments. Much of it is to do with us as a community working, helping and assisting a lot of these people and providing a framework so that this vexed and growing issue can be better addressed by all of us as a community.

This is something that the Baillieu government is looking at. The Minister for Community Services, Mary Wooldridge, is particularly keen to deal with autism and its challenges. She is cognisant of this issue and I know she wants to work with all stakeholders to make certain that that is happening. I was remiss in not saying in the chamber earlier today that one of the first things Minister Wooldridge did in her new job was to visit Gippsland. Whilst she was in Gippsland we visited the very furthest part of Gippsland with the new member for Gippsland East in the Assembly, Tim Bull, who is a huge advocate for autism support in this state. It is good to see this new MP so passionate about something and putting that passion to work. Bill Sykes, the member for Benalla in the Assembly, is also very interested in this issue.

It is something that all of us will be challenged by through our constituents, friends, neighbours, family and other people we know. It is pleasing to have an opportunity to talk about autism. There are challenges ahead. Minister Wooldridge is addressing many of those challenges, and I look forward to working with other members of this chamber to make autism a priority for us as a community.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — Very briefly, I wish to thank all the speakers, but I think the most significant experience for me in regard to this issue was the first time I ever went to an Autism Angels meeting. There were about 20 parents in the room and quite a few children, and the noise just got louder and louder and the parents just kept speaking louder. I got a sense that day of what home must be like for them. I can talk about this as an observer, but I think Mr Finn today has articulated for all of us what it is like to live it. I really appreciate his contribution, and I so hope his lobbying for the Innovative Developments in the Education of Children with Autism program is successful, because I think we have both seen what that program can do and its portability. The really exciting things about the idea are that it is portable, and it is not costly. I hope his lobbying is very successful.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Pennicuik) — The question is:

That notice of motion 222 moved by Ms Hartland be agreed to.

Those of that opinion say aye, to the contrary no.

Honourable members — Aye.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Pennicuik) — I think the ayes have it.

Hon. W. A. Lovell — The noes have it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Pennicuik) — Order! The noes have it?

Hon. W. A. Lovell — No, I am sorry. We are not opposing the motion. I am sorry; I made a mistake.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Pennicuik) — Order! No division is required.

Mr Lenders — On a point of order, Acting President, on two occasions today Ms Lovell has made a call. The first time was during question time and now she has made a call about something being opposed or not opposed. I think this is a legitimate point of order. A call was made by the Deputy Leader of the Government that this motion be opposed. For the record, for the second time today a call has been made. If these calls are made in jest, then she should say that. It is the second time she has made a call for a division, and the point of order is that the vote should be had.

Mrs Coote — On the point of order, Acting President, I must correct the record here. The call before — —

Mr Lenders — We are talking about question time. Don't take any notice of this.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Pennicuik) — Order! Thank you, Mr Lenders. On the point of order, I had not asked if a division was required, but I had called for the ayes. I will put the question again just to clarify it. The question is:

That notice of motion 222 moved by Ms Hartland be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Pennicuik) — I invite Mr Lenders to move notice of motion 228.

VICTORIAN FAMILIES STATEMENT

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house —

- (1) notes the Baillieu-Ryan government's failure to conclude parliamentary debate on its much hyped 2011 Victorian families statement;
- (2) expresses concern that the Baillieu-Ryan government has now had a year to fulfil the promise contained in the statement but has not kept true to the spirit of the statement, nor respected it in its budget or its administrative decisions, which has hurt many Victorian families; and

- (3) calls on the Baillieu-Ryan government to immediately cease its regime of harsh funding cuts impacting on Victorian families.

If we go to the much vaunted families statement, interestingly from a coalition that said there would be no hype and no spin — —

Mr Drum — On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Lenders said he would move notice of motion 226, but this is not 228. Is that right? I just want to make sure.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Pennicuik) — Order! Yes.

Mr Drum — He said notice of motion 228, but it is notice of motion 226. That is the first time today he has made a mistake.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Pennicuik) — Order! There is no point of order, Mr Drum.

Mr LENDERS — I am absolutely delighted that The Nationals are defending the Liberal Party, particularly Mr Drum defending Ms Lovell given the long history of cooperation between the two of them. It is good to see that the coalition is working.

If we look back at the coalition that talked of having no spin and no glossy brochures, it is interesting to note that the families statement that came in here with much ado earlier this year quietly disappeared from the notice paper. It was on the notice paper for all those months, and every sitting week Ms Lovell would come in here and say, 'Our business is this bill, that bill and the families statement', and suddenly, without a whimper, it disappeared from the notice paper. It is back today for a discussion. It is back today in the context of the motion — and I thank Mr Drum — that is notice of motion 226.

I will go through this glossy brochure from the no-spin government. I will quote the very first paragraph to the house. It states:

Families are the cornerstone of our communities. While Victorians belong to families that look very different from each other, family life is central to many of the most important things we have in common.

Now this is the good bit:

It is about the necessities of a roof over our heads —

housing —

and food on the table, but it is also about working in a secure job that uses our skills, educating our children, feeling safe on

our streets, knowing our neighbours and having a quality of life that allows us to spend time with our loved ones.

I will start my remarks by reflecting on what the aspiration is in this families statement compared to the reality — what the actions and inactions of this government have actually done to Victorian families. I will start with the very first point: ‘It is about the necessities of a roof over our heads’.

We hear a lot from the Minister for Planning, who comes into this place talking about the most magnificent government in the inner solar system and about how in 11 or 12 months he has undone the neglect of the heinous governments before him. The other day he was actually boasting about the number of land lots he had freed up. I suggest — not that I am comparing Mr Guy with Tommy Bent, who was bent by name and bent by nature — that if he actually goes back through history he will see that there have been periods in Victoria where there has been massive land release. Nevertheless this government will claim credit for everything and in a bout of hyperbole will claim that it is the best in the inner solar system. It is nothing quite on par with Mr Mulder saying that in 11 months he had fixed the problems of 11 years of Labor government — that was a little bit rich.

I turn again to the first thing that this families statement talks about: the necessity of having a roof over our heads. We heard Ms Lovell today waxing lyrical in question time about a great project in the northern suburbs of Geelong. It was a great project that her colleague who sits next to her asked her about in a Dorothy Dixers. That was from a government that was going to get rid of Dorothy Dixers. Members will recall that infamous debate where Ms Cafagna asked Mr Baillieu about this and he said, ‘Yes, Josephine, there’ll be no Dorothy Dixers’. But leaving that aside, the Government Whip asked the Deputy Leader of the Government, the person sitting next to him, about what she has done. What we have is a good project for housing in the northern suburbs of Geelong funded by the commonwealth but with the credit coming to the state. This is a classical example of where we have come to. It is a good project, and it shows that if the commonwealth and state work together on social housing, you get good outcomes, and we congratulate the government for not ripping up all those projects.

I find it quite interesting that half of the government’s budget comes from commonwealth revenue, but whenever there is a shortfall it is Julia Gillard’s fault, and when anything is delivered with half of that commonwealth money it is a great initiative of the Baillieu government. If a measure of Victorian families

under pressure is how they are provided with a roof over their heads, Mr Guy talks about land release that will be of assistance into the future. He does not talk about that land release including provision for social housing or low-income people. He does not include any of those things.

Yet in her time in opposition Ms Lovell in effect bagged not every project but many of the projects that were put forward by Richard Wynne, the member for Richmond in the Assembly and a great former housing minister. She bagged those projects because the planning was too quick or the federal money, the amenity or the planning was not right. There was every reason to dog whistle and scare people on those issues, but there are two fundamental options for housing in Victoria. One is that it be market driven, and land availability and a flexible construction workforce in delivery are the two key elements of that; the other is that the government either buys more housing, freeing up housing stock, or assists with social housing and works on delivering that to get roofs over heads.

The first item put forward in this families statement earlier this year, which disappeared in a whimper from the notice paper, was about putting roofs over heads. On both of those tests, I would argue — and those opposite will undoubtedly argue to the contrary — that things have been worse in Victoria for families since the change of government. Things are worse in Victoria for families than they were.

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

Mr LENDERS — I invite Ms Lovell, as she stridently denies it, to start explaining why in some of the regions around Shepparton during her watch as housing minister the lists have actually grown longer — in her own home town. Under her watch as Minister for Housing in her home town of Shepparton the waiting lists have gotten longer. I would like the minister to explain that on the record in this house and explain to her community why, after one budget and a year of her stewardship, in her home town people need to wait longer for a home.

The second thing that is listed on here is food on the table. Food on the table is always an interesting one. I had the privilege of being in Healesville at the weekend. Healesville is an interesting place, of course, because Cindy McLeish, the member for Seymour in the Assembly, was one of the four Liberal candidates who ran an advertisement in the *Mountain Views Mail* for three weeks in a row before the election. Cindy McLeish — Cindy from the city, as some call her — is a good constituent of mine, of Mrs Coote and of

Ms Crozier from Elsternwick. That advertisement said, amongst other things, that under a Liberal government prices would not go up.

It was interesting for me to visit Healesville, which is in Ms McLeish's Assembly electorate of Seymour — and of course it is also in Northern Victoria Region, which is the electorate of Mr Drum and Ms Lovell. I was told by someone in Healesville — and I do not dispute this — that since the state election the price of a 500-gram packet of sliced cheese has gone up by 17.6 per cent, the price of an 875-gram box of laundry detergent has gone up by 18 per cent, the price of a 420-gram can of pet food has gone up by 17 per cent and the price of a 1-kilogram bag of tomatoes has gone up by 27 per cent. I took the word of the person who told me this that it is the case.

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

Mr LENDERS — What I will say to Ms Lovell, through you, Acting President, is it is unquestionable that families in the third of the Seymour electorate that rely on Yarra Valley Water will pay more for water because of the actions of Ms Lovell's family-friendly government — its choice to close the north–south pipeline. It is not just those people but 4 million Victorians — —

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Ms Lovell may well get very excited and strident in defending this — and she has a difficult dilemma, because some people in her electorate think closing the pipe is a very good idea — but the cruelty for those in the north of her electorate is that this government's policy, which has been announced by the Minister for Water, Mr Walsh, means that water will come down the pipe come the next drought, when Melbourne gets to stage 4 water restrictions. However, the government will not take water for Melbourne when Lake Eildon is 98.5 per cent full, as it is today, but when it is much lower — probably 20 per cent full. I would like the government to explain to Victorian families north of the Great Dividing Range how that actually works. It is an interesting dichotomy.

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Ms Lovell is stridently going on about the cost of the desalination plant, and she is correct, the desalination plant is an expensive infrastructure project; no-one has suggested anything to the contrary. If my reckoning is correct, from 1 December to 1 July next year the desalination plant will not be providing water to Melbourne Water, but as

I mentioned in my adjournment matter last night, the Essential Services Commission has already struck a rate that deals with the \$50 million a month payment to the consortia for the entitlement to get water. Melbourne Water users — and that includes Barwon Water, South Gippsland Water, Westernport Water and Western Water — will all pay \$50 million a month for a service that is not delivered. When the Treasurer, Mr Wells, strikes a dividend for water — —

Mrs Coote interjected.

Mr LENDERS — When Mr Wells strikes a dividend, Mrs Coote, he will take half of that \$50 million a month as a profit and will fleece your constituents and mine for services not provided. It is fine for the member to say that the desalination plant will produce expensive water; I do not dispute that. However, by the government's own admission it will be making Ms Lovell's constituents and Mrs Petrovich's constituents in the southern third of the Seymour electorate, which is getting water from Yarra Valley Water, pay more than if the north–south pipeline was running.

By the government's own rhetoric the cost of living for families is important, but it is saying to people in Wallan, Yarra Glen, Beveridge and Healesville, 'You will pay more for your water than necessary, because this expensive water is being turned on rather than the cheaper water through the pipe'.

Mr Drum interjected.

Mr LENDERS — It is a perfectly legitimate policy position for The Nationals, unless you happen to be any of The Nationals whose constituents will get water out of the desalination plant. I say to Mr Drum — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! I ask Mr Drum to stop interjecting. I do not think we need to encourage Mr Lenders to raise his voice much more than he has already.

Mr LENDERS — Thank you for your objective comments, Acting President. I urge Mr Drum to forget the super-pipe to Bendigo, forget those communities south of the Divide, like Wandong and Kilmore, which get their water from north of the Divide. If you actually look at where the Great Divide is, you will find that some of these towns are south of it, yet Cindy McLeish said no water should go from the north to the south. What I say to Mr Drum is: leaving those areas aside, just look at the one-third of your electorate — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! I ask Mr Lenders to direct his contribution to the

Chair and perhaps to not encourage members on the other side of the chamber to interject.

Mr LENDERS — I will seek to do that, Acting President. Some of them provoke me, and I am trying to educate them on water. What I would say to you, Acting President, is that in your electorate of Western Victoria Region you would find that the desalination plant and the grid mean that Barwon Water, which supplies water to about 40 per cent of families — —

Mrs Coote — On a point of order, Acting President, we have just heard the Leader of the Opposition say that he is here to educate us on water. That is not the intent of the motion. It is about families, not about water. Perhaps you, Acting President, could bring him back to the subject of the motion.

Mr LENDERS — On the point of order, Acting President, I was specifically referring to the second point of the 2011 Victorian families statement that talks about the cost of living, and I was addressing water in terms of the cost of living.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! I do not see the point of order. I think there are some linkages between those issues, but I ask Mr Lenders to direct his contribution to the motion at hand.

Mr LENDERS — The second great pillar of the Baillieu government's families statement, the glossy brochure that has slunk off the notice paper, talks about the cost of living for families. I talked about grocery prices in Healesville, and I am also talking about water prices in Geelong, Bendigo, the southern third of Seymour, most of Macedon and the entire area — —

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

Mr LENDERS — I will happily go through the costs to families that are a deliberate consequence of policy decisions of the government. Closing the north-south pipe, which will take one-sixth of Melbourne's water away, which is cheap, and replace it with more expensive desalination water from other areas — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr LENDERS — People say, 'Build another dam', but that will actually add to the cost. What we have is a cost to 4 million Victorians being applied by Melbourne Water, Barwon Water and the other Melbourne retailers such as Western Water, South Gippsland Water and Westernport Water. Water is more expensive because of the ideological decision of

the government. The cost of living of families before — —

Mr Koch interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Through you, Chair, to Mr Koch — explain to me the maths, because you get free water and the only cost is pumping it out of the Goulburn River for electricity, which is no different to the cost of pumping it from the Thomson Dam, as it is further away than Lake Eildon. Other than the electricity, the cost is free, so it is cheaper. If you replace that with desalination water — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LENDERS — You tell me, Mr Drum and Mr Koch, through you, Chair, why that would not mean that water would be more expensive for families? It is a nonsense. What it means is that the government is cursing and condemning families, 4 million Victorians, to more expensive water because of its ideological obsession.

I turn to the other costs of living for these same Victorian families. These families came to the election where — —

Mr Drum interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Mr Drum, this is not a football match. I ask Mr Lenders to not incite members on the other side of the house.

Mr LENDERS — Let us move from water and on to getting rid of the School Start bonus. We are talking about the costs to families. Families with a child starting in prep or in year 7 will be required to undergo a means test to ascertain those most in need, I acknowledge that, but during the election campaign there was never a mention of the Schools Start bonus being scrapped for the vast majority of Victorian families. We are talking about easing the cost of living for families, but we have a government full of spin and hyperbole. It says it is looking after families, but most Victorian families with a child starting prep or year 7 will have the School Start bonus ripped away from them. The government's excuse is always that times are tough, the GST has gone down and there are other priorities. Executive order 1 from the Premier was good for the families of two ministers when he boosted his cabinet by 10 per cent. His first priority was to create more ministers, and from then on he said, 'There is actually not a lot of money for families'.

I turn to the cost of putting food on the table. We have not yet heard the cacophony from those opposite on the carbon tax, which comes into effect on 1 July next year. This is a reflection on what has happened to date in Victoria with the things the Baillieu government has control of. I also turn to the costs for families. I am glad Ms Lovell is sitting in the chamber — in her objective manner! — because she may reflect on the costs for families. Her Nationals colleague the member for Shepparton in the other place, Mrs Powell, had a problem with libraries and fixed it. To give her credit, she enabled families to have access to libraries. Mrs Powell, Ms Lovell's colleague from Shepparton, fixed it. Ms Lovell, on the other hand, with a budget about five times the size of Mrs Powell's budget, cannot find \$1.7 million for the Take A Break program.

We are talking about pressures on Victorian families which a Victorian minister could address. I invite Ms Lovell, if there is such a priority for relieving the pressure on families, to get rid of those two extra ministers and their entourage. That would make \$1.7 million available. That is a sign of the Baillieu government's priorities. It is impossible for it to find \$1.7 million for the Take A Break program, but it finds enough to get two more ministers in cars, driving around the state and causing trouble. The government could get rid of the two ministers, and perhaps it could trim the number of parliamentary committee chairs or parliamentary secretaries.

The government has made choices, which are legitimate choices for government in this place, but it cannot then go out and say it cannot find \$1.7 million. It can find the money to boost its ministerial team, but it cannot find money for Victorian families. As Ms Lovell well knows, Take A Break takes pressure off families by providing occasional child care. If we are talking about — —

Hon. W. A. Lovell — Lobby the federal government; it is responsible.

Mr LENDERS — Ms Lovell said I should lobby the federal government, but she, as a minister of the Crown with a budget of more than \$1 billion, can fix the problem today. She can walk into her office and fix the problem today, like Mrs Powell did, who found four times the amount of money Ms Lovell has found. Jeanette Powell did not blame the federal government; she went out and fixed the problem. What I would say to Ms Lovell is that if she put as much energy into fixing the problems faced by Victorian families as Mrs Powell did in fixing the problem with libraries, those Victorian families would not have that pressure. It is not for me to praise The Nationals over the Liberal

Party, but I dare say Mrs Powell has a bit better antennae for families than perhaps others in the house.

I have talked about ensuring that we have a roof over our heads to putting food on the table. The motion is also about working in a secure job. The interesting thing with jobs is that there are some things the state government can do and some things the state government cannot do. It would be ridiculous for this side of the house to try to hold the government to account for every bit of job insecurity around. That would be ridiculous, but a state government that actually has a plan to secure jobs going forward will do more to add job security than one that does not. There are bits of a plan, giving credit where credit is due, but an overall direction, where the Premier holds a minister accountable for generating jobs in this state, does not exist. That is required to give security to families.

I will give the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security reasonable marks for his efforts in trying to secure jobs in parts of regional Victoria, but the key area of industry policy in terms of what we are doing to stop jobs, particularly manufacturing jobs, leaving the state is disappointing. This government got elected by saying its two priorities for jobs were in manufacturing and agriculture. I disagree with the priorities. In a modern age international education, ICT and financial services are equally important priorities in terms of new industries for government, but the government has made a choice and has said manufacturing and agriculture are its two top areas. Although the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security has not necessarily been successful in his efforts to secure jobs, I give him at least an 8 or 9 out of 10 for effort. The manufacturing team has, sadly, let the state down, and without that job security families are anxious. We have lost 1300 manufacturing jobs from iconic companies, which has been widely reported by the media statewide, let alone the haemorrhaging of the smaller companies, on which I have no data, nor have I seen any. My colleague Mr Somyurek could, sadly, inform the house of who those 1300 people are.

You cannot continue beating up the workforce, like this government does, and expect security. The nurses dispute involves nurses from 70 000 Victorian families; it is not just an industrial dispute, it involves 70 000 Victorian families, with all sorts of threats over their heads about how they should operate — and they have the temerity to actually engage the government in industrial bargaining. That is not good faith bargaining. A cabinet document released in May talks about how organisations can manoeuvre to force workers into a particular set of circumstances where there is no good faith bargaining.

In relation to the state public service the Minister for Community Services, Mary Wooldridge, has come out with some fairly outrageous statements that branded the entire public service because of her jaundiced view of what might be happening in the child protection area. We heard another bizarre statement in relation to teachers. Some 60 000 Victorian teachers were told that with the election of a Baillieu government they would get the highest wages of any teachers in Australia, and that would involve an 8 per cent wage rise. I do not think any of those teachers were naive enough to start factoring in that 8 per cent, because there would be enough common sense among them. However, teachers were promised an 8 per cent wage rise, but then they got the enterprise bargaining offer of 2.5 per cent, unless they can agree with a whole lot of other things.

As far as security in jobs goes, if you work in the public sector, you are fair game; if you are work in many areas of the private sector, not much of an effort is put in to help you keep your job. My contacts in the financial services and ICT industries, areas in which I was active as a minister, tell me that there is an exodus north. Good luck to Barry O'Farrell and his government for encouraging jobs to go to Sydney, but the sad thing is that Victoria is drifting.

It is not catastrophic; it is not fatal. I do not want to exaggerate it, but Victoria is drifting. The Victorian families statement talks about secure jobs. We need a bit more from this government than a rhetoric of blaming other people. We need a lot more than a rhetoric of blaming other people. We need a lot more than a rhetoric of blaming the federal government.

Some of the key areas — and I will get to education shortly — include the building of schools. If you slow down that program, if you abandon the long-term projects in the transport plan and if you have a plan for a plan for a plan that you want the federal government to pay for at some stage in the future, so that in four or five years you can start working on this, that does not generate jobs. The cruel hoax for families includes things like the Rowville railway line. The day before I was born, on 30 September 1958, Henry Bolte announced the first plan for a railway station at Monash University. Six times since then the Liberal Party has promised that railway station at Monash University, the most recent being in this feasibility study for Rowville. If we are talking about families and the jobs that come from projects, just doing something rather than having another round table and talking about it or having another feasibility study you want the commonwealth to pay for will actually generate jobs in Victoria.

I move on to the issue of people working in secure jobs that use their skills and the issue of educating our children. Let me utter the dreaded acronym for the government — VCAL (Victorian certificate of applied learning). If we are talking of some of our most challenged young people who are seeking to engage in meaningful employment and who have often just fallen through the cracks in the education system, VCAL has been an outstanding success story of the last decade, or almost a decade, in actually helping people in this category.

In relation to the process that Mr Hall and the government are going through of cutting out the VCAL coordinators, I get the concept that you are trying to relook at programs, streamline them and work out where you can run them. I get where the government is coming from. But given the practicality of VCAL — and I do not want to overcook it — this is probably the area in education that is closest to the top if not at the top where the extra intervention of a coordinator would make it work. We can all list schools in our electorates where VCAL programs work. Where you have kids who are disengaged or disconnected, it is inevitably those extra people who link the kids with particular interests or skills with particular employers in an area who make it work.

If you have in your families statement this syrupy statement, 'We want our children to have skills', the TAFE system is important, the education system is important and how you deal with the massive cutting of capital works is important. That was an election commitment of the government. It said it would do half of what the Labor Party did, or 60 per cent of what the Labor Party did, so that means less capital works in schools. That was what was promised. We are not saying that is a broken promise. The consequences of that obviously are that there will be less work done in schools and maintenance requirements will be higher, and this will all affect families, but I give the government credit on that because it did not promise it would match Labor's capital expenditure in schools, so the consequences were in a sense obvious when Victorians made the choice.

However, the VCAL area was one that came out of nowhere. I give credit to the Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Mr Hall, or the Minister for Education, Mr Dixon, whichever minister it was who said that in some areas if schools are setting up new VCAL courses there will be a pool of funding to assist that. That is good, that is a reasonable mitigation of a bad decision, but the reality of this is that we all know schools which will have to reallocate resources to VCAL. Many schools will do that — schools I have

been to. I have been to schools in Kerang in the electorate of Ms Lovell and Mrs Petrovich, and they are diverting resources away from other areas. They will make that choice, and that is the choice of a devolved school system. If you are going to talk about skills helping families, be aware that some of the most vulnerable families and students genuinely feel they have had the rug pulled out from under them on this.

Going back to my motion, back to the skills statement and back to the families statement, this is a great disappointment for a large number of Victorian families.

Other issues raised in the families statement include working in a secure job, using skills, educating our children and feeling safe on our streets. I will not even begin to go through the charade of having protective services officers going to railway stations without toilets. Hopefully the government will sort that out, and hopefully the police force has now stabilised enough after the carnage that it went through, the conniptions that it went through internally and all the traumas that the government was going through. Hopefully Chief Commissioner of Police Ken Lay can actually start sorting some of that out, but feeling safe on our streets also involves the government taking responsibility and not just finding scapegoats to blame and forever trying to frighten people so it can be their champion. There has been a fair bit of that, but I will give the government the benefit of the doubt that it will come through that.

Other areas in the families statement include knowing your neighbours and having quality of life that allows us to spend time with our loved ones. On that last one — quality of life that allows us to spend time with our loved ones — I cannot let pass the 100-odd families that are connected with this Legislative Council, whether it be the 40 elected members or the 60 or more others who work in this place either directly for the Legislative Council or indirectly through other parts of Parliament. This statement makes a mockery of those people. Last night we were in this place till 3.30 in the morning. That is probably the longest sitting we have had, or if it is not, it is certainly in the band. It beggars belief that we do this to ourselves when we could have sat till 10.00 p.m on Thursday and we could have sat on Friday under our standing orders, or we could have actually explored some of the issues that we have had — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Why don't you — like yesterday? This is not a reflection on Mr Barber or

Mr Hall. Through a long committee stage yesterday Mr Barber gave Mr Hall questions and Mr Hall was representing another minister. The two of them actually tried to get a fairly complex area dealt with, but it took 3 hours. The reality was that the two of them were paying attention. I was sitting in here as the Labor Party spokesman. There were a couple of government members here. People were here. The reality was that two people were intensely interested in what was going on, and the Chair obviously was paying attention. There were those members, and there were probably half a dozen support staff around them. The logic behind not being in a legislation committee dealing with the detail and then reporting back to the house defies belief.

Without engaging in a standing orders debate, going back to the quality of life of these 100 Victorians affected by this, this government cannot manage to save itself in this particular area. When we talk in this chamber about quality of life it beggars belief. If government members want to dragoon us into Opus Dei so that the 40 of us will be lashing and afflicting ourselves, that is one thing, but for the 60 or more staff supporting us — —

Mrs Coote interjected.

Mr LENDERS — That is it is completely another thing, Mrs Coote. Mr Davis may get a thrill out of people sitting until 3.00 a.m. and may think, 'That's all part of good governance' — and it beggars belief, given he is the Minister for Health. Leaving that aside, however, we are talking about a families statement and about working families in Victoria having a quality of life that allows us to spend time with our loved ones, yet I would suggest that many of the staff here last night risked their lives going home — and I am not exaggerating that. They risked their lives going home, as did the members, because of fatigue. All of their families at some stage would have been aggrieved by the text message or phone call informing them — because no-one knows in advance. Perhaps the government caucus is told how long we are going to sit, but none of the other 100 people know, and therefore — —

Mrs Coote — We don't have a caucus.

Mr LENDERS — Mrs Coote says there is not a caucus, but remarkably they are more disciplined than the Labor Party. The 21 coalition members march in lockstep on everything, whether they agree with it or not!

That is their privilege. If you form a caucus, you form a caucus. The point I am making about quality of life

with this micro-example of us staying late in this place is that this families statement is an absolute and complete joke. The people here are expected to be back at their workstations at 8.00 a.m. The Parliament will pick up the tab for some to stay at a hotel in the city, and some go home and come back in the morning. If we are going to have a families statement that talks about all these things, it is about time the government paid some heed to its rhetoric.

If we go through the rest of the families statement section by section, we see it is all very glossy and impressive. There are sections on things such as helping families pay their bills. Well, I have talked about the cost of water due to the north-south pipeline — not due to the historical legacy the government inherited post drought but due to the actions it has taken to put the cost up further. I have talked about the promises made in the Yarra Valley and about what the relevant measure would do to consumer prices. I have talked a bit about the protective services officers in relevant areas. We could go through all of those things, but they come, in conclusion, to the question of the basic services affecting families. Perhaps I am fairly old-fashioned, but for me the core elements of the state that affect families are community safety, health and education. I have touched on community safety and education, and I will conclude by talking about health.

The Minister for Health is very excited because he is in an enterprise bargaining agreement dispute with the nurses, and he seems to run on adrenaline. Good luck to him with sorting that out, and good luck to him with managing his stakeholder relations for the next four years. Hopefully the dispute will be resolved to the satisfaction of the government and the union. These things are never easy, but I must admit it is an extraordinary frolic to watch him in action on that. He will also have an EBA (enterprise bargaining agreement) negotiation coming up with the various ancillary and support staff in the health system over the next year or so. He will also have to deal very shortly with the toughest, most militant union in the inner solar system, to quote the hyperbole of Mr Mulder, the Minister for Public Transport, which is that very ferocious and tough union the Australian Medical Association. I wish Mr Davis well with that. If he thought the Police Association was tough, let him deal with the AMA!

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Let me tell Mr Leane, the Electrical Trades Union is a bunch of pussycats compared to some of these other unions!

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr LENDERS — There will be the paramedics in the ambulance service, too. The minister has all these EBA negotiations coming up, and he needs to work through all of those. In the end the underpinning of all this is that the single largest component of the state budget is the health system. You can quibble about where the sizes are as between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Health, but ultimately the hospital system is the largest part. The biggest issue between the federal and state governments for a decade, whether under the Howard government, the Rudd government, the Gillard government or all the respective state governments — the Kennett, Bracks, Brumby and Baillieu governments — has been how you get the balance right in response to the eternal drift where the federals shed more and more funding responsibilities to the states, while there is exponential 8 per cent inflation in the health system. It is how you deal with that.

For families health is probably the single most important issue to them in terms of their reliance on government, because in the end you come to the health system when you are desperate. Though obviously there are also normal procedures, people come into the health system in emergencies. Victorian families had been given enormous promises to the effect that, 'We'll have a bigger Box Hill Hospital and we'll have a bigger Bendigo hospital', but we have not actually been told what services those promises imply. It is almost as if government members have been beating their chests, saying, 'We're going to build a bigger hospital', but the debate has not been about the patient services.

Mr Davis is involved with debate at the moment about how many beds have been closed by nurses et cetera, and that is a debate he needs to be in — he is the health minister — but what we forget in all of it is that we are talking about families. The nurses EBA dispute will come and go in the next weeks, months or whatever time it takes. However, as we go into the remaining three years of this term — with one year already having gone by — hospital bed numbers are actually contracting in Victoria. It was telling when Mr Jennings asked Mr Davis in this house how many beds there were in the health system, and he did not know. He did not even guess at it. He did not know.

Mr Koch interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Mr Koch may be happily writing his Christmas cards on Mr Rich-Phillips's desk, but Mr Davis did not know how many beds were in the

health system. Let us assume he went and checked — I am sure he would have.

Health service after health service provides services to our community, and these are difficult services to manage for all the reasons that we know and that I will not go into. In the end this is the area families are looking for support in and solutions to. Blaming the nurses and the federal government might get you off the hook for a week, a month or even a year, but ultimately people want those services. They constitute probably the core service of the state government. Even though our population has grown by 1.5 per cent since the election of the Baillieu government, Victorian families have not seen any increase in hospital beds. I suspect we have actually had a contraction. Mr Davis can obviously deal with that by putting figures out, and we have heard the kinds of statements that have been made, such as that it is good for Victorians to outsource beds from the hospitals. If the Labor government had done that, we would have been laughed out of the inner solar system, to go back to that analogy.

What I am saying here is that for Victorian families it is fine for Mr Davis to get in here and very excitedly present a glossy document — and at the end of the document it says there is going to be another at the start of 2012, and Mr Davis is out there talking to families about what should be in it; however, contracting numbers of hospital beds is not an answer. Our population has gone up 1.5 per cent since the election of the Baillieu government, and we have fewer hospital beds. We need service delivery. The state is about delivering health, education and community safety. This document talks about those things and a bit more, and if the document were delivered on it would be fantastic.

As my motion says, it raises hopes and aspirations, but the actions of this government do not match the rhetoric. Instead of taking pressure off families, we are putting pressure on. Whether it is cost of living increases or taking away services like VCAL (Victorian certificate of applied learning) or the Take a Break funding, we are contracting the health services and disrupting the lives of tens of thousands of Victorians by needlessly pursuing belligerent industrial disputation from the employers' point of view.

I urge people to support my motion because the Victorian families statement had the potential to be a great document but it is turning into a cruel hoax from a government that either does not know how to deliver or does not want to deliver.

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — It will come as absolutely no surprise to the opposition that the government will be opposing this motion. However, it gives us a great opportunity to talk about the achievements of the Baillieu government. In just over one year families have truly come to the forefront of the government's approach to government. At the outset of my contribution I would like to remind the chamber about the families statement that the Premier, Ted Baillieu, brought down as one of his earliest actions as Premier. The *2011 Victorian Families Statement* under the heading 'Why Victoria needs a families statement' with the subtitle 'Family life is central to many of the most important things we have in common' states:

Families are the cornerstone of our communities. While Victorians belong to families that look very different from each other, family life is central to many of the most important things we have in common. It is about the necessities of a roof over our heads and food on the table, but it is also about working in a secure job that uses our skills, educating our children, feeling safe on our streets, knowing our neighbours and having a quality of life that allows us to spend time with our loved ones.

Mr Lenders also quoted from that statement, but his emphasis was on negatives — nothing good, all bad. When he was not on a frolic on water, he was talking about the negative elements of what is happening in this state. He did not talk about some of the great achievements we have made as a government.

I will start with health. Mr Lenders said that health is probably the no. 1 most important issue to families. I would like to put on the record what we have done in the health sphere since coming to government a year ago. I remind Mr Lenders that the Labor Party was in government for 11 years and very few things were achieved. We have done them in a year. I will list some of the things we have achieved in health. In acute care, we have provided a record \$13 billion in health funding, including new programs to improve health service delivery; we have included \$448 million in the 2011–12 budget to initiate the coalition government's commitment to provide 800 new hospital beds and \$565 million to boost the hospital system, especially for elective and emergency departments. We have protected the Victorian health system by renegotiating the Council of Australian Governments health deal from the Gillard federal government, including more funding, no clawback of Victoria's GST and specific arrangements to protect Victoria's rural hospitals and home and community care services.

I will pause to remind the chamber about the negotiations that the former government did with — I think it might have been — that fly-by-night Prime Minister, Mr Rudd. It was prepared to sell our souls

here in Victoria; it was prepared to do anything it took. But when the Baillieu government came in and went to the negotiating table and said it was not good enough — surprise, surprise — even the other Labor states came in behind us and we were able to achieve a huge result for the state of Victoria — but it took a Liberal government to do it.

We have also strengthened palliative care services with a \$34 million funding boost. We have released the Strengthening Palliative Care plan, which outlines the future direction of palliative care services. This is a very sensitive area. It is something that perhaps many families do not think about until it hits them, and at that stage they need every bit of support they can get because they are dealing with an issue that none of us likes to think about and it is imperative that the funding, the sensitivity and the programs are there to support them at such times. This is about listening to Victorians and understanding what they have to go through. It is putting money into places where Victorians need it at that most crucial time. I think the Minister for Health is to be commended.

There are some other issues. We started work on Ballarat's regional integrated cancer centre, which was hugely well received by people in rural and regional Victoria. We have opened the new Royal Children's Hospital. We have funded new and improved health services at Western, Sunshine day hospital, Sunbury and Frankston and we have allocated \$259 million to upgrade regional health services across Victoria.

In 1999 the Labor Party, and Mr Brumby in particular, came to government saying how well they had done in rural and regional Victoria. That is about as much as they ever did; that was it. The government continued to neglect rural and regional Victoria and, in fact, the Labor Party received a backlash from rural and regional Victoria, which is one of the major reasons that we are here as a coalition government in Victoria.

In his contribution Mr Lenders was quite scathing about the fact that we have put in \$630 million and called for expressions of interest to build the new Bendigo hospital in rural and regional Victoria, which is an important part of our state. The coalition government understands that the people of Bendigo need a new hospital and that Ballarat needs a new cancer centre. These are really important issues.

But there are also things that are affected by what we have done in health which are particularly pleasing to see. One of those is the use of the new information technology. We have launched an iPad application for the Better Health Channel. People are becoming

increasingly addicted to their iPads, so it is really good to see that the Baillieu government and the health minister are making certain that health in this state is at the end of a button so people can get the information they need. I think that is going to be particularly interesting as we look into what young people do.

In his contribution Mr Lenders also went on at great length about crime and law and order. I remind him that if he had not been so busy with spin in the lead-up to the election last year and if he had been out on the streets of his electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region, which is the same as mine, he would have heard people saying that they were concerned about being bashed in the street. The people of Ashwood were particularly angry about a poor old man who was bashed to death in the middle of the day on his last trip around his own area before moving away, because the Labor government had closed down the police station. How is that for law and order? What about that as a dreadful excuse?

Let us look at what we have achieved in crime prevention. We are delivering the \$25 million community crime prevention program, which will fund grassroots crime prevention initiatives to build safer communities. This includes the Community Safety Fund grants, which provide up to \$10 000 for councils and community groups to implement practical community safety projects such as locks, lighting and fencing. It also includes public safety infrastructure grants, which provide up to \$250 000 for councils to develop public safety infrastructure such as alarm systems, lighting systems and closed-circuit television systems. It has been particularly pleasing to see the implementation of closed-circuit television in the lower house of Prahran, where a lot of alcohol-induced violence was happening. That is something that the current member for Prahran in the other place, Clem Newton-Brown, ran very hard on in the lead-up to the election. It is good to see that that promise has been upheld.

I will say this once again: rural and regional Victoria was neglected by the Labor Party during its 11 years of government. In the crime prevention area one of our achievements has been that rural reference groups have listened and responded to local communities. Rural reference groups were engaged to support and build local community capacity to address local crime and safety issues. It is important that locals are part of the law and order process. That is why people want to see the PSOs (protective services officers) at train stations. They want to be given the assurance that they can get on and off trains at stations in safety. They want to know there is a safety net.

In this chamber we have listened to the Labor government going on and on about the PSOs, saying that they should not be on train stations and that there are a whole raft of reasons for that. I can remember a very late night of debate in this place when, once again, Labor Party members said they did not agree with our PSO legislation, but members of the public, the people who were actually affected by law and order, crime on their streets and safety in their neighbourhoods, were pleased that we had honoured yet another election promise.

Education is a particular passion of Mr Lenders. I listened to him going on during his contribution. As I said in the chamber before, I feel sorry for Mr Lenders, because I know education is a passion of his. I know he is bitterly disappointed that he is in opposition and that his voice can no longer be heard. We heard his contribution to the debate, which was just sour grapes.

I refer to the achievements in education of the Baillieu government. We have made the largest single investment in capital works at special and autistic schools in more than a decade — that was something we debated earlier this afternoon — that is, \$78.3 million worth of funding has been provided to 11 schools and an additional \$156 million has been invested in a children's disability program to meet growth in demand. I made a contribution to the debate on Ms Hartland's notice of motion and talked about people who suffer from autism and how families, friends, neighbours and communities are also involved.

Mr Lenders scathingly refers to our Victorian families document as a sham, but that is not true at all. What did he say it was? He said it was a hoax on Victoria's families. How absolutely and utterly untrue that is, because the Baillieu government has introduced some very real and properly funded programs, such as the one I have mentioned. That shows we have been listening to families who need help and support. Very real families and their supporters in the community are getting the funding they have asked for.

In relation to the teaching profession, we are recruiting an extra 100 maths and science specialists at a cost of \$24.3 million over five years. Those specialists will work with teachers in primary schools to build their maths and science teaching skills. It is essential that primary schoolchildren are given the benefits they need if we are going to have a skilled workforce in the future.

In his contribution Mr Lenders criticised Mr Hall, the Minister for Higher Education and Skills. I put on the record some of the achievements Mr Hall has been able

to implement since our election to government in November last year. He has presided over the investment of \$1.2 billion in Victoria's training system which will rise to over \$1.3 billion next year; he has commissioned an independent review by the Essential Services Commission of fees and funding in the VET (vocational education and training) sector; he has implemented changes to VET funding consistent with the recommendation of the Essential Services Commission to better manage the much-needed growth in training; and he has provided additional funding for exemptions and concessions to support more people when accessing training. These are issues that are affecting real families and their quality of life in Victoria. These issues were particularly well received by those families involved in this area.

Members will have heard me in this chamber talk *ad infinitum* about the richness of our community being reflected in our approach to the arts in this state. This is extremely important to understand as a community. One of the first things the Premier did was to make himself the Minister for the Arts. We know the Premier is passionate about the arts; he has a very deep, abiding and longstanding involvement with the arts and has been a great supporter of the arts for a significant time. Together with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier Assisting the Premier with the Arts, Heidi Victoria, who is the member for Bayswater in the Assembly, the Premier has done some remarkable things in the short time since we were elected to government last year.

I will put some of those arts achievements on the record, because the arts reflect how families operate. The arts provide benefits to the lives of families and reflect whether families feel happy and connected to their communities. We have delivered a \$73 million boost to the arts to deliver our commitment to nurturing creative talent, making the arts more visible and accessible across the state and building on the strength and diversity of our arts sector. We have provided \$24 million over four years to secure the future of the Victorian College of the Arts; \$4 million in regional arts initiatives; and a new \$1 million sculpture initiative.

The former Labor government was more than happy to rip the heart out of the Victorian College of the Arts. It was prepared to sacrifice it, bundle it up, put it into the University of Melbourne and take away what was so beneficial to Victorians. The former Labor government could not wait to do that. However, we have recognised the importance of the Victorian College of the Arts and have put \$44 million into it over four years to secure its future. This is for all the families involved with the

Victorian College of the Arts and its future graduates. This is important for Victoria, and it will enhance the richness of arts within Victoria in the future. We have provided \$3 million to the Bendigo Sandhurst community theatre project. Once again we have listened to rural and regional Victoria, and we are putting funding into this area to enhance the lives and experiences of Victorian families.

Mr Lenders did not speak about community services at all. It was something he left out, which is a great pity because much has been achieved in community services. I put on record my acknowledgement of the work that the Minister for Community Services, Mary Wooldridge, has done in this sector. It is a very difficult sector, and we are dealing with many very disadvantaged people within our community. They all have families, neighbours and friends, all of whom contribute to their quality of life. If we can encourage people with disabilities, whether they be mild or severe, to live as independently as they possibly can within our community, that is going to be very good for all of us in the community. That is certainly the thrust of what the Baillieu government is achieving.

One of the major things Mr Lenders left out of his contribution to the debate, which comes under the umbrella of community services and affects all Victorians, is the cost of living issue. We have provided 840 000 Victorian families with the benefits of year-round electricity concessions and an increased water and sewerage concession cap to keep pace with increasing costs. This will be an amazing benefit to families for whom bills are a major concern. This is real quality-of-life stuff. I spoke earlier today about the cost of living, which had been brought up in another debate. What has been done in this state by the Baillieu government for all of these 840 000 Victorian families in providing year-round electricity concessions has to be balanced with the huge impost that the federal Labor government has put on this state with the carbon tax. It is an enormous impost. The cost of the carbon tax is going to reverberate through all Victorian families. It is going to be absolutely horrendous and will affect the cost of living and quality of life of families in this state into the future.

One of the particularly difficult things we need to deal with in the community services sector is child protection. The Minister for Community Services, Minister Wooldridge, recognised that some of Victoria's children who come under child protection are the most vulnerable children we have in our state, and it is incumbent on us as a government to make certain we put in place proper safety nets to ensure that these children can be looked after in the best way possible.

The difficulty here is that we have to put this in context, and Minister Wooldridge has done this in many instances. We are dealing in many cases with very complex family structures; we are dealing in many instances with domestic violence, with drug and alcohol issues and with intellectual and other disabilities. We are dealing with some of the most challenging behaviours in some of these areas.

We are talking also about little children in this state and how we can make them safe. It is very important that we work to support these children in whatever way is best for them, and child protection workers are at the forefront of dealing with these issues. As I said earlier today, Minister Wooldridge spent a lot of time talking to child protection workers in Gippsland and listening to what they had to say. She heard about the very real challenges they were facing. This is a vexing problem for us as a community. One of our election promises was to support parenting skills. If we are going to look down the track at how we can start to make a difference, it is very important to have a look at strengthening families. Not all families these days have wider networks they can draw upon to enhance their family skills, and we have recognised this very important fact.

Our child protection improvements have included the investment of \$98 million and 47 new staff. That is an enormous commitment and shows exactly what Minister Wooldridge feels is necessary in this area. Minister Wooldridge also launched a comprehensive inquiry into Victoria's child protection system to look at how the protection and support of vulnerable young Victorians can be improved. The inquiry called for submissions right across the state, and I know there have been many. I commend all of those who have written and in many instances shared some of their very concerning stories. If we are going to be able to make a difference, we have to know exactly what we are dealing with. This was a very courageous approach by the minister, and I know she is looking forward to seeing what comes out of those recommendations.

In the community sector, red tape and bureaucracy for charities and community sector organisations have been reduced by replacing four standards with one. This will make it so much easier for people who are working in charities. We have been out there listening. In disability services it is really important to understand that Victoria took the lead on an announcement by the Council of Australian Governments that the federal government, Victoria and other states will work towards a national disability insurance scheme (NDIS) that will provide greater choice for people living with a disability. In Victoria we have formed an NDIS task

force to advise Victoria on the best path towards a national disability insurance scheme, and we are seen across the country as the forerunners in this area. We are setting up pilots and looking into the transition to an NDIS. This is something for which Victoria is recognised by all of the other states around the country.

There has been \$92.7 million invested in disability funding to improve access to services for Victorians living with a disability, their families and their carers. This government has given great recognition and praise, formal and informal, to carers, and there will be legislation at some stage dealing with carers. We have recognised the huge contribution made by carers in this state. I point out once again that carers are family members. They may be carers of children with a disability or they may be carers of people with a mental disability, and that would include young carers looking after their parents who have a mental illness. There are carers for aged parents and ageing people within our community. As a government we have recognised that all these families and their various configurations are dealing with these tensions in their day-to-day life, and we are giving recognition and support where it is necessary.

In the youth justice sector we have passed new laws to improve security at the youth justice centres, and work is under way on a new single-entry point at the Parkville youth justice centre. In flood recovery, we have paid more than \$20 million in support payments to over 11 000 Victorian families who were affected by floods, and we have established flood recovery centres in Kerang, Narre Warren and Charlton. However, it is also very important to understand how the Baillieu government and Minister Lovell in particular have supported early childhood development. If we get it right with our small children and the families and all of the people involved in early childhood development, it is going to set us up very well for the future.

Minister Lovell certainly has recognised this and has put in place many programs and has achieved a great deal. The minister has launched a \$26 million capital grants round for 2011–12, the largest grant round for early childhood infrastructure in Victoria's history. I will repeat that: it is the largest grant round for early childhood infrastructure in Victoria's history — \$26 million for capital grants. That is recognition of what is needed in this state, and it is going to have huge ramifications and benefits for Victorian families. The minister has also delivered an additional \$10 million for kindergarten inclusion support services, an election commitment that will enable 246 more children with disabilities to attend kindergarten.

Minister Lovell has prepared and launched the Smalltalk research project, a world-leading \$8.9 million project to provide assistance and guidance to about 2000 families for parenting skills to develop a child's social, interpersonal and literary skills. This is really helping families and giving them the very skills they crave to help and enable their small children to develop as they would like them to. This is very real funding exactly at the point where it is going to make the biggest difference.

Once again recognising the issue of rural kindergartens, the Baillieu government has prepared and launched the Small Rural Kindergarten grants program, a \$6 million election commitment to provide grants of up to \$20 000 to eligible small rural kindergartens. This is another example of the Baillieu government caring, supporting and listening to our rural and regional communities.

The government has also provided every community-based kindergarten in Victoria with a grant of \$2500 for IT and equipment at a total cost of \$3.4 million. There is funding of \$3.7 million to maintain the Maternal and Child Health Line's capacity to answer more than 100 000 calls per year. We find that at a time when young parents need more and more advice, this is an invaluable service for Victorian families. There is also funding of \$2 million to implement the coalition government's parenting strategy to provide support to parents, which I touched upon earlier. It is important to know that we put the money with the rhetoric, and \$2 million was directed to implement this strategy. There is also funding of \$180 000 to expand the maternal and child health nurses scholarship program to provide an additional 50 postgraduate scholarships of \$3500 each.

When we look at the total package that Minister Lovell has put in place, we can see that it is about helping to support parents, giving them the skills and support where they need it, giving access to help online, looking at IT, looking into rural kindergartens — helping Victorian families where they need to be helped. I congratulate Minister Lovell on those achievements — and this is year one; we have only been in office for one year.

It is also important to look at housing. Once again we have a whole series of families in public housing. Many Victorian families face huge challenges with housing, so it is important to understand what we have achieved in our first year. We announced the development of the Victorian housing framework and launched a new four-year \$76.7 million homelessness action plan to tackle homelessness across Victoria. Homelessness is very complex, and no longer is it characterised by a middle-

aged man wandering the streets. Homeless Victorians can be young, old, have a mental illness, have a disability, have a drug or alcohol problem — they can be from just about any area in our community. It is a very different and changing group of people, and it is important to understand that we are having to put programs into place to deal with a myriad of challenges in this area.

The minister has also commenced an upgrading of 1800 public housing properties and the building of 1600 new public housing properties. These are going to come on stream, and all the families who will be residents in these houses will be able to re-establish themselves and reconnect with their community. These very important areas that have been addressed indicate that the Baillieu government has achieved.

The Victorian families statement is an ongoing discussion between the government and Victorian families about what is important, what is needed and how we are progressing in achieving it. I have answered many of the criticisms Mr Lenders posed in his contribution, and I was able to give some really good facts and figures about what the Baillieu government has done for families, recognising not just the importance of a families statement but also the sentiments behind the statement. We need to really listen to families. We do not take a huge blanket approach with glossy spin, but we listen to the various areas, including some of the things I have touched upon today: the housing issues, the early childhood issues and the disability issues. There are programs for rural and regional Victoria and the arts — a whole range and raft of things we have been implementing to strengthen Victorian families.

It is important for members of this chamber to understand that each year the Victorian families statement will be updated. It will provide a snapshot of what Victorian families experience, what they want and what they aspire to. It will set out the challenges ahead and the progress in addressing issues that families have identified as important to them. It is not about what the government has decided is important for families; it is about listening to families to find out what is important to them and to help them where they need it most.

In this spirit, the Victorian families statement and the issues in it have been identified as being important to families, and they continue to guide decision making at every turn. For example, the proposals put to cabinet now include advice on the benefits and impacts on families. This is a very important step, because right at the very top of the policy-making process in this state families are at the forefront. They are very much part of

the cabinet discussion, and they are kept at the forefront and in the minds of all of our ministers as they make and develop policies and funding programs, and it is very pleasing to see that.

Because it was so pleasing to see these developments, I was very disappointed to hear Mr Lenders say he did not believe the sentiment behind our families statement was true; it is true. I was particularly hurt by Mr Lenders's comment, and I am certain that now he has heard of the real achievements we have made he will change his mind on some of the hurtful things he said about the Baillieu government.

In contrast to this motion, I refer to the May budget, which contained huge funding for Victorian families. The budget announcements included a 17.5 per cent annual electricity concession; stamp duty cuts; the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund, helping rural and regional communities and families; 1700 more police and a reform agenda to deal with the unacceptable levels of crime and violence under the previous government; a \$2.5 billion increase in funding for health services, a key priority for all families; and a \$98 million boost for child protection services to support vulnerable families and children.

Mr Lenders's motion talks about funding cuts, but I have outlined where we have promoted more programs to put funding where it is needed. Unlike Mr Lenders, who sat up in his Treasury eyrie when he was the Treasurer, coalition members are actually getting out there, listening and putting the money into programs in places where they are most needed.

We are also keeping Victoria's economy strong. This is of the utmost importance to Victorian families, because if we do not have a strong economy, the rest is irrelevant. If we do not have the basis and framework for a strong economy in this state, we cannot roll out the programs that we know are going to be important to Victorian families in enhancing their quality of life. We have put a minimum \$100 million in surplus and are reducing spending growth to 3.2 per cent. This, along with the employment and education initiatives that we have introduced, is critical to the overall security and future prosperity of Victorian families and the Victorian community more generally.

We are committed to continuing to listen to and engage with Victorians so that we better understand the needs of families in Victoria and so that each year the families statement will truly reflect the needs and aspirations of all. I think Mr Lenders will be regretful that he has brought a motion such as this to this place, because the

families statement is something we are very proud of and will continue to be proud of.

Mr Lenders was very churlish in saying that the motion to take note of the Victorian families statement dropped off the notice paper. He knows the mechanisms of this chamber as well as everybody else who has been here for a significant time. It was a silly thing to have said; I am sure he is ashamed of it. However, as we did in opposition, we have spent this past year listening to and engaging with Victorian families, and we look forward to presenting to the Victorian people the 2012 Victorian families statement, which will set out what we have heard and how we are responding. We as the Baillieu government are very proud of our achievements for families in Victoria in our first year.

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — I welcome this opportunity afforded by Mr Lenders's motion to take another look, a year after the 2010 election, at the Baillieu government's first and, I think, only ministerial statement — this one about Victorian families. The statement said very clearly that its objective was to lay the groundwork for an ongoing assessment of where the government needs to focus. Maybe this was always to be a fruitless task, because if you go back and look at the Premier's speech at the time of the statement's release, you will see that he said it was little more than a discussion point. He said that it was not intended to provide answers that fixed any particular problem. Mr Lenders has taken us through the document in considerable detail, and when you look at it you can see it is little more than a list of what the government thinks are the significant issues relating to community wellbeing that it might address.

The statement committed the government to consultations with Victorian families and indicated that they would include ordinary folk, the men and women of Victoria, members of families — which, I guess, includes all of us — as well as experts in particular areas of public policy and the usual community-based organisations that collectively have much knowledge and experience that a government should know about, especially if it is a government that plans to fix the problems.

The objective of those consultations was to establish benchmarks to help the government focus on how it could fix the problems confronting the state over the next four years. The first question is whether the government has conducted those extensive consultations and what benchmarks have so far been identified. I checked out the Victorian government's website. I went to a section called 'Family, policy and

research' and sure enough there was a link to the *2011 Victorian Families Statement*.

I thought, in my excitement, that I was one click away from an update that would list all the consultations that had been conducted, where they had been held, who was spoken to, what was said and how far we were along the path to identifying the fabled benchmarks. But, to my sorrow and disappointment, one click revealed merely the pdf (portable document format) version of the *2011 Victorian Families Statement*, and that was it. For the record, there was no annual report. I direct members to the last paragraph of the last page of the Victorian families statement. It is headed 'The government's commitment to Victorian families' and says:

We all aspire to ... productive lives, spending quality time with our loved ones, well supported within our communities. Part of the government's job is to help people realise these aspirations.

It concludes by saying:

The annual families statement reflects our commitment to the health, wellbeing and prosperity of Victorian families, now and into the future.

The operative phrase there is 'the annual families statement'. In my delight when I first read it I thought, 'Oh, there will be one of these every year'.

Mr Lenders — You do like statements.

Mr SCHEFFER — I do like statements, and I used to enjoy the annual statement of government intentions that the Brumby government put out, which was a fantastic map of where the government intended to go. It was a fantastic document. Here, however, we do not have a sequel, even though it was promised, which is a great shame. For the record, there were two other links in the 'Family, policy and research' section of the Victorian government's website. One was to the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the other was to youth programs and services offered by the child, youth and family services sector of the Department of Human Services — and that was it. As far as I could gather from looking on the internet, which is the only real resource I have, not having direct access to government departments these days, that was it; so there was nothing. I am forced to conclude that there has been zero consultation on the families statement.

This is not to say that the government has not instigated any number of other kinds of consultations. To take a recent example, on Monday we had the Minister for Mental Health, Ms Wooldridge, launch a consultation on mental health research, and back in March the

Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Peter Hall, set in train a review of tertiary education in Gippsland that is being undertaken by Professor Kwong Lee Dow.

Those are both laudable and very worthy consultations, but my point is that they do not relate to this families statement, because, as Mr Lenders said, the families statement is actually dead. An observation I just made to him in discussion was that the purpose of this document was not to actually have consultations, not to set benchmarks; the purpose of it was to make a statement and to put out a glossy document. I am not one of those people in this house who uses the word 'spin' — I leave that for others — but you would have to say that there is not another word that would describe a document and exercise of this kind.

No-one is saying that governments should not review and refocus policy and expenditure — that is the job of government — but I cannot find any evidence that any of the reviews I have referred to are linked to the objective of identifying benchmarks for further actions, as promised in the statement. We have no choice but to conclude that once again this government has failed to fulfil a commitment to seriously and professionally engage the Victorian community in the issues that it flagged in the statement. The list of issues the statement identified are without any doubt absolutely important. They include housing provision, health, education, school funding, vocational education and skills development, employment, ageing, disability, public transport, the cost of living, community safety, policing, costs and charges, urban planning, small business, regional and rural issues, the management of natural disasters and so on. They are all there listed in this document. It is a ready reckoner of what the issues are.

Members will recall that the Premier, in his speech to the Parliament when he was introducing the families statement, said that the coalition places families at the very centre of its decision making. He went further, saying that all cabinet decisions are underpinned by consideration of the benefits they will have for families. Mrs Coote, to her credit, referred to that in her contribution. This is a position that the government has adopted, and it is good and it is right, but the point is that the government, having made that headline commitment, needs to develop a process that ensures that it both happens and that it is capable of being evaluated, so that we all know how real and how successful the commitment is.

Without evaluation and the process around it, this so-called commitment is valueless, because the fact is it cannot be tested. There is nothing at all on the Victorian

government website about how the coalition is going to deliver this commitment to place Victorian families at the very centre of the cabinet decision-making process. There is nothing on the website that tells us how the government is going to ensure that each and every one of the decisions the cabinet makes will be of value and benefit to Victorian families.

It is not as though there was no methodology to do this. It is not as though this commitment is inherently nebulous. We do have methodologies. I am old enough to remember that this kind of thing was done back in the 1980s by the government of John Cain. In those days the Labor government had what was called a Victorian women's budget, and through that budget every department and every unit of government was required to show in its program budget how its programs were delivering for Victorian women.

The value of this kind of approach is that it drives the formulation of benchmarks and measures, and importantly, it changes the way that governments and their departments, as well as all those organisations that deliver government programs, think about what they are doing and consequently they lift their game. Having very clear measures and benchmarks linked to budgets and dollars focuses attention. This is what could have easily been done around families. A methodology could have been set up, but it was not. There is no evidence of that, so you would have to say that this statement was nothing more than spin. As I say, this commitment is utterly worthless.

The families statement, in the absence of any evidence at all that any action has followed from it, must be seen for what it is — a piece of rhetoric produced by the party as a propaganda piece in the first flush of its post-election triumphalism. I cannot believe that this statement was written and prepared or endorsed by the Victorian public service. There is nothing in this document, in terms of footnotes or acknowledgements, that indicates it was prepared by the Victorian public service. I suspect that the document was worked up by spin doctors in one or other private office and was pushed amid great fanfare, but that it is incapable of really delivering anything. I suspect also that a woman as intelligent and professional as Minister Wooldridge would have taken one look at it and realised that it would be much better for the statement to be airbrushed from history. I think that is exactly what has happened.

We heard from Mrs Coote in her contribution that the coalition has in fact delivered on a whole range of election commitments that benefit families, and that in effect when all is said and done the families statement has been honoured and all is well with the world, so

why bother about this document? That is not the way I see it. I think these documents are important.

Turning to the general issue of the impact of the coalition government on Victorian families, the picture is far from reassuring. The most disturbing factor, the one of most fundamental concern, is that it is pretty clear that after a year in office this government does not have a jobs plan. We know from all the evidence that the single most important measure of community wellbeing is whether or not there are jobs, because besides the income that derives from being in work, there is the social connectedness from being in the workforce and the knowledge of making a contribution to the society and the economy that is the cornerstone of a community and an individual's wellbeing.

Besides ensuring that an individual has a job and income, government also has a role in ensuring that workplaces and working conditions are conducive to wellbeing. That is why, going right back to March this year at the outset of the government's period in office, we on this side of the house argued so strongly against the government's antifamily, anti-retail workers changes to the Shop Trading Reform Act 1996. We clearly saw that this legislation undermined the quality of life of retail workers and their families.

Many of us talked about the way that legislation would spoil the Easter Sunday of many Victorians and said that it would have the effect of interrupting school holidays. So much for the point Mrs Coote raised, that every decision cabinet would make would be of demonstrated material benefit to Victorian families. Here we had a piece of legislation in March-April, in the lead-up to Easter, that undermined that objective and threw that consideration aside.

There is widespread concern over whether the government is capable of maintaining the jobs we have in this state and whether it will be able to create more jobs as our population increases. The basis of that concern is that real income from production and productive capacity increases if there is infrastructure investment that can provide a skilled workforce, transport connections, communication systems, research and development and the services that people need in their communities for their wellbeing.

Building infrastructure takes years to plan, and to see that we need only look at the significant and major successes of the previous Labor government. I cite the Victorian schools plan, which was about rebuilding and renovating every government school in the state. That investment was to have been completed in 2016, but the plan has been trashed by this government, which has

pulled some \$480 million out of education. We believe and we know that the Victorian schools plan would have improved the quality of education in Victorian schools, improved educational outcomes and facilitated community development as those schools were designed and built. Importantly, the building and the renovation of schools in almost every town in Victoria would have created jobs and benefited families, because that work would have used the skills and resources of local tradespeople and local suppliers and had the multiple purposes of improving education, improving community development and creating economic activity in the communities.

As well, Labor massively increased the number of teachers — by many thousands — which both created jobs and improved education and skill levels. The rebuilding of the Melbourne to Bairnsdale rail line and regional bus services took years of planning, and there was a long lead time. It started soon after the election of the Bracks government in 1999 and was delivered around 2006–07. It involved a huge amount of work and a huge amount of planning, and it took a long time. Other examples of long-term planning and delivery include the desalination plant that will connect South Gippsland to the water grid; the water grid itself, which everyone knows is arguably the greatest infrastructure achievement of the Labor term; the massive investment in our hospitals, which Mr Lenders referred to, including the iconic Royal Children's Hospital; and the increase by thousands in the number of nurses in Victoria.

Each and every infrastructure initiative of the previous Labor government served the three purposes of increasing the productive capacity of the state, improving the services available to our citizens and creating new jobs. This became and was a virtuous circle. By contrast, a year into its first term the coalition government has no new infrastructure initiatives on the drawing board; the only plans it has are studies for plans. If anything materialises from what has been started and is under way now — and this is a very important point — it will not happen for another five years. We are facing a global situation where there will very clearly be a contraction of resources, and that will impact very heavily on Victoria's prosperity.

To sum up, these issues arise out of a consideration of the 2011 Victorian families statement. A commitment was made by the government when it released that document and it has effectively been removed. The coalition has clearly failed to do a single thing which is directly connected to this statement. It has clearly consigned this document and everything related to it to the dustbin of Victorian history.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I also rise to speak on this motion. I find it astonishing that Johan Scheffer and his colleagues can climb up on a soapbox and make the contributions they have made after having been in office for 11 years. Listening to the content of these contributions, one would think that we have been in office for 11 years and were being judged on the outcomes and performance indicators of the former government rather than the present government. What was the comment Mr Scheffer made? I think he said that the families statement was dead — or was it Mr Lenders? What was interesting was Mr Scheffer's comment that because this statement was not prepared by bureaucrats and driven by a machinery designed by bureaucrats, it was somehow less authentic and less effective.

That says a hell of a lot about the thinking of the Labor Party and its perhaps exclusive focus on generating the processes, the rubric, the glossy publications and the spin doctoring rather than on an honest conversation and dialogue between a government elected to office and the people of Victoria — an unassuming statement reported on in part by this fairly simply presented document outlining the Victorian government's achievements for 2010–11 following the first year of the coalition government. We are not obsessed by processes that are going to be created and driven by the bureaucracy. We believe the unassuming but nonetheless aspirational families statement delivered by the Premier is one that captures the aspirations of Victorian families.

Aspirations of Victorian families are not dead. They are alive, they are strong, they are getting stronger and they are confident. If we look at two-party preferred polling results here in Victoria, we see they show voter confidence that this government will deliver on its commitments and on the community's aspirations. Mr Scheffer was bemoaning the lack of performance indicators — and I think he said benchmarks. I wonder if Mr Scheffer knows what benchmarks are called in a political context — they are called promises and commitments. And guess what? We are working through those one by one and making sure that we deliver on our benchmarks, our promises and our commitments. Mr Scheffer has possibly been too involved for too long in the workings of government departments. He may have lost sight of and grown distant from the people who put him into office. I think this is the malaise that afflicted the former Labor government and was responsible for its defeat. It was a failure to stay in touch with those who gave him the job and the opportunity to do something good for the state.

To say that somehow Mary Wooldridge was so disappointed in the statement that she may have airbrushed it is preposterous. Mr Scheffer himself conceded that Minister Wooldridge has been involved in some very important consultations within the responsibilities of her portfolio. The Premier believes in his team and that it will undertake the necessary consultations — genuine, authentic, real consultations, not just going through the motions and not just speaking to friends in the areas of their portfolio responsibilities — and that is what is happening.

This motion is preposterous. It is fortuitous that it has been moved because it enables us to provide a progress report a year on. I think that is a very healthy thing, so I would like to encourage Mr Lenders to bring forward one of these motions on every birthday of the coalition government. The opportunity for member after member to get up and reflect on the commitments made, on the benchmarks and on what has been done is a very good thing for democracy.

Obviously the statement was introduced in the Assembly. When it was received in this house it was ordered that it be considered on the next day of sitting, and a motion was moved to take note of it on 3 March. While a number of members spoke on the families statement, Ms Mikakos was the only member of the opposition to speak on it at the time it was introduced, which is a very poor reflection on the former Labor government. Ms Hartland spoke for the Greens, I spoke, Mrs Petrovich spoke, Mr Finn spoke, Mr Elsbury spoke, Mr O'Brien and Mr Ondarchie spoke — all of us spoke on that motion to take note of the statement, and we probably lament the fact that many more of us did not have the opportunity of speaking on an important vision for Victoria.

The debate was adjourned and eventually discharged from the notice paper, as is the normal parliamentary process under the standing orders and as happens to all motions except for those moved by ministers. Mr Lenders is therefore being mischievous. He is very good at being mischievous. He knows that many motions are discharged in the same way from the notice paper. As I said before, it is notable that Labor Party members have been absent from the chamber even today, and they ought to be coming back here and listening; it is their motion. This ought to be the instrument and vehicle of Labor members, but we are more than happy to take ownership.

Coming back to the motion, Mr Scheffer said that the measure of any community is jobs. I see the role of any government as being fourfold. The first is to provide the infrastructure that any community needs — that is,

common needs in order to go about doing its business whether it is economic activity, private endeavours, sport and recreation, or whatever. It includes roads, freight, public transport and bridges, as well as the actual bricks and mortar that delivers services and builds social capital. It is your schools, your buildings, your hospitals. Of course we know that one of the very strong concerns of Victorians was seeing so much money wasted by the former Labor government while it failed to deliver the infrastructure that the community needed. It overspent massively on some significant projects and wasted so much money. It was responsible for so much waste and mismanagement when the infrastructure that was needed was not being delivered. I think that was the biggest message and the biggest reason the Labor government lost.

This is something on which we have been focusing, and it has not been made any easier by a number of factors. First and foremost, there has been and there is a galloping worldwide economic downturn. The punishing effect of the federal Gillard government in terms of drawing funding and grants is not just un-Victorian and unfair, but I believe it is punitive and will be seen for what it is come the next federal election. The other major constraints are the huge overruns on major projects and the huge black holes that have been left in the budget through lapsing programs and the like. They are some of the constraints in terms of delivery and the backlog of infrastructure.

Mr Scheffer was lauding the Labor government's performance in the renewal of schools. The other day I spent a day in the west and visited four schools with Mr Elsbury. Between the four of them there would have been a backlog of capital works worth in excess of \$100 million, given that most of them had not received any funding since 1999. That was just from visiting four schools, one of which is in the electorate of the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. They are safe, Labor-held seats, and those members opposite do not give a hoot. No matter where those children live, at the end of the day they deserve decent facilities. They deserve to have their needs met by a responsible government that plans and delivers — it is a two-stage process. I would like to commend Mr Elsbury for not continuing the tradition of ignoring vast tracts of Victorians who were not necessary to Labor and who were not instrumental in its securing and keeping power, which is all the former Labor government members were interested in.

In relation to this nonsense about renewal of schools, a lick of paint is not renewing a school. Many schools have been left like ticking time bombs, absolutely ravaged by poorly administered Building the Education Revolution projects. There has been a huge increase in

funding requirements as a result of the BER. Many of these facilities have been left half, a quarter or a third built. Just the other day I visited a school that had its BER project completed in June. The school has not yet been able to occupy it, but in the process it generated another \$500 000 in expenditure that was not foreseen in the BER project. Labor's federal program under the former state Labor regime has been so botched and so mismanaged that the current state ministers have been left with a significant challenge in terms of meeting the needs of schools regarding their facilities.

That is why the Minister for Education, Martin Dixon, has recently announced a maintenance audit. There was no maintenance audit under the former government. It dismantled the old system — the physical resources management system, which delivered fair and equitable funding for maintenance to schools across the state — and rolled it up into the student resources package. Much of that money for maintenance has been frittered away by schools, which have been forced to meet other growing costs such as the rising price of energy, including electricity.

When the coalition came to government under former Premier Jeff Kennett, we thought a \$650 million backlog was earth shattering; I suspect when we complete the full tally of the backlog in school capital works and maintenance it will be earth shattering. It is a deplorable reflection on what Mr Scheffer claimed was a wonderful inspiration of the Brumby Labor government — the Victorian schools plan.

I would like to continue with this contribution, but I think there has been some agreement which may require me to wind up soon.

The former government's failure to provide infrastructure, failure to provide the necessary services, failure to be open, accountable and respectful — all these things were what Victorians wanted to change and what the Victorian families statement promised to turn around. The statement promised to put families and Victorians at the epicentre of our decision making, which we have done. The document *Victorian Government 2010–11 — Achievements and Policies Implemented in the First Year of Government*, provides in bullet points a good summary of our response to that statement in the first year. I commend the statement to all members and all Victorians. I intend to upload it to my website. I suggest to Labor members that they would be well advised to spend a bit of time looking at those achievements, which have been significant for the south-east, which was a badly neglected region. That is why we were able to pick up four seats in the region.

Victorians are already deriving significant benefit from the new government.

With those few words, I commend the Victorian families statement and look forward to further opportunities to contribute to debate on it. I would be happy to speak on it for hours on end, but I am forced to tie this up in the interests of the house being able to get on with further business.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan).

Debate adjourned until next day.

MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house supports marriage equality, and calls on the commonwealth Parliament to amend the commonwealth Marriage Act 1961 to provide for marriage equality.

The motion I move today is a simple one. It is identical to the motion moved by Greens MP Nick McKim and supported in the Tasmanian Parliament on 21 September and the motion moved by Greens MLA Shane Rattenbury and supported in the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory on 16 November.

I am moving this motion because marriage equality has always been Greens policy and we have campaigned strongly for it for many years. The Greens were the only party to take marriage equality to the 2010 federal election.

On 29 September the Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young reintroduced her marriage equality bill into the Senate. The federal Marriage (Equality) Amendment Bill 2010 seeks to remove discrimination from the federal Marriage Act 1961 and to give same-sex couples the right to marry. The Greens believe same-sex couples should have the same right as other couples to celebrate their love and commitment through marriage. A majority of Australians support this right. Countries including Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Norway, Spain, South Africa, Mexico and many states in the United States of America now recognise same-sex marriage.

Through this motion I am inviting members of the Victorian Legislative Council to add their voices in support of marriage equality at the federal level, which is where the change is needed, by amending the commonwealth Marriage Act 1961.

The introduction of Sarah Hanson-Young's marriage equality amendment bill into the Senate in the current and previous federal Parliaments followed the 2007 introduction by Senator Kerry Nettle of a similar bill to redefine marriage as the union of two people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, voluntarily entered into for life.

I move this motion because I am personally committed to removing all forms of discrimination, injustice and unfairness in the law, including in the federal Marriage Act 1961. The time for marriage equality is here. At this time in history the federal government has a golden opportunity to remove discrimination from the federal Marriage Act 1961 once and for all and allow all Australians who wish to marry the person they love to do so, regardless of sex, gender or sexuality. Australia could then join the many countries around the world and states of the United States in removing marriage discrimination forever.

More and more people support marriage equality. A Herald/Nielsen survey released just last week showed that 62 per cent of respondents support marriage equality, which is up by 5 per cent from last year. People understand the inherent justice of marriage equality and the unfairness of the status quo. People understand that marriage equality is right and fair and that continuing to discriminate against same-sex couples is not fair and is wrong. Many states have introduced relationship registers to enable same-sex and mixed-sex partners to formally register their relationships. In the debate on the Relationships Bill 2008 in this chamber on 8 April 2008 I said that that bill and the relationships register fall short of full equality for same-sex couples and will allow discrimination against them to continue. The relationships register affords same-sex couples lesser recognition than does marriage. I said there is no reason for this other than the objections of a minority of people in the community to whom that bill, presumably, would not apply and on whose lives it would have no practical effect or impact.

It is not good enough to only partially remove discrimination and then to make things a little fairer but not entirely equal. People are equal, and the law should reflect that, and where it does not reflect that it should be amended. The Greens have campaigned for the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and intersex people from the start, and we have a policy of no discrimination. I moved amendments in relation to the relationships register to allow for an accompanying ceremony and for mutual recognition of relationships in different states, but those amendments were not supported. In my view, the current definition of

'marriage' in the federal Marriage Act 1961 is inherently discriminatory. While not all same-sex people might wish to marry, they should be able to be married if they wish to be. This is an issue of personal freedom. It is a fundamental right to choose one's partner and to have the love between two people fully accepted and recognised. Less than that is a denial of a fundamental right and is therefore discriminatory.

I support at the national level marriage equality for all people, regardless of sexuality and gender identity, and also a national relationships register for those who wish to register their relationships but do not necessarily wish to marry. That would be the best of both worlds: marriage being open to everybody and also a relationships register at the national level that is open to everybody who does not wish to marry but does wish to have a formal recognition of their relationship.

Allowing discrimination to exist in legislation, such as in the Marriage Act 1961, sends the wrong message to the community. It sends a message to the community that it is okay to discriminate against gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and intersex people in other ways. As we know, that results in daily heartache for thousands of people and their families and friends. As we also know, it also results in violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and intersex people and in tragedy in their lives. This is another important reason why we need marriage equality.

The Prime Minister has indicated that she does not support marriage equality, and I have to take her at her word. However, it puzzles me that she should hold this view. I hope that despite her personal view she can recognise the imperative need to remove discrimination from the Marriage Act 1961 for the reasons I have outlined in this place. The majority of people in the community support marriage equality, as do the majority of ALP state branch members. The Prime Minister will receive more support than opposition for bringing about marriage equality.

I also know and acknowledge that there are many members of the Victorian government who support marriage equality and speak up both in their party rooms and publicly in support of it. This is the case in every state and territory of Australia — right across Australia. Support for marriage equality is cross-party, it is very strong in the community and it is growing. It is an issue for which the time has well and truly come. I would hope those members of this chamber and the public who, for whatever reasons, have difficulty embracing marriage equality are able to open up their hearts, walk in the shoes of same-sex partners who cannot legally marry when they dearly want to and

imagine the pain and heartache they and their families and friends suffer as a result.

Contrary to what people say, marriage equality will improve marriage, not undermine it. The institution of marriage has changed over the years — for example, women and children are no longer the property of men — and it must change again to bring an end to the remaining discrimination inherent in the Marriage Act 1961 and the heartache that that brings. In moving the same motion in the Tasmanian Parliament this year Nick McKim said that the Greens understand and recognise that the best way to provide marriage equality in Australia is through reform at the commonwealth level — that is, to amend the commonwealth Marriage Act 1961 to remove the discrimination that was inserted into it by the Howard government. If the commonwealth Parliament does not act on this issue in a timely way, the Greens in Tasmania reserve their right to bring on debate on their package of bills to provide a same-sex marriage framework in Tasmania.

I understand as well, as do the Greens across Australia, that the best way to remedy this issue and to bring about full equality in marriage is to bring about reform at the federal level. As I said, I urge the Prime Minister to show leadership in this regard. However, as Mr McKim said in the Tasmanian Parliament, there is always the fallback position: that we could introduce laws in the states of Australia to allow for same-sex marriage. Certainly the constitutional advice provided to us is that the introduction of bills in state parliaments to provide for same-sex marriage only — that is, marriage only for same-sex partners — would not fall foul of the federal constitution, which since it was amended seven years ago has stated that marriage is between a man and a woman and specifically precludes same-sex marriage. State parliaments would be able to legislate for same-sex marriage.

I agree with Nick McKim that it is best dealt with at the federal level, and that is why we have Senator Hanson-Young's bill, the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010, in the Senate. That is the vehicle we would like to see used to amend the Marriage Act 1961 and to bring about marriage equality. Like Mr McKim in the Tasmanian Parliament, I am prepared to introduce a bill, and in fact I am in the process of drafting a bill for introduction into the Victorian Parliament to allow for same-sex marriage.

As I said before, this is an issue for which the time has come. Support is growing in the community for marriage equality. As we know, marriage is not a static institution or a static concept, it has evolved over time and it needs to evolve again to reflect community

values and to ensure that the legislation is not discriminatory and does not contradict people's basic human rights. Shane Rattenbury of the Australian Capital Territory Parliament, in speaking to the same motion there just a couple of weeks ago, also pointed out that it is important to remember that marriage is a legal construct created by Parliament. It was created by people. We decide what marriage is. It has not been handed down on a stone tablet or from on high; it is in fact a human construct.

Under the Marriage Act 1961 in the past women and children were the property of men and had no rights in marriage at all. That is how marriage used to be. At the time it was accepted that that is how it should stay, but we obviously know it has moved on from that. It is now no longer the case that women are the property of their husbands or that children are the property of their fathers. That is a reflection of the women's rights movement and the changing community attitudes towards what the institution of marriage should be. It is now no longer acceptable for marriage to be an institution where women and children are meant to obey the husband and the father. That is how it was deemed to be. Women had no financial rights in marriage.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Queen Elizabeth Centre: report 2010–11

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Queen Elizabeth Centre's 2010–2011 annual report, which is the centre's 93rd annual report. I can advise the house that I, along with my parliamentary colleague Mr Jennings, had the pleasure of meeting with the centre's new chief executive officer, Athina Georgiou, a few weeks ago.

The Queen Elizabeth Centre (QEC) is based in Noble Park and provides specialised care, support and guidance to new parents during early parenthood, from birth until their child reaches 48 months. Whilst the centre's head office is in Noble Park, it delivers services through regional outreach bases in Morwell, Coburg, Wangaratta, Wodonga and Wonthaggi. At the core of the services provided by the centre is the belief that every child's wellbeing is first and foremost.

The centre's priorities, as outlined in the report, are to meet the needs of the most vulnerable families, families who face multiple complex life issues and families who

have unique needs that require unique responses. QEC seeks to meet these unique needs by working with the family and external providers to highlight the parenting practices that need developing. As I stated earlier, every child's wellbeing is first and foremost.

The primary funder of the QEC is the state government, and the work that is funded is significant and varied. It includes, but is not limited to, five-day live-in residential programs, day stays, skills development and parenting programs like Parenting Plus. In addition to core services, the centre also provides innovative services and programs to families and communities like the family coaching placement prevention pilot and the Sing and Grow music therapy program. A large percentage of the centre's clients are referrals through maternal and child health centres, the Department of Human Services and general practitioners.

This report highlights the value of this service to young parents. Just under 30 per cent of participants in the Parenting Assessment and Skills Development Service program were under 20 years of age, with a trend towards families accessing this service with younger-aged children than in previous years. This alone should highlight the need in the community for centres like this and that the government needs to be involved in their funding.

As I stated earlier, the centre's priorities are targeted towards services for families experiencing the greatest disadvantage and displaying high-risk factors. Almost half of the centre's clients present with numerous risk factors and a history of contact with child protection, emanating from depression, family violence, mental health issues and drug and alcohol dependence. Families and children in these circumstances are vulnerable and at risk of lifelong adversity and poor social, educational and economic outcomes. It is to the benefit of us all that children in these circumstances are given the best opportunity in life. Counselling and psychological support are key components of the programs, as are group education sessions conducted with families of similar age and profile. Referrals to ongoing support services once the families complete the residential program are provided when necessary.

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the five-day residential program run by the QEC was conducted in October 2006 by the Parenting Research Centre to explore the acceptability of the program and the family-centred approach at the centre, as well as the effects of the program on parental wellbeing and child behavioural difficulties. This is available on the QEC's website. The results are highlighted on page 5 of that evaluation, where it states that from those who

participated in the study, symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress were all reduced after parents completed the program, and these improvements seemed to be maintained one month after leaving the centre.

The centre targets marginalised culturally and linguistically diverse communities through specifically tailored peer-led playgroups and parenting education groups. In Noble Park the centre has continued to run these programs for Afghan and Sudanese families, and their popularity grows as their existence becomes better known. These programs are a great success for the participants, who make new friends whilst learning essential parenting skills as well as building confidence as parents, which is clearly demonstrated through the interactions of parents with their children, in their use of English and in their socialising within their communities.

This program was funded by the federal government, and I thank them for this contribution. Last year alone 78 groups involving 1887 participants were held. In addition, the centre continues to work in partnership with key organisations on initiatives to improve access to parenting support services for Victoria's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. There are also a number of very good programs to help young fathers deal with parenthood.

The 93rd annual report reflects an organisation with great longevity. However, if you go through the financial statements, the significant role that government, in particular the state government, plays in ensuring the centre's continued viability becomes apparent. The funding that is provided for QEC programs, and programs like them, is repaid through the lifetime of the children, parents and the community that benefits and learns from these programs. I hope the government will continue to be aware of this during the next three years when making funding decisions.

I congratulate the Queen Elizabeth Centre on all it does to facilitate positive outcomes for families and children, and I wish it continued success in the future. I commend the report to the house.

Auditor-General: *Procurement Practices in the Health Sector*

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to make a statement on the Victorian Auditor-General's report on *Procurement Practices in the Health Sector* of October 2011. Health Purchasing Victoria was set up in 2001 under the Health Services Act 1988 and covers about 23 per cent of Victorian

public hospital spending. When it was set up, Health Purchasing Victoria was expected to facilitate public hospital collaboration to get the best value in purchasing; to reduce inefficient or inappropriate duplication of functions, particularly in tendering; and to improve purchasing practices by developing policies and practices that ensure probity and improve supply chain management.

This Auditor-General's report makes eight recommendations, all of which have been accepted by the Department of Health. The department and Health Purchasing Victoria will now work together to implement these recommendations. The audit has shown that Health Purchasing Victoria is an effective contributor to the health service system, having made savings totalling about \$40 million for health services through its purchasing strategies.

However, the audit also shows that Health Purchasing Victoria (HPV) is yet to implement all its functions under the Health Services Act 1988 or to exploit its full potential. An audit was conducted in 2005, and it found that while central procurement had saved hospitals money, they could get better value still and there was a need for cooperative action to address data and other challenges. After 10 years in operation it was established that HPV is yet to implement all its functions under the act or to exploit its full potential and that it has not been undertaking its probity assurance function under the act, having only limited involvement in procuring medical equipment and having missed opportunities for greater savings and better procurement.

We expect that the Department of Health will now consider how Health Purchasing Victoria can deliver more efficiencies and savings for our health system. The government has established the Victorian Health Priorities Framework 2012–2022, which emphasises the need for our health services to be both clinically effective and cost effective and for Health Purchasing Victoria to contribute strongly to this.

The audit did not make any findings on any matters of impropriety or any significant systemic issues in the health sector, but it did find that after 10 years in operation HPV is yet to implement all its functions. The Auditor-General's office also criticised Health Purchasing Victoria for not performing its probity assurance of public hospital procurement processes. The Department of Health contributed to HPV not being able to fully discharge all of its statutory duties by a failure to provide adequate support as system manager. The report says the department should have finalised and released the medical equipment asset

management framework and should be using Health Purchasing Victoria in procuring high-volume medical equipment.

The Auditor-General has also been critical of the department for not assisting HPV to provide a quicker finalisation of the Victorian product catalogue. Procurement policies and procedures in health services are broadly consistent with the Victorian Government Purchasing Board guidelines; however, there is still room for improvement. I know the Minister for Health is working with the Department of Health and with Health Purchasing Victoria to ensure that the Auditor-General's recommendations are addressed. These issues have existed for 10 years, and after 10 years we still have not got it right, but with his leadership the Minister for Health along with the Department of Health has got the system back on track. I am looking forward to an improvement in this system.

Auditor-General: *Procurement Practices in the Health Sector*

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I am also speaking in response to the Auditor-General's report *Procurement Practices in the Health Sector*. The Auditor-General's report shows that productivity gains can be made in the health sector outside the workforce. If the minister is interested in making productivity gains across the board and not just engaging in brinkmanship with the nurses, he should act on the Auditor-General's recommendations. The audit investigated best value, probity and transparency in the purchasing practices of Health Purchasing Victoria and public hospitals.

HPV was established in 2001 under the Health Services Act 1988. It was expected that HPV, alongside its other functions, would deliver savings through its collective buying capacity being used on behalf of public hospitals. Procurement represents around 15 per cent of public hospital operating expenditure, and last year more than \$1.6 billion was spent on relevant goods and services. HPV is responsible for only 23 per cent of that \$1.6 billion procurement budget. Even so it made \$40 million in savings in 2010–11.

While to a large degree HPV is meeting its objectives, it is not fulfilling all its legislated functions, principally due to a lack of support from the Department of Health. Nineteen per cent of the 200 procurement decisions made by the hospitals that were investigated — almost 1 in 5 — did not meet the public sector transparency standards. Transparency in the use of public funds is clearly of benefit to the health system, but the Auditor-General's findings also reveal that hospitals are not enjoying the savings benefits of competition. This is

significant considering the minister is currently engaged in a very public battle with Victorian nurses, apparently to save money. I will use language from the minister's own bargaining strategy. Surely the management prerogative should be to make productivity gains wherever they exist. I suggest the minister is looking in the wrong place. The term 'productivity gains' first emerged under the Kennett government in the 1990s. It soon became clear that the term actually meant budget cuts. Where is the evidence that treating health care like a market has improved the health system? The only place where this thinking makes sense is in the purchasing of quantities of goods, not in the area of service qualities.

In terms of the Auditor-General's report, it is clear that fully resourcing HPV in its probity function will deliver the savings that competition has to offer. In fact Health Purchasing Victoria's difficulties with performing its legislated probity function were due in part to it chasing the incentives and performance indicators outlined in its memorandum of understanding with the Department of Health. At page 6 the report states:

While HPV is a statutory authority, and as such can determine its priorities and allocation of resources, in practice the department strongly influences HPV. The department's memorandum of understanding ... with HPV, while not a statutory document, sets out HPV's funding, agreed performance indicators, and responsibilities, emphasising only a selection of HPV's legislative functions.

Health Purchasing Victoria's business plan and strategic plan also exclude probity from its functions. The Auditor-General's report says on page 16:

HPV has not issued a policy promoting probity in public hospital procurement. It tried to issue a probity policy in 2007 but stopped when the department advised against it.

Why is the department so averse to regulating hospital purchasing? I know the minister will blame the previous government, but I remind the minister that he is now in charge. The challenge I put to him is: will anything change under his stewardship? Is this really a party-political problem or just a matter that is actually about institutional politics? The minister's strategy in his negotiations with Victorian nurses, as revealed by the *Sunday Age*, would suggest the latter.

Health Purchasing Victoria's memorandum of understanding expired on 30 June 2011, and a new one is being drafted. It is also developing a new strategic plan timed to coincide with the findings of the Auditor-General's report. This period of strategic change at Health Purchasing Victoria, along with the Auditor-General's recommendations, is an opportunity to embed a sustainable practice in our public health

services. If the minister wants to save money, the place to start is in savings that do no harm. Health Purchasing Victoria has already saved \$40 million. The Auditor-General says more millions are there to be saved without having to hack into our health workforce.

Office of Police Integrity: report

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — In rising to speak on the Office of Police Integrity report *Crossing the Line*, I wish to start with and concentrate on an appendix of the report relating to the former ministerial adviser Mr Tristan Weston; it contains his response to the draft report. I wish to touch on a few things Mr Weston said.

As we know, a lot of commentary has come from the Premier and from Mr Ryan, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, about Mr Weston's role in relation to the report's adverse findings. This has been to the point where even in the recent weekend papers Mr Ryan gave Mr Weston another whack about his activities. When you read Mr Weston's response to the draft report you see that his statements include that he:

had no training and found himself in the middle of a crisis, under extreme pressure, with no support. Mr Weston said he routinely worked 12 hours a day, found the pace frenetic, was the sole adviser responsible for the police portfolio ...

He also states in his response to the draft report that he disputes parts of the report and the views of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mr Ryan, and Mr Hindmarsh, who is the minister's chief of staff. The report states:

Mr Weston disputes the characterisation of some of his conduct as misconduct. He says there were occasions where he was praised by Mr Hindmarsh for doing exactly what Mr Hindmarsh is reported as labelling 'blatant misconduct'.

Mr Weston has gone from a situation where this time last year when he was a coalition candidate for the Assembly seat of Macedon, where I am sure he had good relationships with and received good advice from some of the current coalition members of Parliament — he was also probably advocated as being a good candidate and a good person to represent that electorate by the then Leader of the Opposition, who is now the Premier — to a point less than a year later where the Premier said at a media event when Mr Weston resigned or was terminated or at whatever point it was when the Office of Police Integrity's report came out that Mr Weston had not been well for a long time. I find that to be an amazing thing to say when less than a year ago Mr Weston was a coalition candidate and the Premier must have been 100 per cent behind his candidacy for that seat.

I think the issue is that Mr Weston had the same opinion that a lot of the government MPs would have had about the two high-ranking police officers featured in this report — that is, that Mr Overland was no good and Sir Ken Jones was good. So Sir Ken Jones was good and Mr Overland was bad, and Mr Weston went out and, as it says in the report, openly had discussions with members of the government and did what he thought was required of him to get a situation where Mr Overland, who they thought was bad, would be replaced by Sir Ken Jones, who was good. I would have thought that both men were high-ranking, good policemen, and it is not possible to get to positions like that without being good policemen. A media commentator said that the thing about Sir Ken was that he used to like locking up criminals. I think Mr Overland would have liked locking up criminals as well.

I think Mr Weston was doing exactly what he thought was the right thing by the people who were employing him. I think there is a lot more to come out, and I do not think Mr Weston will be prepared to be charged and do any time in jail in order to cover up for people who I think encouraged him and who praised him and who said he was doing a good job, and that is the conduct he is being abused for in this report.

Library Board of Victoria: report 2010–11

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — I have an enormous amount of pleasure in speaking on the Library Board of Victoria's annual report 2010–11. This is the first opportunity I have had to say how delighted I am that the Premier is also the Minister for the Arts. I know firsthand how passionate he is about the State Library of Victoria — he has been a supporter of the library for a very long time — and I know the library was delighted to know that he had taken on the arts portfolio. Not only does he support the library in every sense but he made certain that as Minister for the Arts he gave the State Library of Victoria a \$5.6 million funding boost in the 2010–11 budget to help it to respond to the massive increase in visitor numbers and to the rising demand for digitally delivered information. That funding has been really well received.

I think it is important for us to understand the issue of digitisation. I can remember a very long time ago when I was running the State Library of Victoria Foundation for Mary Baillieu, who was a wonderful Victorian and who was also passionate about the library. We got the first funding from the Myer Foundation — it was \$350 000, which seemed like an inordinate amount of money — to digitise all of the very fragile glass negatives that are part of Melbourne's and Victoria's

history. There was a huge area in the basement of the state library and it took a long time to get that digitising done. It forms an important pictorial history of what happened in Victoria, and despite the slides being so fragile, that history is now able to be kept in perpetuity.

The other thing to note is about VICNET. As part of our parliamentary email addresses we all have the suffix 'vic.gov.au', which started a long time ago with VICNET in a tiny office in the state library, so it is very exciting to think about all these things so far as digitising and the state library is concerned. Once all the wealth in our state library and the huge amount of material there is digitised it can be made available to the entire world. I know this money is going to be particularly well received.

I would also like to record my huge admiration for the president of the library board, the Honourable John Cain. Mr Cain has done a phenomenal job in that role. He has taken the library from strength to strength. He knows my passion for the library, and we have had many very good and progressive discussions about it. I know that he, too, was pleased with this funding. As he says in his foreword to the report:

We are very pleased that the new government has assisted the library over the next two years with a funding boost.

The foreword quotes the Premier as having said:

'On any given day, our state library is buzzing with people of all ages and from all walks of life — students, children and families, researchers and academics, and tourists' ... 'The State Library of Victoria continues to undergo an exciting period of transformation, and the coalition government looks forward to working with the incoming chief executive officer, staff and board to ensure the library remains at the heart of our community for years to come'.

I would particularly like to record my praise for two of the board members for the work they do. The first is Catherine Dale, who was appointed to the library board in June 2002. She brings a great deal of experience, as indeed does Stephen Kerr, who is the deputy president. He is passionate about the library and is a great advocate for it.

In its last year the library digitised more than 85 000 items, making them readily accessible to anyone anywhere. Among the items digitised were the very popular *Footy Record* from 1912 to 1998, 19th century regional Victorian newspapers, World War I Victorian military unit histories and a precious manuscript dating from 1420 entitled *The Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of Manhode; and, the Pilgrimage of the Sowle*.

I think the \$5.6 million that the Minister for the Arts and the coalition government has given to the state

library will be very well received by Victorians into the future.

Royal Children's Hospital: report 2010–11

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak about the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne annual financial report for 2010–11 into the operation and performance of one of the best-known children's hospitals in the world. It is timely for this report to be tabled, as Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II of Australia recently officially opened the brand-new children's hospital facility in Parkville.

It is appropriate to look at the history of this hospital, which has served and cared for the children of Melbourne for 140 years. Originally established as a charity hospital in 1870, it was called the Melbourne Free Hospital for Sick Children. The overall intention of the founders, Dr William Smith and Dr John Singleton, was to provide medical treatment to sick children from disadvantaged families. Initially the hospital provided six inpatient beds and treated as many outpatients as possible. Interestingly, the original committee of management consisted solely of women, and the majority of committee members were women until the 1980s. In 1953 the hospital had the prefix 'royal' conferred on it.

Through this wonderful hospital's long history, it has achieved an outstanding record of leading the field of paediatrics and has become a medical training hospital without equal. Most Victorian families with children have used this hospital at some stage in their lives, and the magnificent Good Friday appeal effort is a testament to the popularity of this hospital. The appeal is a thankyou to the caring, wonderful staff who make this hospital what it is today, and it ensures that there are additional funds for the continuation of the vital work of the hospital.

In 1963 the average stay in the hospital was 10 days, and visiting hours were limited to twice a week. Imagine the heartbreak of parents not being allowed to stay by their sick child's bedside. Today it is considered beneficial for parents to be close by, and this is encouraged by the hospital staff. The present day treatment success rate of childhood cancer is 80 per cent — a far cry from the child mortality rates of the 1870s — and in 2010 the hospital completed its 100th heart transplant.

Financially the hospital is in the black, and it is up to date in relation to the training and teaching methods of future paediatric health professionals. A strategic plan is in place to move all the patients and staff to the

brand-new facility in Parkville. According to the report, it should be finished by late November of this year. I am sure that the dedication and commitment that is the keystone of the Royal Children's Hospital will be transferred with it when it moves.

Auditor-General: TAFE Governance

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — I continue my earlier statement on the Victorian Auditor-General's report into TAFE governance. Initially, I will focus on the prevailing implications of the poor communication and oversight of Skills Victoria and Holmesglen TAFE in the years leading up to some serious financial decisions made on behalf of Holmesglen TAFE in June 2010. To sharpen the focus, I will concentrate on the \$6.5 million loan to a registered training organisation that represented the funding of an acquisition of a financially stressed organisation.

The Victorian Auditor-General has stressed that although the Victorian Skills Commission receives regular reports from Skills Victoria about the performance of the TAFE sector, unfortunately the processes were found to be inadequate. Hence VSC could not be assured that the functions delegated to it by Skills Victoria were likely to be effectively performed.

In following up what I said previously, it is important that I focus on the Auditor-General's recommendations that Skills Victoria should actively engage with TAFE institutes during the preparation of their strategic plans, critically review and provide feedback on plans and inform the relevant minister about conflicts between government policy and accountability issues where necessary. A finding or a recommendation such as this only serves to highlight that in relation to these sorts of issues, it was the blind leading the blind. An appalling lack of oversight was highlighted.

The second recommendation was that Holmesglen needs to review its investment policy to ensure that investment decisions are consistent with its authority to invest and with relevant government policy. The recommendations in the report also apply to the Department of Treasury and Finance. There is a recommendation that the department should review the intended application of standing direction 4.5.6 and consider whether the exemption should be based on effective investment powers rather than the legal source of powers.

To amplify those points I will turn to the tracking of some of those events in figure A1 of appendix A of this

report, which is headed 'Events relevant to the financial arrangement'. It really is a frightening revelation in terms of the tracking of these events that started on 10 June 2009. It says:

Skills Victoria issued an executive memo to all technical and further education (TAFE) institutes informing them about the new standing direction 4.5.6 (SD 4.5.6), which requires state government entities with no specific borrowing or investment powers to undertake all borrowings, investments and financial arrangements with financial institutions that are either state owned, or have a credit rating the same as or better than the state of Victoria.

No-one should be starting an acquisition trail to buy out competitors when they are caught like rabbits in the spotlight by the pressures and realities of a contestable market that TAFEs face. The Auditor-General commented in relation to this that:

The Minister for Finance signalled that the state government has a low financial risk appetite and requires public entities to abide by this in their financial arrangements.

Where did this confusion occur? It is just dumbfounding. It then says:

By sending this advice to TAFE institutes Skills Victoria signalled its belief that the restrictions on investment powers apply to TAFE institutes.

On 9 July 2009:

Holmesglen commissioned its own legal advice that stated — that standing direction —

4.5.6 was not applicable to Holmesglen.

This is central to the argument and the conclusions the Auditor-General has drawn in that Holmesglen basically ignored the financial constraints imposed upon it. It was not backed up in any way by any support or direct advice from Skills Victoria. It chose to step away from providing advice on investment and seeking legal advice. It is still in high dudgeon and in contestability mode.

Office of Police Integrity: report

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — I wish to make a statement on the Office of Police Integrity report headed *Crossing the Line*. I am a keen reader of crime fiction, preferably with a political edge, and Victoria has produced many fine authors of crime fiction, but until I read the OPI's report I would have dismissed a work of crime fiction containing the actions outlined in the OPI report as entirely unbelievable. I am also a former ministerial adviser and head of the Premier's private office, and in my experience the actions outlined in the OPI report are even more preposterous.

Just as outrageous are the claims by the Deputy Premier, Mr Ryan, that he had no idea about what was going on in his own office, that he had no idea that his own ministerial adviser had arranged for the Minister responsible for the establishment of an anticorruption commission to meet the former deputy commissioner of police at Parliament House, and the claims of the Premier that he had no idea what his chief of staff was up to.

Any reasonable person would conclude that the conduct described in the OPI's report fits the description of corruption referred to in the parliamentary library's background brief on the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Bill 2011. The OPI's report also emphasises that the OPI was not able to investigate all conduct, including conduct that may meet the description of corruption referred to in the background brief. For instance, the OPI was unable to explain the discrepancies in the evidence given to it by the Deputy Premier and the member for Benambra because of the limits to its jurisdiction.

The conduct described in the OPI's report clearly indicates that all those involved believed they were beyond the reach of the OPI, free to act with impunity, to abuse the power entrusted in them and to corrupt government merit-based appointment processes. Mr Weston, the former ministerial adviser to Mr Ryan, confirmed this when he was reported in the *Herald Sun* of 27 October as saying:

On the basis of the legal advice available to me the OPI did not have the jurisdiction to investigate my work as a ministerial officer.

In other words, Mr Weston and his legal adviser thought Mr Weston, and presumably others, could act corruptly by abusing the power entrusted in them as much as they liked and get away with it. One of the many matters the OPI was not able to investigate was where that self-serving legal advice came from. It is well known that Mr Weston's campaign director at the last Victorian election, when Mr Weston was the unsuccessful Liberal candidate for the Assembly seat of Macedon, was Mr Serge Petrovich, a Victorian barrister, member of the Liberal Party and failed Liberal candidate for preselection for the seat of Macedon in 2002, a contest won by Mr Bernie Finn.

Mr Petrovich, also a former policeman, has publicly acknowledged that he was investigated by the police ethical standards department in relation to an incident where, following the preselection contest between Mr Finn and Mr Petrovich, Mr Petrovich twice checked Mr Finn's police file. A number of members of the Liberal Party in this place like to make accusations

about corrupt conduct on a regular basis. The OPI report has provided chapter and verse about the corrupt conduct of members of the Liberal Party, and a couple of them have paid a political price.

The shadow minister for police, Mr Merlino, the member for Monbulk in the Assembly, has moved in the Parliament to condemn the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and to demand his immediate resignation on the basis that he has been either complicit in the disgraceful, cowardly and potentially illegal abuse of power used to remove the independent Chief Commissioner of Police or that he has displayed an extraordinary level of incompetence in that he knew absolutely nothing about the gross misconduct of members of his own office. I endorse Mr Merlino's motion.

Auditor-General: *Maternity Services — Capacity*

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report entitled *Maternity Services — Capacity*. I have spoken on this report in the past, and at that time I mentioned the planning approach under the previous government and the shortcomings and failures of that government in relation to many aspects surrounding planning issues in maternity services that this very good report highlights. Not only does it highlight those planning incapacities but it also highlights the very real pressure that maternity services across the state have had placed on them over the past 10 or so years.

The report notes that, after a number of years in decline, birth rates started to increase in Victoria from 2001, with a peak in numbers during the years of 2007 and 2008. That was highlighted, as I said, through the lack of planning for maternity services. Due to that lack of planning there was an inability for women to be able to access appropriate maternity services, not only in the growth areas that this report highlights — and I draw attention to the report where it notes birth figures, particularly in the north-western region, and how growth in those areas was particularly affected — but also in our rural and regional areas.

On page 27, under the heading 'Access to antenatal care', the report notes:

All women should be able to access antenatal care easily and readily.

In particular, under the heading 'Access to maternity services' the report notes that the previous government's:

... Future Directions for Victoria's Maternity Services policy aims to give women timely, high-quality maternity care during pregnancy to provide the best possible start for their babies.

The Auditor-General's report goes on to say:

Increased demand has posed a daily challenge to hospitals in managing antenatal bookings. In response, health services have set up community-based or 'outreach' antenatal clinics, prioritised publicly funded ultrasounds and scans for those most in need, and collaborated with GPs to share maternity care.

That is well and good in relation to addressing some of those issues. The report then considers issues surrounding equity and time lines of access in the various phases of maternity care, in particular antenatal, labour and birth, and postnatal care.

The demand for maternity services, whether in the metropolitan region or in rural and regional Victoria, has been significant. The report highlights that significance and the failure of the previous government to address those areas, as I have said. In contrast the Baillieu government has recognised the areas of concern and acted upon them.

It is also pleasing to note the recommendations laid out by the Auditor-General on page xi of the report. I did not have time to go through them in great detail last time, but I did mention that they have been accepted by the Department of Health and have been taken up. I will not go through the recommendations again, but in addition to those six recommendations, that are very well laid out in this report, the initiatives and actions of this government, together with the Victorian Health Priorities Framework 2012–2022, which was released in May by the Minister for Health, will give priorities and direction to the ways in which the Baillieu government is working to improve the planning, coordination and accessibility of maternity services throughout this state. This will also include support for and encouragement of rural obstetric and maternity services, additional postgraduate scholarships in midwifery and nursing and funding for increased capacity for rural midwives through ongoing clinical supervision. This will be a huge improvement to health services in rural and regional Victoria.

This government is very mindful, respectful and understanding of the demands on nursing and maternity services right across the state and is doing much to support them. In addition to congratulating the Auditor-General for laying out very clearly what the shortcomings are, I also congratulate the health minister and the Department of Health on addressing those real needs.

Royal Children's Hospital: report 2010–11

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I rise today with a strong measure of pride to talk about the Royal Children's Hospital annual financial report 2010–11, yet another example of just how well Labor managed this state when in government. It proves that the real legacy of our time in government will serve and support the people of Victoria for many decades to come. It also helps to make it known that when Labor governs it does so for all of the community. It also reminds members of this house, especially those opposite, and the people of Victoria that we were at the helm of the good ship Victoria when the fabulous new Royal Children's Hospital building became a reality. I also note that this happened against a background of long and ongoing criticisms from the former opposition, now in government.

There have been unfounded and insulting comments about the size of the hospital, its location and other factors, of which the Premier himself, the Honourable Ted Baillieu, disproved when he stood behind Her Majesty as she opened this wonderful new building. The new hospital is a building that will serve our community and our state for decades to come and that owes so much to the leadership of former Treasurer and later Premier John Brumby and former Minister for Health Daniel Andrews, the next Premier of our state, yet the passing mention of these two great men by the current Premier at the opening ceremony did not show them the respect they deserved. However, I am certain that Her Majesty, wise as she is, knows the truth behind this magnificent new hospital that Labor built. Had it not been for Labor, the plans would still be on the drawing board, as they are with so many other policies under this government.

I am talking about a hospital with world-class, leading-edge facilities that is able to give children the best care possible, although a critical part of that care is the amazing doctors and nurses. I commend the doctors at the Royal Children's Hospital; however, I note that they earn 30 per cent more than their colleagues who work at the Western General or Sunshine hospitals due to the inability of the health minister to sort out the mess that he has created. Nurses are justifiably seeking better pay, given the long hours of dedicated work under what are at times awful circumstances that I sincerely doubt anyone in this house would wish to experience.

I congratulate the talented Tony Beddison for his leadership as chairman of the hospital board, a very wise appointment on our part, and Professor Christine Kilpatrick, a gifted CEO who has given much to this very special hospital and its patients. Of course I also

wish to congratulate all the Royal Children's Hospital staff, as a solid financial outcome is about more than accountants balancing the books; it is very much a team effort across all areas.

We on this side of the house value such team playing and strong support, and we recognise that while a limited number of talented staff may win awards every year, many more are deserving of them. This hospital attracts the very best, and the very best they must be if they are to care for the most precious gifts in all of creation, the children of our state. What I have just said may be wrong, because as we are all aware the highly talented staff at the Royal Children's also care for children from far and wide, beyond the borders of our state, because compassionate people do just that.

Trishna and Krishna are examples of two critically ill young babies who were brought into the hospital, and while they had a carer who should be made Victorian of the Year, it was the staff at the hospital who gave these two little girls from a far-off country a chance to live normal, healthy and happy lives. The staff at the Royal Children's Hospital had already done this many times and will do so into the future.

As I read the annual financial report and note how well the hospital is managed I am also reminded that for more than a decade past the hospital had the strong support of a caring and effective government that neither asked where people lived nor cared about their politics. I am certain that this government will follow on in its brief remaining time in office. The Royal Children's Hospital's reported strategic priorities and key outcomes are not a long list of empty words but a record of great dreams and solid achievements.

Having served as a government backbencher during the years of the building of the new hospital, I am so proud of the key role — the leading role; the driving role — that was played by our government.

Royal Children's Hospital: report 2010–11

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — I rise to speak on the Royal Children's Hospital annual financial report 2010–11. It is very important to note that we all at some stage may have cause to make a visit to the Royal Children's Hospital, usually in a time of crisis — at a time when we are most worried about the most precious members of our family, our children. I know the facilities personally; I have been there on a number of occasions with my own children due to a variety of sporting injuries caused by playing football or netball, ice-skating or horseriding. Whether they have been paediatric, orthopaedic or gastrointestinal incidents,

there have been plenty of opportunities to have a very good up-close-and-personal view of the very good services provided by this hospital.

It is important to note that whilst the hospital services metropolitan Melbourne it also plays a very important and strategic role in offering services to rural and regional families. I know that people in rural and regional communities take comfort in knowing that that facility is available to them. We witnessed recently the historic opening of the new facility by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on 26 October. It was a very important day for Victoria because we have not only a new building but new facilities and a new way of treating children in Victoria.

The Royal Children's Hospital has touched the lives of children and families, and not just on a rural and regional or metropolitan basis but nationally as well. We have seen some changes since the hospital originally opened in Parkville 140 years ago, and we have seen advances not only in technology but also in the way we treat our patients. In addition facilities are now available to enable families to not only visit more frequently but also stay with their children in this new facility.

The hospital has received a good report which shows great financials, and I think we also need to acknowledge the assistance that the Victorian community provides this hospital through the Good Friday Appeal, which has raised the outstanding amount of \$15.156 million. The appeal was established in 1932 by a group of journalists from the *Herald and Weekly Times* publication and has stood the test of time as a massive fundraiser for the hospital. I think we can credit not only that delivery but also the strategic plan for 2010 to 2013 which sets out six strategic directions for the Royal Children's Hospital. They are delivering excellence in health care; realising the potential of the new Royal Children's Hospital; supporting and strengthening the Royal Children's Hospital team; enhancing community and stakeholder support; maximising campus-led research, and providing excellent educational development and training. As with all organisations, nothing can progress without a strategic plan. This plan helps inform the business and departmental planning processes over the next three years, and it will be reviewed on an annual basis. If necessary, the actions that have been identified to better meet the opportunities and challenges before the hospital will be addressed.

It is good to also acknowledge the staff of the Royal Children's Hospital. The staff continue to demonstrate outstanding commitment to the vision and values of the

hospital, and I think it is timely that with the establishment of the new hospital we congratulate the staff, who are trained to the highest standards and who work towards great outcomes for our wonderful children and their health needs in Victoria.

Auditor-General: *Biotechnology in Victoria — The Public Sector's Investment*

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — Successive Victorian governments, including the previous Labor government, have valued the contribution that research and development in biotechnology makes to the state's scientific achievement and to its capacity to innovate and contribute to the international development of new technologies. The Auditor-General concludes in his audit of the effectiveness of the state's investment in biotechnology that the Department of Business and Innovation has met 10 of the 16 goals and targets it set itself and that it has made progress on the 6 targets that have not been fully met.

Investment in biotechnology has the potential to stimulate scientific research and innovation, assist in making medical and pharmaceutical discoveries, attract private investment, develop highly skilled people and more generally extend the state's scientific knowledge. The Auditor-General was critical of the investment to the extent that he indicated that there were shortcomings in the method used to target investment and weaknesses in evaluating the effectiveness of the potential benefits and identifying risk. The Auditor-General accepts that, owing to the long lead times in complex investments of this sort, it may not be reasonable to expect the full benefits to become apparent quickly. But he believes that 10 years is sufficient time and that the department should be able to objectively demonstrate the cause and effect relationship between investment and the results achieved.

This set of life science technologies can be used for a range of purposes, such as vaccines, health treatments and agricultural products. The technologies can also be used in energy generation, increasing production, controlling pests and processing waste. Clearly innovations of this type can deliver huge benefits to humanity; they have considerable economic value and can raise the state and national income. Technologies of this type may take many years to develop, and the long lead times, high levels of investment required and high failure rate justify the public investment. This is a classic example of what the Auditor-General calls the perception of market failure in the sector; the private sector is reluctant to invest because of the high risk and slow return on the very high investment.

The Auditor-General's report also examines the value of this industry sector and, drawing on a 2009 report undertaken by the former Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, says that out of the 44 publicly listed biotech companies only 13 were profitable. The report also states that 83 per cent of the \$23.8 billion combined market capitalisation of the Victorian life sciences industry sector is accounted for by one of the top ten global biopharmaceutical companies.

Overall, even though most companies are not turning a profit, the huge profit of this single company accounts for an aggregate net profit of \$981 million for Victoria. This is why there has to be a level of state intervention. The Department of Business and Innovation and its predecessor, the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, have, since 1999, invested some \$3.5 billion in the state's scientific arena, of which around one-fifth is directly invested in biotechnology and just under one-fifth in initiatives indirectly related to biotechnology.

The Auditor-General recommends that the DBI (Department of Business and Innovation) should develop an overarching biotechnology strategy and that its investment portfolio should better align its investments with its risk-and-return profile. I found this a very useful report, and I commend the Auditor-General's office on its production.

Office of Police Integrity: report

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to make a very brief contribution on the Office of Police Integrity report, *Crossing the Line*.

Mr Lenders — That's a very good name.

Ms MIKAKOS — I agree with Mr Lenders that it is a very appropriate name. This is a report that is truly astonishing in its scope. It outlines the breadth of corruption, collusion and underhanded practices engaged in by senior members of the government — both ministers and their staff — to orchestrate the demise of the most senior police officer in this state. The report makes it very clear on page 9 that it does not exonerate the Deputy Premier, Peter Ryan, in any way. The OPI makes it clear that it had no jurisdiction to investigate ministers or their ministerial staff who were not serving members of Victoria Police.

There is a whole series of unanswered questions that the government has worked to dodge since the report was tabled in this Parliament, including questions about what knowledge the Minister for Police and Emergency

Services had about various meetings that occurred between Sir Ken Jones and other individuals. There were background briefings and off-the-record comments being made to a whole series of journalists. There were meetings involving the Minister for Corrections and meetings involving the Premier's chief of staff, Mr Michael Kapel, who secretly met with Sir Ken Jones at Sir Ken's home on 16 February this year.

A whole series of issues arising from this report have not been responded to, and still lurk in the public's mind. I believe the Victorian people deserve some answers to these issues. The government can duck and weave as much as it likes on these issues, but they will not go away. The government claimed that it was going to hold itself to a higher standard. In opposition the coalition made a whole series of statements around issues of openness, accountability and transparency, and what have we seen since it has been in government?

We have seen the farce of this chamber spending hours upon hours last night in committee on the legislation establishing the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission — one of the most important pieces of legislation to come before this house all year — and the minister completely refusing to answer questions around how that body will operate and what further pieces of legislation might be coming before the Parliament, to the point of the absurdity of the house sitting until 3.30 in the morning and the Victorian public and the house still being none the wiser about the operation of that legislation.

We have had the situation in the last two days of the Minister for Housing, Ms Lovell, distributing thousands of letters to petitioners and refusing to answer questions in this Parliament — showing complete disrespect to this house — around the circumstances relating to the letter being circulated, how it was distributed and who paid all those costs, given that the letter was written on the minister's letterhead. We have seen today and yesterday the Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, Ryan Smith, refusing to answer questions regarding shareholding issues where there was a clear conflict of interest between his private share ownership and decisions made that relate to his portfolio.

What we are seeing from this government is a complete disregard for standards of integrity. The Office of Police Integrity report is just the tip of the iceberg. What it has done is give the Victorian people a taste of what is really going on behind the scenes of this government.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Housing: Moorabbin development

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — The matter I raise tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Housing, who I note is not in the chamber, and it relates to the recently built social housing units on the corner of South Road and Nepean Highway in Moorabbin. I note that the minister was very critical of the project in her contributions in this place on 24 February and 25 March last year and that she was asked by Elizabeth Miller, the member for Bentleigh in the Assembly, in an adjournment matter in the Legislative Assembly on 14 September, to 'come and look at the site'.

In her contribution Ms Miller talked about Labor's neglect of affordable housing in the area and about how great these social housing units are. In her contribution she described the development as:

... a great example of public housing in my electorate. I invite the minister to visit the development, view the important facility and join me in welcoming the new tenants ...

I could not agree more, but when the coalition was in opposition both Ms Miller and Ms Lovell signed a petition calling for this 'inappropriate site' not to proceed. I have the petition here if anybody wants to peruse it to see their signatures. Beyond this, Ms Miller doorknocked local residents, spreading fear and misinformation about the project — a fear campaign which the minister, Wendy Lovell, has not repudiated in any way.

The action I seek from the minister is that she come up with some social housing support of her own, not to claim credit — —

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, I am fully aware of what Ms Miller's actions were, and could I say she was not doorknocking to arouse fear; she was merely responding to constituent inquiries.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! There is no point of order.

Mr LENDERS — The action I seek from the minister is that she come up with some social housing support of her own and that she not claim credit for programs like Moorabbin, which she ridiculed in opposition. She should apologise to the Moorabbin community for the fear she and others instilled with their negative campaign, and most of all come up with a policy of her own. If she is really generous, she should apologise for her hypocrisy.

Health Purchasing Victoria: environmental policy

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Health. As the minister is aware, the Auditor-General has recommended Health Purchasing Victoria realign itself with its legislated activities. Today I will concentrate on the part of the Auditor-General's report that pointed to Health Purchasing Victoria's obligation to build capacity within the sector. In this I think the Auditor-General is referring to part 6, division 2, section 131(e) of the Health Services Act 1988, which states that one of Health Purchasing Victoria's functions is 'to foster improvements in the use and application of purchasing systems'. I also think the concept of capacity building exists in the term 'best value', which is also used in that section of the act.

I suggest that another factor be included: 'Considering environmental aspects in the purchase of products and services, and endeavouring to ensure the suppliers also meet high standards of environmental performance'. I get this phrase from the environmental purchasing policy of the minister's own Department of Health.

Climate change will continue to be an issue throughout our lifetimes and well beyond. Given the purchasing decisions we make now affect the wellbeing of future generations, I suggest the departmental policy ought to be made law. The business case can be proven in a number of ways. As one example, Forbes McGain, an intensive care specialist at the Western Hospital, the major public hospital in my region and the leader amongst hospitals in Victoria on environmental practice, conducted a life cycle study of drug trays used in his practice. The study found that the hospital could save between \$2500 and \$6000 through the use of reusable drug trays instead of the more popular single-use items. Economies of scale demand that we look at what other cost-effective and environmentally preferable products and practices are available. The idea of 'best value terms' could be expanded to include this kind of evidence.

Sixty per cent of the ecological and carbon footprint of Victoria's public health services comes from the procurement of consumables. I support evidence-based decision making in health policy, as I support it in all areas of government. The evidence is in; climate change is a public health issue. It is time to consider both the immediate and long-term costs of our decisions. I would like the minister to clarify the Baillieu government's commitment to a healthy environment. His action on this issue would be a clear indication of what the Baillieu government's stance on climate change is, because it is a bit difficult to know at the moment. The action I am asking of the minister is that he embed environmentally preferable cost-saving purchasing into the Health Services Act 1988.

Libraries: Sunshine

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Local Government. Usually when I speak about the Brimbank City Council all sorts of images spring to mind. There is no shortage of shysters associated with the Brimbank City Council, and we have seen no end of trouble and difficulty associated with that particular council over a fair period of time — all associated, I might say, with the Australian Labor Party.

Today I do not wish to embark on an adventure down that particular track. Rather I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Local Government concerning the administrators of the Brimbank council — as we know, Brimbank council has no elected councillors — who are attempting to get some funding from the state government for the Sunshine library through the Living Libraries capital infrastructure program.

My understanding is that the council wishes to expand the library's floor space and increase public spaces for events, programs, learning, reading, study and public access to computers, as well as to better connect the library to Hampshire Road, Hampshire Square and other spaces. I am particularly familiar with this library because it is just across the lane from my office. I walk past it quite often and have even been known to go inside from time to time. It is a great resource for the community, and one has to remember that this is a community in the fullness of rejuvenation. This is a community which is once again returning to younger families. We have a number of migrant groups there as well. So the need for a library service is very strong, stronger than it has been for a long time.

I fully endorse the attempts by the administrators of Brimbank council to get some funding from the

minister through the Living Libraries capital infrastructure program, and I urge the minister to consider very favourably the request from the Brimbank administrators for this funding as it will be a major plus for a resource which is under great demand at the moment. I believe that with appropriate funding the resource will be under even greater demand, because it will be much bigger and much more productive in its own way. I ask the minister to take into consideration the pleas of the Brimbank administrators and to give the Sunshine library some money from this infrastructure program that will see it through for many years to come.

Healesville freeway reservation: future

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport, Terry Mulder, and it is in regard to the Healesville freeway reservation, through which VicRoads has declared there will never be a freeway. Therefore there has been a lot of discussion in the community about how the land reservation should be utilised in the future. I received a letter from the mayor of the City of Whitehorse in which he put forward the position of Whitehorse City Council, which is that this reserve of land should be kept for public space and community use.

I know the minister has been asked by the members for Bayswater and Forest Hill in the other place to act in certain ways. I think the member for Forest Hill asked the minister to go out to look at the land, and the member for Bayswater asked the minister to speak to the community about an ongoing process that VicRoads has undertaken in relation to this land.

The action that I am seeking from the minister is very much in line with that of the Whitehorse council. The positions of the members for Bayswater and Forest Hill seem to be a little bit different. In the *Whitehorse Leader* of 2 March the member for Forest Hill is reported as having ruled out any development on this land — that is, while he has been the local member. Before the election the member for Bayswater said in her election literature that one of her seven priorities for the Bayswater district was:

Preserving the proposed Healesville freeway corridor as public parkland for the benefit of all.

The action I seek from the minister is for him to do whatever it takes with VicRoads, Parks Victoria and the council to achieve exactly what the member for Bayswater called for in the lead-up to the election — that is, to preserve the proposed Healesville freeway corridor as public parkland for the benefit of all.

Bushfires: preparedness

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Bushfire Response, Peter Ryan. I congratulate the coalition on the announcement of more than \$306 000 for practical solutions based — —

Mr Lenders interjected.

Mrs PETROVICH — I certainly would not congratulate you. I congratulate the minister on \$306 000 for practical solutions based locally to increase bushfire safety and preparedness across some of Victoria's most bushfire-prone areas. The \$5 million Fire Ready Communities program aims to improve fire preparation, fire awareness and education over the next four years. It is noted that these grants mark Victoria's inaugural Fire Action Week, which ran from 13 to 20 November. Projects which have received first-round Fire Ready Communities grants range from dedicated bushfire community information programs and establishing telephone trees within the communities to creating a new community warning siren system to help with evacuation in high-risk bushfire areas.

I note one of the grants is for a project in Bullengarook, an area in the Macedon Assembly electorate that I know very well, which has been given a \$40 600 grant aimed at providing a pilot of a new, community-based bushfire readiness model.

Mr Finn — It voted Liberal in the last election.

Mrs PETROVICH — It did. It voted Liberal in the local Assembly member's heartland. I think she lives in Bullengarook, Mr Finn. This project will develop and test the readiness and practicality of the planning process step by step with local residents and agencies, identify people and places that are particularly vulnerable and develop a suite of community and agency responses to address their unique risks and vulnerabilities. A township protection plan will be developed as part of this project. This particular pilot will include a community-wide exercise to test the plan, followed by a review to refine the plan where necessary.

I am particularly supportive of the community empowerment aspect and working with multiple agencies on these projects. It is a great initiative, something that was never taken up in the previous 11 years by those who are making a lot of noise here tonight. While the program targets the state's 52 identified high-risk bushfire communities, other communities in high-risk areas can also submit project

proposals for consideration. I ask the minister to update the house on what other projects are planned for the 52 high-risk bushfire communities as they are rolled out.

Planning: green wedge logical inclusions

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and it concerns the impact on residents of potential changes to the urban growth boundary as a result of the deliberations of the Logical Inclusions Advisory Committee in relation to the south-east growth area, specifically in Pakenham. In May this year the minister instigated a process whereby the Growth Areas Authority would review the urban growth boundary in a number of interface local government areas, including Casey and Cardinia within my electoral region. The objective of the review is to see where further pieces of land not included inside the urban growth boundary could be included, which would enable them to be developed as a way to help address the shortage of metropolitan land supply for housing and employment purposes.

Concerns have already been raised in the media and debated in this house about the benefits that may accrue to landowners and developers who have links to the Liberal Party, and many residents believe that some of the areas designated for rezoning are inappropriate and not in the community interest. But leaving this aside, local residents have spoken to me about their concerns that if the rezoning takes place in the absence of clear plans and funding allocations for infrastructure, the resulting lack of livability for existing and new residents will be disastrous. As I understand it, the proposal for Pakenham is to expand the urban growth boundary to about 4 kilometres from the Pakenham city centre, east of Ryan Road between the Monash Freeway and Pakenham Bypass to the south and the Old Princes Highway to the north.

I ask the minister to provide me with a clear commitment to provide funds that will provide reasonably direct access to the Monash Freeway and to the Melbourne–Gippsland railway via a new railway station for East Pakenham, including the new residences on the land east of Ryan Road, if the outcome of the review is that new housing is to be constructed there. The Monash Freeway is the main road from Melbourne to Warragul in the west and the Latrobe Valley to the east, and it is important that residents who live in Pakenham have access to this highway without having to virtually circumnavigate half the town to get there.

I see from the presentation by Parklea Pty Ltd to the Logical Inclusions Advisory Committee that there is an expectation of primary access by future arterial connections to the Princes Highway. Currently there is one connection from the freeway into south central Pakenham at Koo Wee Rup Road. Another is well to the west at Cardinia Road and the other well to the east at Nar Nar Goon. Residents are therefore justifiably concerned that the proposed development east of Ryan Road will in effect box in the residents who will make their homes there.

The Parklea Pty Ltd submission makes a number of suggestions regarding the access that residents of the future development will need to make the development viable for so many people. But, so far as residents know, there is no commitment from the minister that government will invest adequate funds to facilitate the expensive construction of the roadworks necessary to give residents access to the freeway and to avoid massive road congestion.

Rail: Southland station

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I would like to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister of Public Transport, and it concerns a flyer that was handed out at Cheltenham station the other day on the issue of the promised Southland railway station. Dare I say that it alleges this has been something of a fraud brought upon the electors in the Assembly seats of Bentleigh and Mordialloc. I noted that the flyer was properly authorised; however, it used the contact details of an electoral office of a certain upper house colleague of mine who is currently presiding in the Chair.

I assume and I hope, given its political nature and inaccuracy, the pamphlet was therefore paid for by the non-parliamentary resources of the certain member. Given the scoping work that has already happened on the project and the briefings I and other members have had from the department, I ask the minister to consider what action he can take to accurately inform the community about the progress that is being made. I also ask that he respond to the falsehoods and inaccuracies — I am trying to be kind and not reflect on the Chair — in the contents of the flyer.

I am more than happy to provide a copy of the flyer to the minister. As I said, I hope the flyer is being paid for by non-parliamentary resources, given its political content and its absolute inaccuracy. I would hope, as a representative of the said area that such inaccuracies would not be peddled without due diligence. Clearly there has been no due diligence exercised in trying to perpetrate what is an absolute falsehood.

I ask the minister to take immediate action to make sure that the intent of the government and the work that is already being undertaken to bring about the Southland railway station — a project promised by Labor several elections in a row but never delivered — is seen to be being progressed by a government that intends to keep its election commitments.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) —
The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.51 p.m.

Responses

Hon. P. R. HALL (Minister for Higher Education and Skills) — I have written responses to adjournment debate matters raised by Mr Drum on 16 June, Mr Finn on 16 August, Mr Leane on 30 August, Ms Hartland on 13 September, Ms Tierney on 13 October, Mr Finn on 25 October and Ms Mikakos on 8 November.

Mr Lenders made a request to the Minister for Housing with regard to matters associated with social housing in Moorabbin. I will pass on that request to the Minister for Housing.

Ms Hartland raised a matter for the Minister for Health. That is a matter which I will convey to my colleague Mr Davis.

Mr Finn raised a matter for the Minister for Local Government. He made it abundantly clear that he supports the application for some library funding for the good people of Brimbank. I will pass that request on to the Minister for Local Government.

Mr Leane raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport regarding the Healesville freeway reservation and his desire to see that it is put to good community use. I will pass that on to the Minister for Public Transport.

Mrs Petrovich raised a matter for the Minister for Bushfire Response that concerned an inquiry about fire readiness planning for bushfire risk communities, and she sought information from Minister Ryan with respect to that matter. I will convey that to the minister.

Mr Scheffer raised a matter for the Minister for Planning regarding the urban growth boundary and in particular access to the Princes Highway around the Pakenham area. I will convey that request to the Minister for Planning.

Finally, Mrs Peulich raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport seeking some clarification of content, as I understand, of a particular flyer that was handed out at a suburban railway station. I will ask if the Minister for Public Transport is able to do what has been requested by Mrs Peulich.

