

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 4 May 2011

(Extract from book 6)

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

Environment and Planning Legislation Committee — Mr Elsbury, Mrs Kronberg, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik, Mrs Peulich, Mr Scheffer, Mr Tee and Ms Tierney.

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

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

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(*Assembly*): Mr Battin and Mr McCurdy.

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

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

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FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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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

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Wednesday, 4 May 2011

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

PETITION

Kindergartens: funding

Following petition presented to house:

To the Legislative Council of Victoria:

The petition of certain citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council:

1. Victoria's current baby boom and the COAG agreement to increase kinder hours for all four-year-olds from 10 to 15 hours will mean that many more kindergarten places will be required; and
2. the Baillieu government's commitment of only \$15 million over four years will be unable to provide the necessary expansion of kindergarten facilities.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council of Victoria urgently calls on the Baillieu government to address this funding shortfall and significantly increase the level of funding available to expand Victoria's kindergartens.

**By Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan)
(293 signatures).**

Laid on table.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Anti-Cancer Council Victoria — Report, 2010.

Auditor-General's reports on —

Managing Student Safety, May 2011.

Revitalising Central Dandenong, May 2011.

Ombudsman — Report on the Investigation into the improper release of autopsy information by a Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine employee, May 2011.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule No. 26.

Victoria Police — Chief Commissioner — Report under section 96 of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, 2010.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Notices

Mrs PEULICH having given notice:

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mrs Peulich is only able to make a statement on one report next Wednesday.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — It needs to appear on the notice paper, and I understand that any other member can make a statement on this report. I am just making sure that that opportunity exists.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Members can only give notice of intention to make one statement.

Further notice given.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Noble Park Primary School: 100th anniversary

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise today to congratulate Noble Park Primary School on achieving its 100th birthday. On Monday, 4 April, as part of the school's yearlong centenary festival, students were called to class by the ringing of an old-fashioned bell, while the school captains dressed in early 1900s costumes, and attended a birthday assembly addressed by the mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong, Roz Blades. A school festival will be held on 7 May with a range of activities on offer for the whole family. A reunion for ex-students and staff is also planned for later this year.

Noble Park Primary School was established in January 1911, not long after the suburb was subdivided for housing. It began with only 26 enrolments and classes were held in the rented Noble Park public hall. It was not until 1917, when enrolments reached 100, that a local developer by the name of Frank Buckley donated land to the education department for a school to accommodate the growing enrolments. A two-room wooden school building was constructed on that site. By 1926 another 300 students had enrolled at the school and a further three buildings were added to the site, making Noble Park Primary School the biggest wooden school in Victoria. In 1956 the Education Department purchased more land further along Buckley Street and established the school where it stands today.

The school's first teacher, Olga Ernst, has a special place in Australian literary history as she was the author

of Australia's first book of fairytales called *From the Land of the Wattle*. She wrote the book when she was just 16 years old, and it was the first piece of Australian literature that based fairy stories in the Australian landscape.

I wish Noble Park Primary School continued success for its next 100 years and hope it continues to build on its place in Victorian history.

Diamond Valley Little Athletics Centre

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I would like to report to the house on my attendance at the annual general meeting and presentation evening of the Diamond Valley Little Athletics Centre on Saturday, 16 April 2011. The Diamond Valley Little Athletics Centre is one of the largest organisations of its type in Victoria with 620 children aged between 5 and 15 years competing on a weekly basis. It has been my pleasure to attend the centre regularly on Saturday mornings to present medals.

I would like to congratulate centre president Stuart Schnaars, secretary Andrew Edney and treasurer Stephen Anderson as well as the rest of the executive committee, club members and volunteers for their tireless work in coordinating competitions for children each week.

During the evening I had the pleasure of presenting centre champion athlete awards to Nick Beames and Ellen Brasier as well as seeing Andrew Brasier, Nick Soccio and Terry Knape all receive centre life membership. David Davies, Stephen Anderson and Stuart Schnaars received distinguished service awards, and Matt Owen received the Jim Mason perpetual trophy for outstanding contributions to the centre. I congratulate all of them.

Anzac Day: Epping

Mr ONDARCHIE — On another matter, I attended a very moving Anzac Day dawn service at the Epping RSL. I congratulate president Herb Mason and the executive committee of the Epping RSL sub-branch as well as mayor and host Rex Griffin for their kind hospitality on the day. I also thank the members, visitors, families and children who attended on that day. It was a very moving day to honour, respect and thank those who sacrificed their lives for all of us.

City of Whittlesea: citizenship ceremony

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I recently attended the Whittlesea City Council citizenship ceremony held at the Plenty Ranges Arts

and Convention Centre. My colleague Mr Ondarchie also attended, as did Ms D'Ambrosio, the member for Mill Park in the Legislative Assembly. The mayor, Rex Griffin, and his fellow councillors welcomed us all, and later we spoke with our newest Australian citizens over some light refreshments.

I congratulate and thank the mayor, his fellow councillors and the officers of Whittlesea City Council for making this event special and, as always, memorable.

Mirabel Foundation: funding

Mr ELASMAR — On another matter, just before Easter I was delighted to meet with the manager of the Mirabel Foundation. This wonderful organisation provides advice and valuable practical assistance to the children of drug addicts who have been handed over to their grandparents. Often the grandparents are elderly and unaware of the government grants that are available to them.

Mirabel needs financial support to give these children of addicts a good start in life. I deeply admire Mirabel's dedication and compassion for these unfortunate kids who, through no fault of their own, end up being cared for by their, often elderly, grandparents, who receive very little financial support from the government.

Budget: city of Casey

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to give a slap on the back to the government for the budget commitments which have been announced for the communities in the city of Casey. In particular I would like to give a slap for \$1 million in funding to conduct planning and development work in support of an expansion of Casey Hospital, a slap for \$600 000 to expand free commuter car parking at Narre Warren railway station and support for the expansion of car parking at Merinda Park, a slap for \$22 million for the Berwick trade careers centre at Chisholm Institute of TAFE, a slap for \$20 000 in funding for minor works at Narre Warren North Primary School, a slap for \$15 million to construct a new special school at Officer and a slap for the land acquisition funding for the new Casey Central East Primary School.

Funding for the land acquisition for the Casey Central East Primary School is the first step towards providing additional educational opportunities for the Cranbourne and Narre Warren South communities, a need not mentioned in the Parliament by local Labor MPs the members for Narre Warren South and Cranbourne

respectively, Judith Graley and Jude Perera, either before or after the November state election.

Sport and recreation also play an important part in Casey, and I would also like to give a slap on the back to the government for the \$500 000 funding provided to Casey Comets Football Club in Cranbourne, which has provided good service for over 30 years to the Casey community. I give a big sledge to the local members who failed to take these issues up as local MPs before the election.

Anzac Day: commemoration

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I attended two Anzac Day functions last week, one at the cenotaph in the city of Moonee Valley. Meeting with older members of the community who have seen active duty is always a very moving occasion. Whenever I attend these functions and speak to people they often tell me they saw active duty, but they want their children and grandchildren never to encounter what they encountered.

I also attended a Turkish RSL sub-branch dinner last week, and I think this quote from the first president of Turkey, Atatürk, sums up the feelings at that function:

Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives ...
 You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country.
 Therefore rest in peace.
 There is no difference between the Johnnies
 and Mehments to us where they lie side by side
 here in this country of ours ...
 You, the mothers,
 who sent their sons from far away countries
 wipe away your tears;
 Your sons are now lying in our bosom
 and are in peace.
 After having lost their lives on this land they have
 become our sons as well.

In the invitation to this event Ramazan Altintas said:

I am confident about the occasions such as this serve to promote peace and freedom through forging links between our cultures. Links based upon awareness and an understanding of the history, which we share.

We must always learn from history to make sure that we do not repeat it.

Western suburbs: government initiatives

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — These are exciting times indeed in Melbourne's west. After 11 years of neglect by Labor, after generations of Labor hacks using and abusing the west for their own advantage and totally ignoring the needs of local

people, after the Brimbank city council debacle and so many other examples of contempt for the people of Melbourne's western suburbs, there is now a government in this state that cares about locals in the west.

The Baillieu government is barely five months old, but already it is showing the people of the west that we are on their side. A string of cabinet ministers from the Premier down have beaten paths to various parts of Melbourne's west. We are listening to the west, and we are working for the west. The delivery of the regional rail project is a glowing example of the coalition government delivering for the western suburbs. After so long off the radar it is wonderful that in this state we now have a government that will do the right thing by the western suburbs. I am particularly proud to be a Liberal living in and representing Melbourne's west, and I am particularly proud as a resident of Melbourne's west to be a member of the Baillieu government.

Budget: Mildura

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — In the lead-up to the November 2010 election The Nationals and the Liberal Party made a number of promises to electors in northern Victoria. In the district of Mildura in my electorate that included a promise of \$14.5 million for an economic development package to start construction of Mildura's riverfront master plan and to support the private development of a 300-seat dockside conference centre and resort at the marina, investing \$3 million in the passenger terminal at Mildura airport, an investment in a major expansion of the capacity of the natural gas supply to Mildura families and businesses and major investments in large-scale solar power generation in Mildura, as well as returning the passenger train which was removed by the last Liberal-Nationals government.

There is no mention of funding for the implementation of these promises in the Baillieu-Ryan budget for 2011–12 and for future years. I call on the government to explain to the electors of Mildura when these promises will be funded, over what period they will be funded, the amount of funding to be made available in each funding year and what the funding source will be — in short, the information that electors have a right to expect will be provided in the budget papers.

Job creation and economic growth in regional Victoria does not just happen; it requires planning from governments. But sadly the Premier and the Deputy Premier have failed to outline in this budget any plan for how they will ensure regional Victoria continues to grow and prosper into the future.

Victorian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation Research

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — On Monday, 2 May, I had the pleasure of launching the annual forum of the Victorian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation Research at Bendigo on behalf of the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Ryan Smith, and the Baillieu government. This program is fully funded through the Department of Sustainability and Environment on behalf of the coalition government as a collaborative effort between the Victorian government and Victorian universities for five years. It will be funded by this government at the rate of \$1 million per annum, and its term expires in 2014.

The role of this centre is to provide decision-makers with an improved understanding of potential climate impacts and investigate options and opportunities for climate change adaptation that acknowledge and account for uncertainty about future climate conditions. The research will inform government policy and industry and community responses. The centre participants aim to provide state and national leadership in climate change adaptation research, to support effective collaboration within Victorian universities on climate change adaptation research, to support collaboration with other Australian and international partners in adaptation research, to foster the development of Victorian expertise and capacity in adaptation research and to actively pursue further funding and resources for adaptation research.

The good part of this work is that it delivers policy outcomes. The doing part of this research is what the community is waiting for. Whether you are a climate change sceptic or supporter and whatever you think causes it, change in our climate has emerged as a major challenge for societies and governments and will potentially impact on natural ecosystems, food and fibre production, cities and infrastructure, human health and biodiversity conservation.

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

Anzac Day: Wattle Park

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I am pleased to rise today to draw the house's attention to the Anzac commemoration service held on 17 April in the patriotic area at Wattle Park. This is a service conducted by the 24th Battalion Association, the 2/24th Australian Infantry Battalion Association, the 7th Battalion (1st AIF) Association, the

2/7th Australian Infantry Battalion Association, the 2/23rd Battalion Association, the Hawthorn RSL, the Melbourne Tramways Band and Parks Victoria.

This was a particularly important commemoration because, as the house may be aware — and I have spoken in the house about this matter before — there is a progeny of the Lone Pine at Gallipoli was planted at Wattle Park on 7 May 1933, which was the anniversary of the 24th battalion's departure from Australia in 1915. It was grown from a pine cone brought back from Gallipoli and so is a direct descendant of the Gallipoli Lone Pine from the Lone Pine plateau that became such a fighting point in the Gallipoli campaign. I am pleased that a juvenile directly related to the Gallipoli Lone Pine is now planted in Wattle Park. It will be there for the future. I think this is a very important announcement, and I congratulate the organisers on this process and Parks Victoria on its involvement.

Budget: western Victoria

Mr O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — I rise to commend the Baillieu-Ryan coalition government and the Treasurer in particular on delivering our first budget, which has shown that this coalition government is focused on delivering its election commitments to the people of western Victoria. The budget delivers big in some of the most important areas in regional Victoria. It is fiscally responsible, it is a caring budget and, most importantly, it delivers on our election commitments — the fundamentals of transport, health and safety.

Some items delivered in the 2011–12 state budget in relation to western Victoria include \$50 million for the Western Highway duplication between Burrumbeet and Beaufort; a \$16 million commitment to upgrade and build ambulance stations, with a new one being built in Beaufort and an upgrade of the Maryborough station to a 24-hour service; a \$73.4 million boost to Ballarat Health Services; \$600 000 for the Maryborough District Health Service; funding for natural gas expansion in Avoca from the Regional Growth Fund; \$25 million towards the Skilled Stadium stage 3 redevelopment; \$2 million to start planning a Ballarat-Geelong-Bendigo rail link; and many other announcements set out in the budget papers.

I applaud the government for the delivery of the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund, which is truly a visionary program. It will drive regional prosperity and is a centrepiece of the budget. I particular commend Damian Drum, the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development, the hardworking department,

the Deputy Premier, the Premier, the Treasurer and the entire public service on delivering such a fiscally responsible and caring budget for Victorians.

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

Member for Bendigo East: comments

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I rise this morning to express my concern over the behaviour of the member for Bendigo East in the other place, Jacinta Allan. Over the last six years V/Line has been trying to fill service holes on regional rail lines caused by what Labor called its fast rail project. We all know what happened with the fast rail project — on the Bendigo line they ripped up one of the rail lines. In order to make these changes appear faster than they are Labor ordered flagship trains, so-called express trains, to pass through towns along the way.

Jacinta Allan has known about these problems created by these service holes ever since the regional rail lines were upgraded, but she chose to do nothing about this problem. Now that V/Line has actually taken some action to fix the problem, Jacinta Allan is calling for information from V/Line to find out what can be done. After six years of doing nothing, she is now calling for information on what opportunities may exist. This is cheap opportunism, and she should know better.

What is looming as a bigger problem for the Bendigo line is the electrification of that line right through from Sunbury to Southern Cross station. Once that happens at the end of the year, in order to appease the people of Sunbury — a decision that the people of Sunbury effectively rejected en masse — the metropolitan rail system will move 30 kilometres closer to Bendigo, which will slow the traffic for an additional 30 kilometres into Southern Cross station.

JOBWATCH: FUNDING

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I move:

That this house condemns the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations for deciding to cease funding JobWatch and notes that —

- (1) JobWatch is a vital service that provides free and confidential advice;
- (2) JobWatch has provided assistance to over 200 000 Victorian workers and recovered over \$3 million in entitlements in the past 10 years;
- (3) JobWatch has enjoyed the support of state governments of all political persuasions for over 30 years;

(4) the minister's actions may force JobWatch to close its doors as soon as 30 June 2011, leaving many of Victoria's most vulnerable workers without a service that provides information and advice about workplace bullying, sexual harassment, illegal underpayment and unfair dismissal; and

(5) the minister's letter of 17 March 2011 to the executive director of JobWatch states that, 'It is my assessment that the activities for which the previous government provided funding are no longer clearly aligned to the objectives of my department', and calls on the minister to explain his statement.

It is my great pleasure to move this motion this morning, tempting as it to respond first to some of the members statements we have just heard. I will resist that temptation. This motion seeks to bring to the attention of the house the serious issue of the defunding of JobWatch by the Baillieu government. JobWatch is an essential service, and that defunding will create a gap in the information available to Victoria's most vulnerable workers.

The motion condemns the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations for his decision to cease funding JobWatch and notes that this is a vital service that provides both free and confidential — and extensive — advice. That is an important distinction between what JobWatch does and what other industrial relations helplines and other services do. JobWatch has provided assistance to over 200 000 Victorian workers and recovered over \$3 million in entitlements in the past decade. That is but a fraction of what has been done in the 30-year period in which JobWatch has enjoyed bipartisan support and funding from Victorian governments of all political persuasions.

The decision the minister has taken will surely result in JobWatch having to close its doors on 30 June. As I said, this will leave an enormous gap in information for Victorian workers. The other thing I would like to explore today — and I certainly invite the minister to take the opportunity to respond to this at some point in the debate; I hope he will — is that in the minister's letter — —

Mr Lenders — Don't hold your breath!

Ms PULFORD — No, Mr Lenders, I will not hold my breath, but I hope that the minister would be prepared to front up and defend this matter.

A letter dated 17 March from the minister to the executive director of JobWatch stated:

It is my assessment that the activities for which the previous government provided funding are no longer clearly aligned to the objectives of my department.

I would dearly love to know how the minister could explain that the objectives of his department have changed to such a degree that ensuring that Victorian employers meet their minimum legal obligations in terms of bullying, workplace safety, harassment, sexual discrimination and minimum wages and conditions is suddenly not the business of the minister's department.

That is a very scary prospect indeed. I certainly urge Minister Dalla-Riva to come clean about the newly aligned objectives that he speaks of in that letter.

JobWatch provides a great deal of advice to a large number of people. This really ought to be a period of celebration for JobWatch, it having just passed the 30-year mark in providing such an important service to so many people. I know some members opposite get very excited when we talk about unions and the union movement. JobWatch more often than not provides advice to people who do not have anywhere else to go for their advice, so it tends to be the place for advice and information for people who are in non-unionised workplaces and sectors of the workforce where union members are a little less thick on the ground.

I would like to take this opportunity, as the government seeks to destroy JobWatch, to thank Zana Bytheway, the executive director, her staff and the people who have served on the board, including the chair, Gerard Brody, for the tireless work they have undertaken over many years.

JobWatch was initially conceived as a grassroots organisation staffed by volunteers. They were people who were passionate advocates for social justice. Over 30 years it has become such an essential service and an important part of the matrix of industrial relations services and places where people can get advice about their rights at work in Victoria that it seems unthinkable that it will be gone. Like many organisations JobWatch has always sought to expand its services and secure additional funding. Indeed I note in JobWatch's most recent annual report that the executive director says that traditionally JobWatch has been funded and resourced to a level where it experienced around 20 to 25 per cent unmet demand. So I know that the people from JobWatch and those assisted by JobWatch would certainly prefer to be having a conversation with this government about increasing resources rather than doing away with them altogether.

The executive director also reports on customer satisfaction. The experience of the organisation is that around 95 per cent of callers have rated the telephone information service as good or very good. I think the most important figures for us to be mindful of are those

I referred to earlier. In the past 10 years its staff have answered more than 200 000 calls from Victorian workers — we could hazard a fair old guess that each and every one of us in this place with our large electorates has many thousands of constituents who have personally interacted with the people at JobWatch — and recovered around \$3 million in workers' entitlements.

JobWatch provides a service to people who generally have nowhere else to go. They are people who do not have deep enough pockets to hire a lawyer to deal with their underpayment or non-payment issues. I will take a moment to provide some information to members in the house about the demographics of JobWatch callers. The majority of callers to JobWatch's telephone information service are women — 55.26 per cent. The majority of callers to the service are from Melbourne metropolitan areas, 82.79 per cent, and the remainder are from rural and regional Victoria. JobWatch provides a toll-free number so that geography is no impediment to seeking advice.

The spread of age groups is quite broad, with just under 30 per cent of callers in the 25-to-35, 35-to-45 and 45-and-over age groups and a little over 10 per cent of callers under the age of 25. The industries in which callers were predominantly employed include the retail trade at 14.3 per cent, property and business at 13.9 per cent and health and community services at 11.9 per cent. I do not need to tell members that the people who work predominantly in these industries are more commonly part time or casual, non-unionised and they are in precarious employment.

A great number of the calls relate to unfair dismissal matters and around a third of all callers in the reporting period covered by this annual report worked for a small business, which has been defined by the federal legislation as a business with less than 15 equivalent full-time workers. My experience tells me that people are more likely to be union members if they are in a larger workplace and less likely if they are in a smaller workplace. It came as no surprise to me that a greater proportion of people seeking advice from JobWatch were those employed in smaller businesses. In the reporting period, 62.5 per cent of JobWatch callers were permanent full-time workers, 15.7 per cent were permanent part-time workers and the balance were casuals.

JobWatch provides information and advice to people across a range of sectors, across the geographic spread of Victoria and for people in all types of employment.

JobWatch found there was a significant increase in the reporting of bullying-related issues. I would imagine that this is in no small part because of increased media reporting of, awareness around and public campaigns about bullying and bullying in the workplace. It is interesting to note that as JobWatch is being defunded at the end of this financial year — that is, in a matter of seven or eight weeks — and as we are having this debate in this place today, yesterday in another place there was discussion about some important legislation that is referred to colloquially as ‘Brodie’s law’ in memory of Brodie Panlock, a young woman who was mercilessly tormented in her workplace. The Labor Party supports that legislation, which is of course being introduced by the government. Brodie’s situation and that of a number of other people have been extensively reported in the media.

A greater awareness about the risks associated with workplace bullying is probably why we are seeing a far greater increase in bullying-related issues as a proportion of the problems people are experiencing in their workplace. No doubt in coming weeks in this place we will get to discuss the specifics of that legislation. It is somewhat ironic that we are defunding one of Victoria’s most important sources of advice on bullying in the workplace at the same time as that legislation is being championed and supported by members in the Legislative Assembly — that is, they are debating the question of stiffer penalties for those people who have behaved in what will become an unlawful and criminal way by tormenting people in their workplaces.

Yesterday the budget was announced. There will be a great many things that people have to say about that.

Mr Leane — Very underwhelming.

Ms PULFORD — Mr Leane says he was underwhelmed. There will be other opportunities to talk about this in great detail, but the Victorian budget is an allocation of very significant amounts of money. The budget is around \$2 billion higher for the coming financial year than it was in the previous financial year.

JobWatch’s funding in 2010–11 from the Victorian government came in the form of a grant of \$942 515 from what was the Department of Industry, Innovation and Regional Development. The total budget for JobWatch in that year was \$1.3 million. JobWatch’s funding overwhelmingly comes from the Victorian government. The most significant other source of funding was \$330 000 from the federal government. Having another look at JobWatch’s annual report we see that this money is almost exclusively spent on

employing people who provide a service to vulnerable workers experiencing great difficulties in their workplaces. These are people we in this place have a duty to represent. This is not about sheep stations, but without the support of the Victorian government JobWatch simply cannot continue to exist.

An article in the *Age* last month canvassed the state government’s decision to axe JobWatch, and it quotes Graham Carbery. I will share his story. Mr Carbery was a teacher whose former employer cut his pay by 29 per cent without warning. He is quoted in the article as saying that he would not have won a settlement without JobWatch:

Without their expert guidance and advice I wouldn’t have known what to do. Individual workers — particularly those that aren’t in unions — really have the odds stacked against them.

Mr Carbery really nails this; that is the nub of the issue. Industrial relations is a very technical area of law that varies from workplace to workplace and from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. It has been greatly simplified these days, but there is still great variety in industrial awards and further variety in workplace agreements. The variety is limitless. It is not possible for people to have the necessary degree of understanding and expertise in their own employment conditions and in the employment laws that govern them without expert assistance, should the need for that arise. Mr Dalla-Riva’s decision will do away with that assistance.

We should not be surprised. The Liberal Party and The Nationals were pretty keen before the election to make a whole lot of commitments and promises about workplace issues that have turned out to be just a little bit different in the cold, harsh light of an election victory. Victorian workers were told that we would have the most well-paid teachers and better pay for police officers and nurses. These have turned out to be non-core promises. Yesterday the government took the opportunity in the budget to reaffirm its commitment to a wages policy with a 2.5 per cent increase. This is the government that in great haste changed the rules around Easter Sunday trading so that people who are employed in retail do not have an opportunity to decline to be rostered. It is treated as just a normal working Sunday rather than a public holiday.

The government has now flagged its intention to revisit the Melbourne Cup substitute day enjoyed by people in a variety of weird and wonderful arrangements across regional Victorian communities and is introducing the opportunity for a split day. Anyone who has ever put on their glad rags for a cup day party knows that it is a

pretty impractical business to go to work for half a shift and then go and enjoy that locally significant day. For people to have one of their public holidays split into two parts is really unfair.

When the Labor government sought to provide the cup day substitute, creating an additional public holiday for a whole class of people who had not previously enjoyed the Melbourne Cup holiday, we spoke to Victorian communities about the need to have different options within a municipality with perhaps a couple of separate regionally significant days, but now the government seeks to chop a whole lot of people's public holiday in half. We should not be surprised that the Liberal Party in government, federally or in Victoria, seems not to have much sympathy for the plight of our most vulnerable workers.

Mrs Petrovich interjected.

Ms PULFORD — The question of the day at the races is but one part of the broader context in which the Liberal Party treats working people. That is one part of the spectrum, but what is being done in the defunding of JobWatch is another part altogether.

I have some case studies I will take the opportunity to share with members to illustrate the types of people we are talking about. For the purpose of this exercise let the record show that the names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the people concerned, but these case studies are about real people with real experiences.

Ricoh worked as a casual worker for over 10 years in a chemical factory. Over time this employment caused him serious injury and ongoing ailments and resulted in his employment being terminated on the basis of his illness. On his behalf JobWatch was able to assist Ricoh by recovering around \$40 000, and he was very grateful for the assistance JobWatch was able to provide to him.

Maree has a chronic, non-work-related illness, but nonetheless for a number of years she was able to perform her clerical role at her place of employment. Eventually, however, despite being able to continue to perform her role without difficulty, her employer grew tired of her and her illness and impairment issues and eventually terminated her employment under the guise of a sham redundancy. Members will be familiar with sham redundancy arrangements. Maree took the matter to Fair Work Australia, and with the assistance of JobWatch and its self-representation program Maree was able to resolve the matter herself. Maree now thinks JobWatch is fantastic, because no other agency

was able to help her and she was unable to afford a lawyer.

Mr Lenders — Why won't Mr Dalla-Riva fund it?

Ms PULFORD — Mr Lenders, that is a mystery to me. I am hoping we may be able to get to the bottom of it by bringing debate on this motion to the house, and I am sure the next speaker will have something to say about it. I still live in hope that the next speaker might get up and say, 'Sorry! We have made a terrible mistake. JobWatch is an essential service. We recant and we will continue to fund this very important service'. I still live in hope.

The next case study I would like to share with you is about Henry, a very young apprentice in a suburban factory. He was horribly bullied and victimised over a period of time, including by having his lunch repeatedly stolen by work colleagues, by being punched from time to time by these same coworkers and by being hung by his neck from a rooftop at one point. Henry was later assisted by JobWatch through this horrendous ordeal, which ended up being heard as a matter in the Magistrates Court.

I had an opportunity to speak with my colleague Natalie Hutchins, the member for Keilor in the Assembly. Natalie was a member of the board of JobWatch for a number of years and was also an assistant secretary of the Victorian Trades Hall Council. Ms Hutchins shared with me a number of stories that all these years later it is a little hard to forget. She talked about Jason, a young apprentice, who went to work for his first week. Everything was all right; it was pretty exciting to have a new job and the financial and other independence that young people crave — what a wonderful thing it was for him to be undertaking an apprenticeship and gaining some great skills that will serve him well for his lifetime in the workforce. Except Jason's employer said, 'We do not pay apprentices; apprentices do not get paid'. Of course not having any idea about his rights at work Jason thought that was probably pretty much the way of it, so he worked for six months after having received only an initial week's pay. Six months is an extraordinarily long period to be working for no pay.

Mr Lenders — And Mr Dalla-Riva will not fund this?

Ms PULFORD — Mr Dalla-Riva thinks that funding a service that would assist someone like Jason, who wanted to get a good start, who wanted to gain some skills, who wanted to start earning and who wanted some financial independence — or Henry, Maree and Rico and a whole bunch of other people —

is not important and is not worthy. I shake my head in amazement at that.

Mr Lenders — And they had a family statement.

Ms PULFORD — Yes, those opposite did have a family statement. I would welcome the opportunity at some point to contribute to a debate in this house on the government's family statement; I have been waiting my turn for a number of weeks. This government purports to be all about families, but I do not know what Jason's mum and dad would have made of that, or what the children, parents or brothers and sisters of the others I have spoken about would make of the types of support that this government is providing to families in these kinds of circumstances.

The closure of JobWatch will affect a lot of people — around 25 000 people each year seek assistance from JobWatch. These people are most commonly in a state of distress because they have been sacked, discriminated against, underpaid, harassed or bullied. That the department's objectives are no longer aligned to assist these people is not a response I welcome from government speakers.

On average a JobWatch phone consultation lasts about 25 minutes during which time the service provides detailed advice and options. The Fair Work Australia Help Line, which I imagine government speakers might suggest can do the job just fine, has an average call length of around 5 minutes. Making a comparison between the things that JobWatch does and the types of other information and advice services that the commonwealth industrial relations system supports and funds is like comparing apples with oranges. Some 55 per cent of the calls to JobWatch are referrals from the Fair Work Australia information line, and we know that the people who refer those calls — people from the office of the Fair Work Ombudsman — are concerned about where they are going to send these people. Around 25 per cent of all calls to JobWatch come from the Fair Work Ombudsman, and the Fair Work Ombudsman is going to have nowhere to send them as a result of this decision by Minister Dalla-Riva.

In these lengthy consultations JobWatch canvasses with the caller a range of other workplace issues and their legal options under federal and state legislation. It provides the caller with a comprehensive overview of their options and their rights at work rather than taking a piecemeal approach based on the specific nature of the call. In the many years I worked for the National Union of Workers my experience was that the initial cause of the call was often the tip of the iceberg, and I

am sure that is also the experience of the people who take the calls at JobWatch.

I will say a little more about the types of issues that are raised with JobWatch. The discrimination inquiries that JobWatch deals with go to matters of age, disability, employment activity, lawful sexual activity and orientation, parental and carer status, pregnancy and breastfeeding, race, sex and equal opportunity.

On the issue of bullying, JobWatch plays a particularly important role. It has always been at the forefront of highlighting bullying as a workplace issue and assisting those who have experienced bullying in the workplace. According to the data, since 2000 around 7 per cent of JobWatch callers had experienced bullying. As I said earlier, bullying represents an ever-increasing proportion of the reasons for calls to JobWatch. It now represents around 3000 callers a year — and that is only those who are feeling courageous enough to make that kind of a call in their circumstances, those who feel empowered enough, despite the bullying to which they have been subjected, to try to do something about it. We know that people who are being tormented, young people and people who speak English as a second or third language are less likely to make those kinds of calls.

Mr Lenders — Perhaps Minister Dalla-Riva wants people to join trade unions.

Ms PULFORD — I would certainly recommend to any worker the benefits of joining a trade union, Mr Lenders, and I expect that may be one consequence of Mr Dalla-Riva's decision to defund JobWatch.

Mr Lenders — He wants people to join trade unions?

Ms PULFORD — I expect that's right! No, that does not make sense.

Since 2000 the number of bullying-related calls to JobWatch has doubled. In 1996 JobWatch highlighted the case of David McHugh, an apprentice cabinet-maker who was burnt with an iron, tied up, punched, kicked, shot with a stapling gun and set alight by workmates. This matter was also prosecuted in the Magistrates Court. In addition to those 3000 or so callers a year, JobWatch also provides other information in other ways. Providing the telephone service is the main part of its work, but another important role it plays is in advocacy, raising awareness and promoting good workplace practices.

JobWatch has produced videos and countless publications on bullying, including a 2003 booklet

called *Workplace Violence and Bullying — Your Rights, What to do and Where to go for Help*, in partnership with WorkSafe Victoria. It is a terrible shame that things like this do not seem to be important to the new government.

Mrs Peulich — Sounds like a police matter to me.

Ms PULFORD — Does Mrs Peulich believe Victoria Police has the capacity to help people recover unpaid wages?

Mrs Peulich — When a person has been assaulted in the way that Ms Pulford has outlined it is a police matter; it is absolutely a police matter.

Ms PULFORD — And the matter being debated in the other house is indeed an amendment to the Crimes Act 1958, but I think Mrs Peulich will find that government speakers and non-government speakers seem to be in some agreement about it not being a replacement for workplace laws. Bullying is very much part of it, but Victoria Police, as far as I know, does not really have the capacity to be taking industrial relations matters to the Magistrates Court. For a government that always has a lot to say about the need to have more police resources on the street and a more visible police presence in a whole lot of places — —

Mrs Peulich — If it was my son, I would be calling the police.

Ms PULFORD — But the police are unable to deal with a matter of underpayment or dismissal.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! Ms Pulford has the call.

Ms PULFORD — As I was saying, bullying is a big part of the work that is done. A statewide survey conducted in 2004 by JobWatch of young workers in fast food outlets revealed that over 30 per cent of young people experienced some form of violence or bullying in the workplace. There are a number of ways in which these things need to be responded to, but inappropriate behaviour in the workplace often requires resolution in the context of industrial relations laws. The two are not mutually exclusive.

JobWatch is, however, a one-stop shop where people can seek advice on all their options. They can do so for free. They can do so if they do not have two bob in their pocket. They can have a confidential discussion with people who have significant expertise in these areas.

JobWatch also plays a role in community legal education and provides training on a number of things, including how to recover unpaid wages. The example I gave earlier was about self advocacy. Providing people with the tools to represent themselves is very important in re-empowering someone who has been badly treated in the workplace. In addition to the things I have already mentioned, the community legal education program includes occupational health and safety, unpaid trial work, dealing with misleading employment ads and some of the very special needs of apprentices and trainees — those people who are often the least knowledgeable about their rights in the workplace.

JobWatch creates a number of publications that provide assistance to people, including contractors, to recover outstanding payments. It also publishes a number of information sheets. These are all readily available for people on the JobWatch website or by calling and asking for that information to be provided.

JobWatch provides information about traps to be avoided when job hunting. Those members who have much to do with young people or who have friends and relatives who are 15, 16 or 17 years old will no doubt have encountered the notion of unpaid trial work. It seems to me an outrage that employers would even think to try that on, and yet plenty of people wind up in unpaid trial work in any number of industries.

The decision the government is making is a terrible one. The work JobWatch does continues to be important in any industrial relations law context. There have been significant changes to federal industrial relations laws. Victoria's industrial relations laws have also undergone significant changes — for forever really, but particularly over the last 10 years. Internationally it has been noted that Australia has a tendency to change its industrial relations legal framework far more freely and readily than many other places.

The need for people to have a source they can go to for appropriate and correct information about the current state of play in relation to their workplaces is incredibly important — all the more so when we have a government that was elected on a platform of making Victorian teachers the highest paid but then failing to do so. This government has also flagged its desire to rewrite the Accident Compensation Act 1985.

Even the Kennett government funded JobWatch.

Mr Lenders — You're kidding?

Ms PULFORD — Yes. This would make Jeff Kennett blush. Here was a bloke who basically shut

down the Victorian industrial relations system in one of his very first acts, someone who abolished commonwealth law rights for injured workers, someone who was not at all shy about going hard with an agenda in industrial relations.

JobWatch managed to maintain its level of funding throughout that period. For 30 years it had bipartisan support. However, Mr Dalla-Riva and Mr Baillieu do not seem to care at all about Victoria's most vulnerable workers, workers who do not have information about their rights at work, people who are not members of a union, people who have been underpaid or who have experienced bullying at work.

There is a whole lot of hoopla going on about providing good legal protection to people who are victims of bullying, and those legislative changes are ones that Labor supports. They are very important. Brodie Panlock's family are to be commended for their campaign. I hope the passage of that law, when we get to it, will at least bring the family a little bit of comfort. It can never replace the loss they have experienced.

But for the government on the one hand to support measures that tighten up the laws around bullying and then take away funding and shut down one of the key services that provides information about the resolution of bullying issues, particularly bullying in the workplace, is just breathtaking.

I know there are many other speakers who wish to talk about these matters. I certainly look forward to an explanation from the government about where it thinks these people are going to go for this all-important advice. I live in hope of a change of heart. But if the government pushes on and proceeds with its planned shutdown of JobWatch, I place on the record now that the Labor Party is incredibly grateful to the people who have for over 30 years worked tirelessly at JobWatch to create awareness about people's rights at work and provided them with support when they have been in greatest need.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — Thank you, Acting President.

Mr Lenders — I'm to the right of Jeff Kennett.

Mr ONDARCHIE — There is a statement from Mr Lenders.

In a sense I am pleased to stand and speak to this motion this morning, but I have to say, what a waste of the Parliament's time. This motion was put on the paper before the budget was tabled. Is this a good use of the Parliament's time? I am sure those watching over the

internet and those reading *Hansard* will wonder what value the opposition has added to our parliamentary time today. I almost felt like I was at a university tutorial on JobWatch; I was getting everything that JobWatch does. Obviously those opposite spent time looking at the JobWatch website this morning because they verbalised, almost step by step, everything that JobWatch does.

It is very disappointing that this motion is about ceasing funding to JobWatch and that it has become a political issue when the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations has been working through these issues while maintaining direct contact with JobWatch.

Paragraph (4) of this motion is concerning because it indicates that action by Minister Dalla-Riva may cause JobWatch to close on 30 June 2011.

It is important that members of the house understand the full story, and this motion demonstrates the hypocrisy of the Labor Party. The former Labor government and the then Minister for Industrial Relations, Mr Pakula, along with Workforce Victoria, undertook a review of the funding source to JobWatch. This review was commissioned by Professor Susan Campbell. What did the review find? It found that JobWatch would be better served if, like that of other legal aid services, its funding was sourced from the Department of Justice or the commonwealth community legal services program. It is very clear then that this government's position is no different from that of the former minister, Mr Pakula. This is nothing more than outrageous hypocrisy. What good use of the Parliament's time!

While we are setting the record straight I would like to mention that, contrary to reports in the media, the minister had a meeting with the executive director of JobWatch on 16 February 2011. Also contrary to reports in the media, funding for JobWatch is under review; it has not been ceased. The motion is flawed.

Ms Pulford is drawing her research from the *Age*. There is a surprise for all of us! For the Labor Party the source of information on key funding is the *Age*. Let me make it clear that, despite the grandstanding of those opposite, there was not one single cent in the Labor Party's forward estimates for the continuation of JobWatch. This is hypocrisy at its best. I repeat: there was not one single cent in the Labor Party's forward estimates for the continuation of JobWatch. Today members of the Labor Party are taking up the Parliament's time by speaking on a motion about the importance of JobWatch while not having put one single cent in the forward estimates. When you open the *Macquarie Dictionary* and look up 'hypocrisy',

there might as well be a photo of the Labor Party in there. This is hypocrisy. The former minister and those opposite should be embarrassed by this motion, a motion the government does not support. It is a colossal waste of the Parliament's time.

I was interested to hear the sad stories of Ricoh, Maree, Henry and Jason. This Parliament wishes those individuals well. In accordance with our families statement, we care about Victorians; we are interested in their futures. The hypocrisy of this motion leaves me gobsmacked. But, then again, Labor members jumped the gun on the budget. They gave notice of this motion before the budget was tabled. Maybe they had a chance to have a look at the budget, but they did not read it properly. They have demonstrated an inability to read a budget. There is a surprise. This is from members of a government that contracted the desalination plant, the myki ticketing system and the regional fast rail project. And what happened to them? A blow-out of \$80 million to \$839 million, a 1000 per cent blow-out, and only a marginal improvement in travel times. This is an opposition that is again — and the Victorian community must be laughing — demonstrating an inability to read a budget.

There are the smart meters introduced by the not-so-smart government of the time. Originally they were estimated to cost \$800 million but that project has blown out to \$2.2 billion. Members opposite cannot read a budget. The West Gate Bridge strengthening experienced a cost blow-out of \$86.5 million; the total project will cost in excess of \$362 million.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — On a point of order, Acting President, I am aware that speakers are allowed to range a little bit from the motion but this is a motion about funding for JobWatch. Mr Ondarchie is nowhere near the motion, and I ask you to bring him back to it.

Hon. D. M. Davis — On the point of order, Acting President, members are entitled to speak in a relevant way to the motion. In this case Mr Ondarchie is trying to make it clear that this program is being debated but the lapsing or non-continuation of funding and the underfunding of many government programs by the previous government is a close example and very relevant comparison to draw.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! Lead speakers always get a little more latitude, but I ask the member to bring his remarks back to the motion.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Thank you, Acting President. I refer to the motion, which relates directly to the

budget, a budget that members of the opposition seem unable to read. But that is not new. We have seen evidence of that when for 11 years the former government could not read a budget. During that time it entered into the desalination plant contract for a ridiculous amount of money, the effect of which will be felt by Victorians for a long time. This is another example of members of the former government not being able to read a budget.

What is the coalition government going to do? The Baillieu-led government has delivered a budget that is responsible and caring in tough times. There is support for health, the easing of cost of living pressures on Victorians, capital spending on infrastructure and the support of Victoria's finances, law and order, disability and child protection and mental health. It is out everywhere — —

Ms Pulford — On a point of order, Acting President, I appreciate the occasional need for latitude in debate as much as anybody in this place, but notice was given of this motion prior to the budget. The motion does not relate to the budget; it relates to correspondence to the minister. I urge you, Acting President, to ask the member to talk about the motion.

Hon. D. M. Davis — On the point of order, Acting President, clearly the failure of the former government to give it continuity of funding is a key point and does relate to budgets.

Mr Viney — On the point of order, Acting President, I have been sitting quietly because I thought others were handling this well, but Mr Davis's contribution on the point of order was making a political point, and he was not actually on the point of order. The motion before the Chair is very precise and relates clearly to one issue and to one matter. Mr Ondarchie is ranging a long way from that, and I support Ms Pulford in asking that he be brought back to order and respond to the motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! I have already ruled that as lead speaker Mr Ondarchie has some latitude, and I have asked him to come back to the motion.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Thank you, Acting President. I guess the truth of the matter is that this is embarrassing for the opposition. What a waste of the Parliament's time.

Let us look at the motion bit by bit. It states:

- (1) JobWatch is a vital service that provides free and confidential advice;

- (2) JobWatch has provided assistance to over 200 000 Victorian workers and recovered over \$3 million in entitlements in the past 10 years;
- (3) JobWatch has enjoyed the support of state governments of all political persuasions for over 30 years;

Thank you for that. I think former Premier Kennett was mentioned in an opposition member's speech this morning. What is interesting is that opposition members are taking an assumptive view about what was going to happen. They have got ahead of themselves again. The hypocrisy is gobsmacking; it is amazing. Once again, so that the house is clear about this, I highlight the grandstanding and the theatrics of those opposite. They should be reminded that in the forward estimates of the Labor government not one cent was available for JobWatch. However, here they are today, bleating, bemoaning and carping about an assumption.

I remind opposition members about the review they commissioned from Professor Susan Campbell. It found that JobWatch would be better served in other legal aid services such as the Department of Justice or by the community legal service program. Today opposition members are going on and on —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! There is too much yelling across the chamber. Mr Ondarchie has the call.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I understand it is embarrassing for those opposite, hence the amount of noise coming from opposition members who clearly do not understand budgets. They have not read the budget well. They have made an assumption about what was going to happen in the budget. They have not been clear — nothing surprises Victorians!

Yesterday we saw that the coalition government's first budget is about delivering on its election commitments and about fixing the problems in health and transport. These are problems the Labor Party left behind. There is a long list of the problems the Labor government left behind. This budget delivers responsible and caring government in challenging times. Unlike those opposite, the coalition government will be responsible with taxpayers dollars.

Here we are today with a motion that is flawed in its content and flawed in its importance. When in government the opposition undertook a review, but it did not leave one cent in the forward estimates for JobWatch. Opposition members should be embarrassed. I suspect they are not talking to each

other. Maybe they should sit out in the chookhouse and have a chat about it, because they are contradicting one another. As the former minister, Mr Pakula did not put any money in the forward estimates, yet Ms Pulford talks about the importance of JobWatch. Opposition members need to sit down in the chookhouse or in the Victorian Trades Hall, or wherever they meet, to work out exactly what their line for the day is going to be.

This motion is a complete waste of the Parliament's time. It does not carry any value, and I do not think it is worth carrying on any more about it. I condemn the motion, and I encourage all members of the house to vote against it.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I was not intending to speak this early in the debate, but Mr Ondarchie's contribution has driven me to my feet —

Mrs Peulich — Spurred you on.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — Indeed, Mrs Peulich, it has spurred me on. First of all, let me deal with a few of the assertions made by Mr Ondarchie —

Mrs Peulich — Are you going to apologise for not funding it?

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — I advise Mrs Peulich that the fact is that JobWatch was funded for 11 years by our government. In fact, it was funded for 19 years before that. When the Kennett government was elected it reduced the funding for JobWatch down to somewhere between \$300 000 and \$400 000 per annum. However, to give the Kennett government its due, once it had reduced the funding it then maintained it at that level, so it never cut off the funding entirely.

When the Labor Party was elected in 1999 it increased the funding for JobWatch to more than \$500 000, and then it was driven up towards \$900 000 and was maintained at around \$870 000 per annum thereafter right up until the end of the Labor government. But JobWatch —

Hon. D. M. Davis — But there was no forward money.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — If Mr Davis waits, I will take him to that. The only reason there is a need for a particular appropriation for JobWatch is because of the machinery of government changes made by the Premier after the election. JobWatch was always funded out of the general Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (DIIRD) appropriation of some \$10 million.

Hon. D. M. Davis interjected.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — Hang on! Under our government and previous governments there was always an appropriation made to DIIRD, and ongoing funding for JobWatch every year out of that appropriation. Were it not for the decision of the new government to in effect break up DIIRD, create a new Department of Business and Innovation and to then write to JobWatch and excise it from DBI, there would have been no need, because DIIRD would have continued as was, the appropriation to DIIRD would have continued as was and funding to JobWatch would have continued as was.

Despite Mr Ondarchie's claims to the contrary, let me make it perfectly clear. As he said, there was a review. There was a conversation with JobWatch about whether it was best placed with DOJ (Department of Justice) or what was then DIIRD, but there was never any doubt about JobWatch being funded — —

Hon. D. M. Davis — That's not what we heard.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — You are making that up, Mr Davis, and you know it. JobWatch's funding was secured through successive Labor governments even after the Howard federal government cut the commonwealth element of the organisation's funding. Mr Baillieu and the Liberal government are doing exactly what the Howard government did when it cut off the commonwealth's share of JobWatch's funding. JobWatch was once funded partly by the state government and partly by the commonwealth government. When the commonwealth contribution was removed it fell entirely to the state Labor government to fund JobWatch, and we continued and always would have continued to fund it. That is the first point. Whether JobWatch was to be funded by DIIRD or DOJ, it always had a commitment that funding would be secured.

We have therefore dealt with the nonsense about the special appropriation. There never was a special appropriation. There was a departmental appropriation from which JobWatch was funded. As Mr David Davis knows, in relation to every government department, whether it is the Department of Health, the Department of Transport or the Department of Human Services, there are always agencies that have specific allocations and agencies funded out of the general departmental appropriation, and JobWatch was one of the latter. The only reason any specific funding appropriation would be necessary would be as a result of the decision by Mr Dalla-Riva to hive off

JobWatch shunt it out of DBI and into the Department of Justice. The second — —

Hon. D. M. Davis — That is what you were talking about doing.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — Mr Davis, I have just made it clear that regardless of what conversations might have occurred between the government and JobWatch about where JobWatch might be best placed, the one thing that was never in question was the funding.

Hon. D. M. Davis — You say.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — Judge us on our record, Mr Davis. Despite conversations that occurred between the former government and JobWatch about whether it was best placed with the CLCs (community legal centres) or DIIRD, no attempt was ever made by the previous government to force JobWatch out of DIIRD in the way that Mr Dalla-Riva has forced the organisation out of DBI.

The second point to address is Mr Ondarchie having said we are being 'assumptive'. I am not sure that is a word, but let us assume it is. I do not see how he can say that, given that the budget was handed down yesterday. If there was going to be funding for JobWatch, whether from DBI or DOJ, one would have thought that funding might have been found in the budget papers released yesterday. You would have thought that you might have found — —

Hon. D. M. Davis — You're sounding more and more like Mr Viney.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — You might consider that an insult, Mr Davis; I do not. One might have thought that the funding would be found in the budget announced yesterday. Mr Dalla-Riva has written to JobWatch not once but twice. The first letter said the funding was under review and the second said it was gone as far as DBI was concerned. That means the only other possible avenue of funding for JobWatch is through the Department of Justice's appropriation, and it is very clear there is no extra money in the budget for legal aid, which is where you would expect to find the funding given that Mr Dalla-Riva has basically shunted JobWatch over to DOJ. There is no extra money for legal aid, as I said, and the only extra money in the budget for community legal centres is money to continue programs that would otherwise have lapsed, programs I referred to in this place last sitting week.

Let us therefore get the facts straight. I would say that directly to Mr Ondarchie if he had not done a runner. In

the past JobWatch was always funded from the DIIRD appropriation, and it would have continued to be so. As for Mr Ondarchie's claim that a decision has not been made, I would have thought if there were going to be a decision to fund JobWatch, we would have found that decision reflected in the budget yesterday. The only place that funding might be found in the budget, given that JobWatch has now been shunted over to DOJ, would be in the legal aid budget, but there is no more money in the legal aid budget or in the community legal centres budget. The only extra money in the CLC budget is to continue lapsing programs. JobWatch has therefore not been funded in this budget.

Let me make the following comment to the government: JobWatch funding requires less than \$900 000 a year. I am sure the organisation would like more, but we are talking about \$871 000, to be exact, if we want to go on last year's figures. I note in the budget there is something like \$700 000 for shotgun training for young people. Whatever you might see as the benefit of that, I would say more Victorians would benefit from having JobWatch funded. They would include the 20 000 Victorians a year who have been calling the organisation over a period of 30 years with issues such as their wages and bullying in the workplace — and we will no doubt have more to say on that when Brodie's bill is debated.

This is a very important institution whose value has been recognised by governments from the Cain government on. In fact I might be doing former Premier Thompson a disservice there; JobWatch may originally have been commenced and funded under Premier Thompson. It was certainly funded through the periods of the Cain government, the Kirner government, the Kennett government, the Bracks government and the Brumby government. It has survived all of those governments. It has survived a global financial crisis. It survived the ending of the state industrial relations system at the end of 1992. It has survived all of that, and it has been an enduring institution which has provided support to low-income workers.

Now more than ever, at a time when family budgets are under threat, when there is great uncertainty in the workforce, when we have issues such as bullying, when people's wages and conditions are more prominently in the minds of working Victorians than ever before and after JobWatch has been able to survive all governments over 30 years as a cornerstone institution of fairness, democracy and justice in this state, for it not to be able to survive the Baillieu government's very first budget for the sake of less than \$1 million a year — and given the budget's \$45 billion in spending — is more than regrettable; it is a disgrace. I

call on the government, even at this late date, to rethink its decision and fund JobWatch so it can continue to do the important work it has done for 30 years for working Victorians, particularly those who are disadvantaged or on low incomes.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I rise here today to fully support the motion moved by Ms Pulford. I do that because JobWatch, in my view and the view of many other people in the state of Victoria, is a Victorian treasure. As has been outlined by Ms Pulford and Mr Pakula, it has enjoyed bipartisan support for more than 30 years and is now in its 31st year. It has served the community of Victoria to make sure that working people's rights in the workplace are upheld and when they are not upheld in the workplace that there is a place for workers to go to obtain free and confidential assistance with the problems they face in the workplace. Over those 31 years JobWatch has built up a mountain of expertise and a good reputation amongst not only working people but also employers who have come into contact with it and had many issues and disputes negotiated through to an outcome which is perhaps not what they wanted but is fair for the workers who have approached JobWatch for help.

Ms Pulford in her contribution outlined many case studies that have come before JobWatch. I know Ms Pulford has extensive experience in the union movement, as I have, having worked at the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) in the area of occupational health and safety. Mr Pulford spoke in particular about bullying issues that occur in the workplace. I have to agree that some of the bullying case studies she mentioned escalated into assaults. If someone is physically punched or hung up on a rafter, as she mentioned, or stapled with a staple gun, we are talking about assault; bullying is more about intimidation in the workplace, often by management and/or an employer.

That is where employees will come into difficulty, because they will not have anywhere to go. If they are being intimidated or bullied by their employer, they need some outside help. Many workers, as Ms Pulford pointed out and as is the case, are not members of trade unions. If you are a member of a trade union, you can go to the trade union for assistance in those areas. But if you are not, you need a mechanism, an organisation you can go to. New workers, workers from non-English-speaking and low socioeconomic backgrounds and workers who are not highly paid need to have somewhere to go that is not going to cost them a lot of money. When they go to JobWatch they are not charged at all. They also need somewhere to go where

their issue is treated with confidentiality, and that is what they get from JobWatch.

I also take the opportunity to thank the current director, Zana Bytheway, the current staff of JobWatch and the staff and volunteers who have worked there over 30 years and provided this service to the people of Victoria.

Besides bullying, workers go to JobWatch because of issues regarding underpayment of wages and also for problems with working conditions. In particular problems with rosters and working hours are issues often raised with JobWatch. When I was working at the ACTU in the area of occupational health and safety we would get many people calling our unit, and we were not set up to provide the type of service that JobWatch provides. The occupational health and safety unit of the ACTU was more a policy and standards setting unit. We had a working relationship with JobWatch and referred people to it. We heard back from many of those people that they had their issues dealt with in a satisfactory way.

I would like to go to the points in Ms Pulford's motion. The first one is that JobWatch is a vital service that provides free and confidential advice. Of course I totally support that. The second point is that JobWatch has provided assistance to more than 200 000 workers and recovered more than \$3 million in entitlements in the past 10 years. That is \$3 million that has gone to 200 000 workers, who without the assistance of JobWatch would not have had those entitlements recovered and in their pockets where they should have been. As we have mentioned, JobWatch has enjoyed the support of state governments of all political persuasions for 30 years. That is the third point of Ms Pulford's motion.

I was concerned to hear Mr Ondarchie dismiss those three points of the motion as if they were somehow unimportant. He started out by saying that to debate this motion was a waste of Parliament's time, then he went on to just dismiss those three parts of the motion. I was concerned to learn of his attitude in that regard. As far as I can see he will be the only speaker from the government side on this motion. I would encourage the minister to come in and explain to the house what is happening with JobWatch. It is concerning that there is only one government speaker on the motion, that there is hardly anyone in the chamber listening to the debate on the motion and that Mr Ondarchie began his contribution by saying this debate is a waste of parliamentary time. JobWatch has provided this service to the community for 30 years. It has enjoyed bipartisan support. There has been no explanation to the people of

Victoria as to why JobWatch is not going to be continued.

The minister in his letter of 17 March to the executive director of JobWatch, as quoted in the *Age* and raised in the fifth point of Ms Pulford's motion, states:

It is my assessment that the activities for which the previous government provided funding are no longer clearly aligned with the objectives of my department.

I would like to hear the minister explain to the Parliament and the people of Victoria how the objectives of JobWatch — to provide a free and confidential service to working people and help them resolve their workplace issues with regard to not being paid what they should be paid by their employer; bullying incidents in the workplace, sometimes at the hands of the employer; unfair rostering, which is a key issue that many workers raise; the inability to combine their parental and family duties with the rosters of employers, which are often unfairly and arbitrarily imposed on workers with no negotiation; and issues of unfair dismissal — are not also objectives of the minister's department.

These are the areas in which JobWatch has a lot of expertise and a really good reputation, and I am at a loss to understand how they do not constitute key objectives of the minister's department. If ensuring that people work in fair and safe workplaces and receive their due entitlements is not a key objective, if the minister says that funding an organisation which provides a mechanism by which working people in this state can have those issues redressed is not a key objective of his department, I would like him to explain how that is the case. Then I would like him to go on to explain where if the funding for JobWatch is removed and JobWatch ceases to operate after 30 June this year, those 20 000 workers per year are going to go.

Twenty-thousand workers per year — 200 000 over the past 10 years — approach JobWatch, and by JobWatch's own estimation there is an unmet demand on its call line of around 25 per cent. I would like the minister to explain to the working people of Victoria who rely on JobWatch as a fallback, as an organisation to assist them when they are in trouble, where they are going to go and what organisation or mechanism the government is going to provide for those workers.

I think perhaps the government may have taken JobWatch for granted. It has been there for 30 years and it provides a service. Twenty-thousand workers a year have their problems solved by JobWatch. That is going to create a huge gap in terms of where people can go for help and assistance. What is the government going

to do? Is it going to just leave those people in the workplace with nowhere to go? Is it going to set up a different organisation in the Department of Justice, where it seems to now think JobWatch should live? I am not entirely convinced of that. I know there was a review which made the recommendation that JobWatch should reside in the Department of Justice and be funded from the legal aid budget, but as Mr Pakula has already pointed out, there is no funding available there. In any case I am not quite sure that is where it belongs. I think it was in the right home before, under what was formerly DIIRD (Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development). There was certainly discussion about the right place for JobWatch in my conversations with its executive director, Zana Bytheway, last year when funding issues were raised.

Mr Ondarchie went on to talk about the funding under the previous Labor government. I was going to raise that issue and I still will, although not in the same vein as Mr Ondarchie did. On 5 October last year I asked the then Minister for Industrial Relations, Mr Pakula, what the government's intentions were with regard to the funding of JobWatch. That was following the termination of the Office of the Employment Advocate, which occurred under the previous government, and members might remember that I suggested at the time that that was probably a bit premature.

Mr Pakula was talking earlier about funding of \$871 000, which was the funding for JobWatch in the last year. The funding had been reduced by \$34 000 by the previous government, but JobWatch was funded to \$871 000 per year. At that time JobWatch was requesting that its funding go up to deal with the unmet demand, the close of the Office of the Employment Advocate and the increased referrals it was getting from Fair Work Australia. It had calculated it needed about \$1.3 million to serve the increasing demand it was experiencing. I would have to say the commitment to increasing funding for JobWatch was not that strong in October last year, and that concerned me.

I put a question on notice to the minister and I received an answer on 7 October 2010. The minister's response to that question was that through DIIRD there was a grant agreement for the period from 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010 to provide JobWatch with quarterly payments of \$217 750, and then from the period 1 July 2010 to 31 March this year for quarterly payments again of \$217 750.

At the time JobWatch was also asking for more certainty in funding and to move from yearly funding, or quarterly instalments, to a three-year contract. That would have provided more certainty for its workforce

and for its ongoing programs, particularly in terms of information and advocacy. Like a lot of agencies that are partly or fully funded by the government to provide services to the community, JobWatch wanted some continuity. Unfortunately that was not forthcoming. Perhaps if it had been, we would not be in this position. We may or may not have been in this position, but it is a shame that that did not happen at the time.

I also mentioned at the time, and Mr Pakula went to this in his contribution, that there was an aspect of federal funding to JobWatch. That was removed by the Howard federal government. As far as I know that funding has not been reinstated by the Gillard federal government. It certainly was not reinstated by the Rudd federal government. I raised this issue in October last year when I was talking about state funding for JobWatch, and as far as I know that federal funding has not been reinstated. That is an area that members of the Labor Party could be advocating for at the federal level, but that does not take away from the need for the state government to continue to fund JobWatch.

As I have said, there would be a huge gap for workers who are having difficulties in the workplace with regard to underpayment of wages, working conditions, rosters, bullying and any other types of work-related issues that come up from time to time in workplaces where employers are not doing the right thing. There will be a gap there; workers who encounter these problems will not have anywhere to go to have them resolved.

The answers that the government needs to provide are: one, why does it feel that JobWatch does not fit within — what did the minister say? — the 'objectives of the department', when I think they clearly do; and two, what mechanism is it going to provide to assist workers? Mr Ondarchie can get up and say he cares for the Victorian people, but in regard to caring for Victorian people in their daily working lives and making sure that they have their full entitlements, are not bullied or harassed in the workplace, particularly by employers, and that they have their rights upheld, I will be asking the government to explain how that is going to be done in the absence of funding JobWatch.

I am very happy to support Ms Pulford's motion, and I call on the government to explain its intentions. If its intention is that it will not fund JobWatch — and it is not clear to anybody who has had a look at the budget papers whether there is any funding for it — I will ask the government to explain its rationale for doing that, because the only people it is hurting by removing funding for JobWatch are ordinary Victorian working people. Those are the people who are going to be hurt.

Attacking the opposition is all very well and good, but the people who are going to suffer are ordinary Victorian workers. They are the people the government has said it cares about. If it cares about them, it should restore funding to JobWatch so that it can continue for the next 30 or more years to provide the excellent service it has provided for Victorian workers up until now.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to speak on Ms Pulford's motion, and I congratulate her on what is a very important motion. I am a bit surprised that Mr Ondarchie said it is a frivolous motion and a waste of time. The basis on which he tried to defend that argument did not take him anywhere. He spoke about theatrics, but the only theatrics we saw were from him. He failed to address points (4) and (5) of Ms Pulford's motion, which are very important. He tried to say this motion had been drawn up from assumptions. There can be nothing more definite than a letter from the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations to the director of JobWatch. I cannot believe this, but it states:

It is my assessment that the activities for which the previous government provided funding are no longer clearly aligned to the objectives of my department ...

This is the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations talking about the Department of Business and Innovation.

The role of JobWatch is to give advice on awards, pay rates, unfair dismissals and all sorts of things that fall under the umbrella of industrial relations to individuals who can call up for assistance and advice. It amazes me that this minister, who has been tagged the Minister for Nothing and who has, all of a sudden, given more clarity to that title, has said that as the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations he does not see as a clear objective of his department the funding of JobWatch, an organisation that gives advice on industrial relations. It is absolutely amazing. Mr Ondarchie must have been blindsided with respect to both point (5) and the minister's letter to the director of JobWatch to have come out and said that this motion is frivolous and a waste of the Parliament's time.

What are the clear objectives of the new Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations? It is clearly not his objective to advise individuals on industrial relations, as JobWatch does. What then are the clear objectives of the new Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, and what objectives has he provided to his department? This is where Mr Ondarchie says we can surmise all we like, but in

this case I would like to try to surmise the objectives of the minister.

Is this conservative government not funding JobWatch because it sees it as some sort of union-aligned organisation that evilly advises workers on their rights and conditions? If that is what this government is thinking, then it does not understand the actual function of JobWatch, which is to advise people who are not in a union. If someone is in a union, they contact their union for advice on their rights and conditions. They pay their dues and get their money's worth, and so they should. For people who are not in a union and cannot avail themselves of that service, this government is saying it is going to deliver nothing. It is going to deliver nothing along those lines to those people, which is just amazing.

If one of the objectives of the new minister is union bashing, he has missed his mark by a mile. If we do not have this sort of facility, what could happen is that more people could be encouraged to join unions. This union-bashing exercise has failed; it could actually reverse the objectives the government is looking to achieve. The minister has got the right to come in here and tell us about the new objectives of his department, but it is amazing for him to say that matters of industrial relations and advice to workers do not fall inside his portfolio. It is absolutely incredible and hard to believe.

Mr Pakula rightly cleared up the argument about the funding of JobWatch. There is no argument in regard to the ongoing support and commitment that the previous government provided to this organisation. The previous government supported this organisation — that is a fact — but it was also supported by governments for the last 30 years. Whether we are talking about an ALP government, a government formed with Independent members or the Kennett government, for 30 years we have seen Victorian governments supporting JobWatch. I thought about that this morning. I went out to Queen's Hall to look at the portraits of previous premiers. If you walk past a number of those portraits going back 30 years, half a dozen of those premiers supported JobWatch, but here we have a new government led by Mr Right Said Ted 'I'm Too Sexy for My Shirt' Baillieu, and all of a sudden he — —

Hon. G. K. Rich-Phillips — On a point of order, Acting President, the reference the member just made to the Premier is entirely inappropriate. I ask that he withdraw it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! I missed Mr Leane's comment. I will ask him if he believes his comment should be withdrawn.

Mr LEANE — Just for clarification I called the Premier Mr Right Said Ted ‘I’m Too Sexy for My Shirt’ Baillieu.

Mr Koch — That is completely out of order.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! Mr Leane?

Mr LEANE — I withdraw my comment.

I know some members are pretty keen to add to this debate, and I think it is very important they get that chance, but if this is the best members of the new government can do, they are missing the mark. They need to consider that not everyone is driving around in big limos with drivers like they are. Some people have conditions of work that are not as good as theirs, and those people need support. The government should continue to support them.

Mr VINEY (Eastern Victoria) — Mr Davis accused Mr Pakula of sounding like me, so now he can hear from the real thing, or he could if he were in the chamber. I would regard it as a great compliment if a member of the opposition accused me of sounding like Mr Pakula.

When one considers the proposition by the new coalition government to cut funding to JobWatch, one must think, ‘Here we go again. What a bunch of recidivists’. This has a very similar flavour to the WorkChoices debate that raged across Australia just a few years ago. It seems that in the modern age coalition governments find it very difficult to provide support for working people to ensure that they are able to protect, be aware of and maintain their rights in the workplace.

I am with Mr Leane on this. I am somewhat stunned that the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Mr Dalla-Riva, would advise an organisation such as JobWatch that the funding for JobWatch is ‘no longer clearly aligned to the objectives of my department’. We have not heard at all from Mr Dalla-Riva in this debate, which I think is instructive. If he believes that JobWatch’s role is not aligned with the objectives of the Department of Business and Innovation, it would be useful for Mr Dalla-Riva to advise the Victorian community and this Parliament what the objectives of his department are. If they are not aligned with a fundamental program to ensure that people who feel aggrieved by something that has taken place in their workplace can get advice and, where appropriate, representation, if that is not an appropriate alignment of the objectives of his department, I would very much like to hear what the objectives of his department are.

If Mr Dalla-Riva is saying that he sees the objectives of his department as simply to represent employer interests, he should say so. If that is his view, he should have the courage to say exactly what he means by that comment, because one can only surmise what possible motive there might be in removing funding for an organisation such as JobWatch. I might say that it is funding that is hardly a substantial impost on a state budget; it is in the order of, I think, \$800 000 to \$900 000.

We heard some spurious allegations in this debate from Mr Ondarchie about the funding not being noted in the forward estimates, which is simply absolute nonsense that Mr Pakula clearly put to rest in his contribution. The funding of JobWatch was always done as a line item under the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, as it was then called. If Mr Ondarchie is suggesting that there was not going to be future funding for DIIRD, that would be quite an extraordinary suggestion, because that was always a well-funded and well-supported department under Labor governments.

What is surprising is that this decision flies in the face of a 30-year history. If we go back 30 years ago to 1981 — I think it was the Lindsay Thompson government in 1981, but it may have been towards the end of Rupert Hamer’s period as Premier; I am not quite sure of those dates — we see that there is a 30-year history. We have a long history of both Labor and conservative governments funding this program and agreeing that it provides a good service to workers.

I would contest that it is a good service to employers as well. In my experience employers are often not necessarily fulfilling all of their obligations, and I am sure that JobWatch has been able to successfully negotiate with employers to meet their obligations whether it be safety in the workplace, bullying behaviour that might be occurring in a workplace unbeknownst to employers or ensuring that there is appropriate payment of wages and meeting of conditions. There are instances when employers do not do the right thing, and they consciously do not do the right thing. However, there are probably as many, if not more, instances when employers have simply made an error or have not been aware of their obligations. These are often simple matters to clarify.

I call on the government to think about those people JobWatch is looking after. It is looking after the interests of working people, many of whom are vulnerable and not highly skilled. They may be casual employees or in unskilled positions. If employers are sometimes unaware of their obligations, I can assure the

house that in my experience many employees are extremely unaware of their entitlements. It is absolutely appropriate that governments provide funding to community-based organisations that can give people legal and employment advice on their entitlements. It is a good thing in a civil society for that to take place, and it is a good thing for governments to ensure that people have appropriate access to information and advice.

It is extraordinary for the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations to suggest that the role of a community-based organisation that ensures employers and employees are aware of their entitlements and obligations, and that those are met and complied with, is not in accordance with his department's objectives. It is an absolutely extraordinary development. For the minister not to come into this house to clarify that matter by contributing to the debate, or even to give the house the courtesy of listening to the debate, is shameful. Mr Drum might laugh.

Mr Drum — Have you forgotten about the last 11 years?

Mr VINEY — No. When matters such as this were raised in the time of the last government, ministers, particularly when they were facing a motion such as this which condemns a minister, came into the house and contributed to the debate. I can tell Mr Drum that on the several occasions when the then Leader of the Government, Mr Lenders, was appallingly suspended from the house, he always addressed the matter. Not only did the minister always speak, but every member of the government spoke on those motions when they were serious motions. Mr Drum might shake his head, but I will tell him why I know. I know because I was then manager of government business and I organised the program. That is the difference in approach to what is happening here today. The minister has not given the house the courtesy of coming in, listening to the debate or making a contribution to the debate. That is a very disappointing development on a matter which is so serious.

It is extraordinary that a minister would say that the operations of a community-based organisation, in the form of JobWatch and the role it plays, are not in accordance with his objectives and the objectives of his department. If that is the case, then the minister ought to advise the house, JobWatch and the broader community about what his objectives might actually be. I would like to know what his objectives are if they are not to ensure that employees and employers are complying with their obligations and receiving and delivering, respectively, their appropriate entitlements.

I support Ms Pulford's motion, although in doing so I point out that the opposition does not frequently move condemnation motions. Unlike the other side when it was in opposition, we rarely move a motion that condemns a minister. However, in this case such a motion is warranted, because the minister has undertaken a proposed cut to an organisation that provides a vital service to our community and a particularly valuable service to vulnerable people who are often in low-skilled, casual or part-time employment. This is a disappointing development. It is symbolic of the approach that this government is starting to take. It is symbolic, in the same way as was the Kennett government's fund cutting to the Grey Sisters in the 1990s. These are important programs.

Mrs Peulich — Bankrupting Victoria like Cain and Kirner.

Mr VINEY — Mrs Peulich may not be interested — —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr VINEY — The volume from Mrs Peulich does not alter the fact. I make the comment that she may not consider providing support to employees in vulnerable circumstances and often in low-skilled positions as particularly important, but I do. Even Mrs Peulich would have to agree that to stop funding an organisation that provides that level of support and advice to people in the community who are potentially subject to some quite serious issues in the workplace such as bullying and the underpayment of entitlements is a very serious matter. For a Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations to say that the activities of an organisation such as JobWatch do not align with his role as a minister or the objectives of his department is a very serious matter and an insult to all of us in the business of politics, the business of community and the business of governance — it is an insult to all of us. That a minister would make such a statement — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! Mr Viney's time has expired.

Mr VINEY — There are no time limits in general business, Acting President.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! I apologise. I was looking at the clock. Bear with me for a moment while I check with the experts. I stand corrected, Mr Viney. My apologies!

Mr VINEY — You will not have to put up with me for much longer, Acting President, because I am very close to finishing.

Mr Drum interjected.

Mr VINEY — It might be painful for Mr Drum because he might not like the truth. The truth is that for a Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations to say that the activities of an organisation dedicated to supporting employees and assisting employers in meeting their obligations does not align with his objectives is breathtaking. If that is the case, he needs to make clear what his objectives are. If they are not to do those things, he should come into this chamber and clarify what his objectives are. In the absence of his having done so, the house has no choice but to support a motion that condemns him.

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise to speak in support of Ms Pulford's motion to condemn the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations for deciding to cease funding JobWatch. One of the most important aspects of one's life is secure employment; it is very important to a whole range of people over the course of their lifetimes. Unfortunately securing a job is often our first experience of getting to know what terms and conditions are and what it is like to be a member of the workforce. It is essentially trial and error in terms of gaining that information and knowledge unless you are a member of a union; however, many people are not members of a union and therefore require answers and information.

More than 30 years ago a number of people came together with an understanding that there were gaps in the system that needed to be addressed, particularly for those workers who come from non-English-speaking backgrounds, workers who have not necessarily completed any formal education, and for a number of young workers who would not have had any experience of being in the workforce. All of those more vulnerable workers needed quick and easy access to information so they could be guided in their workplaces. We were very fortunate that we had a group of Victorians who understood that need, and they created an organisation called JobWatch. JobWatch's role has been talked about today, but its role is so important that I think it is appropriate to go over the things that it has provided to Victorian workers for more than 30 years.

JobWatch provides a free and confidential telephone information service, which is very important to a whole range of people. JobWatch also conducts community legal education and training sessions and seminars for the general community, and those training sessions and seminars are open to university students, apprentices and people from a whole range of organisations. The training covers topics too numerous to mention, but includes issues of sexual harassment, pregnancy,

superannuation, remedies in terms of warnings and terminations of employment to mention a few.

JobWatch also provides a whole range of publications that can be downloaded from computers for easy access by people who want to secure that information, and they cover such areas as casual employment, independent contracting traps, redundancy and retrenchment, unpaid trial work, unfair dismissal, working overseas, modelling and acting, termination of employment and private training courses. JobWatch also provides representation and assistance through legal casework and campaigns and does a lot of law reform activity with a view to promoting workplace justice and equity.

For all of those reasons JobWatch has enjoyed bipartisan support from governments in this state regardless of whether they have been coalition or Labor. JobWatch has collected very important workplace data that has been used to support a whole variety of initiatives and cases. JobWatch has also drawn our attention to behaviours and practices in the workplace that are not only unlawful but also unacceptable by anyone's standard, and of course bullying is one of those cases in point. I think it was Ms Pulford who highlighted a case from the late 1990s that set the campaign tone in our endeavours to stamp out bullying and intimidation in the workplace.

Having said that, I think it is only proper for us to ask why this government has now determined to cease government support, to cease financial support and to allow such an important organisation to be closed down. We have been advised that the coalition government, through its Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Richard Dalla-Riva, believes that the existence of JobWatch is not 'aligned to the objectives' of his department.

I agree with Mr Leane. One would have thought that one of the key imperatives of Mr Dalla-Riva's portfolio would have been to have workplaces where people are informed about their rights and responsibilities, where individuals have information and assistance readily at their fingertips and that a government would support organisations that foster level playing fields in our workplaces. One would have thought that a government would support organisations that provide access to information, particularly to workers in regional areas, because JobWatch has a toll-free number so that regional workers can have easier access to its service. Often geographic distance and issues surrounding confidentiality in the places in which regional workers live prevent them from or add barriers to their accessing information that they might have been able to access if

they lived in metropolitan Melbourne. From my direct experience as a member for Western Victoria Region I know that regional workers in western Victoria have used and very much support the work of JobWatch.

We have heard from previous speakers that a high proportion of the people who seek assistance from JobWatch are those who are the most vulnerable in our workforce. The reason we have organisations such as JobWatch is they serve a genuine purpose and provide assistance to those who need it most. We all know that money is not made by providing such advice and support, and that is why government needs to step in and support organisations such as JobWatch.

Yesterday I went into the Assembly to hear the Treasurer outline the coalition's first budget. He made much of the word 'care' and was quite repetitious in stating how his government was a caring government. A caring government, however, is one that delivers and does not simply talk the talk. I therefore support the call for the minister to explain in detail to the house the reasoning behind the decision to cut funding to JobWatch. I repeat: I do not want him to hide behind a sentence that is just a bland, bureaucratic statement that gives no information about the basis of the government's decision.

The staff of JobWatch are owed a much more comprehensive explanation of the government's decision, particularly given that the workload of JobWatch has consistently increased, not reduced. Now JobWatch staff will be looking at redundancy and unemployment themselves. Victorian workers generally are owed an explanation as to why they will not be able to access a free, confidential service that provides a critical reference in their working lives. There needs to be a full and proper explanation of why the government is not prepared to fund an organisation that provides information and enables workers to protect themselves — that is, an explanation needs to be given to current and future workers from non-English-speaking backgrounds who have often not been put through the rigours of a formal education in their country of origin, through no choice of their own; to women and young workers in workplaces where sexual harassment and bullying occur; to those who are underpaid; and to those working in unsafe environments.

I continue to be surprised by the sheer vitriol of those opposite when workers, employees, unions, union members and industrial relations advocacy are mentioned. It is as if there is something innately wrong with being a worker, particularly one who dares to ask questions about their employment conditions. I now

understand the depth of their hostility towards workers and their families, as they have deliberately chosen to pull the rug from under the feet of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable workers in the state by discontinuing the funding of JobWatch.

All by itself and so early in its term of office, the government is creating a narrative that says it does not care about workers and their families. It refuses to understand the need for this very important organisation. It has broken its promises to teachers, police and other public sector workers regarding their wage rates. It has legislated for employees to work on Easter Sunday without penalty rates. Now we have this situation where the government wants to completely smash the good work of JobWatch.

On top of that we have had only one speaker from the government so far in this debate; I think there have been six or seven on the Labor side. The minister has not even bothered to turn up in the chamber. The one government speaker we heard from is a newly elected member of Parliament who had clearly not done his homework and did not even want to talk about the issues before us today. Mr Pakula had to come in and give him a budget 101 lecture, which he still does not want to listen to. He walked out of the chamber as soon as he had finished his feeble attempt to make a contribution to the debate on this important issue.

I ask this house to strongly support the motion before us. It is a proper and serious motion. Victorian workers deserve better than what the government has done to them today.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Assistant Treasurer: access

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. I refer to this morning's 500 Club budget briefing at Crown Palladium, and I ask: did ministers attend, including the Assistant Treasurer?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Assistant Treasurer) — I thank Mr Pakula for his question. Yes, some ministers were present.

Supplementary question

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — Did stakeholders in the minister's portfolio have access to him as a consequence of paying the 500 Club

membership fee or paying to attend the event and, if so, who were they?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Assistant Treasurer) — In answer to Mr Pakula's question, stakeholders in my portfolio always have access to me, as they do to other ministers. Unlike those opposite, we have been willing to hear from stakeholders across portfolio areas, and we will continue to do so.

Monash Medical Centre: children's centre

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Health, and I ask: can the minister inform the house of major initiatives the Baillieu government is taking to improve the health system and any projects where the government is delivering ahead of schedule?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I thank the member for her question and note her strong advocacy for health services in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne — —

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — Indeed, like the Monash Medical Centre and the Monash children's project. She has been a strong advocate for Monash children's and has visited Southern Health with me and other Liberal members of Parliament in a strong show of support for Monash children's and Southern Health generally. We visited the emergency department, the neonatal intensive care unit and other areas. The member is a strong supporter of Monash Medical Centre and of the Monash children's project.

She is quite right that there are some projects that have been brought forward, and Monash children's centre is one of them. We have allocated \$8.5 million in the budget this year for acquisition of land and design development. Those who know Monash Medical Centre will know there is a series of private medical clinics on Dixon Street. We are intending to purchase those three pieces of land to enable the very best construction that can possibly be achieved for that \$250 million hospital. We will move as quickly as we can on that — —

Mr Jennings — That is what the forward estimates say — \$8.5 million out of \$250 million. You've committed \$8.5 million out of \$250 million.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — Indeed, I have to say we are very committed to spending money in this term of government to see the Monash children's centre process started and to see the quickest possible

outcome. I have to say the previous government did not buy this land. It failed to buy the land that will lead to the best \$250 million outcome.

Mr Jennings interjected.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — The previous government had 11 years. It did nothing. There were 11 years of talk, 11 years of chatter, 11 years of failure to act.

Mr Jennings interjected.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — We will act. We have taken the steps, we have committed the money — —

Mr Jennings interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! There is a difference between an interjection and a barrage. Can I suggest that Mr Jennings is well past interjection.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — I make the point by way of general clarification that the report in today's *Herald Sun* claiming funding has been delayed is incorrect. In fact funding has been brought forward for the purchase of the land. This will be a much better project than Labor's project, which would have bent in a twisted shape around the edge of the private properties and would not have got the outcome that was desired. We see this as quite important, and our budget outcomes have made it very clear. The Australian Medical Association in its response to the budget made the following points, and I quote:

This is a good budget that has honoured many of the government's election commitments ...

It made the point that the government has listened to doctors. Dr Hemley warmly welcomed the funding for hospital beds and said it was pleasing to see that funding has been made available for the promised beds. He went on to make the point that this is a good budget.

I note that groups like Palliative Care Victoria have strongly welcomed and endorsed the budget, and I am very pleased to see broad endorsement across the sector. I look forward to delivering on the government's election commitments in health. I look forward in particular to moving as fast as we can on the Monash children's centre.

A sign of the government's good intent is that we are going to build a better project than Labor's half-baked project which was never delivered over 11 years. We will do it with a better hospital. We will purchase the land to build the best possible hospital, and we will deliver for children in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

Ministers: code of conduct

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government in his capacity representing the Premier. I refer to the commitment given by the Premier on numerous occasions that ministers would not attend fundraisers until the ministerial code of conduct has been released, and I ask: why has the code of conduct not been released, and when can we expect it?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I thank the member for his question. The code will be released shortly. I am happy to find out the exact date from the Premier and get some information on the precise timing of the code's release.

Supplementary question

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the Minister for Health for his answer and for his undertaking. But is it not a fact that the attendees at today's breakfast either paid a membership fee of over \$1000 per annum or paid to attend the breakfast, and as a consequence the Treasurer and other ministers attended in contravention of the Premier's commitment?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I am not sure that that is true at all.

Aviation industry: regional initiatives

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — My question without notice is for the Minister responsible for the Aviation Industry, the Honourable Gordon Rich-Phillips, and I ask: can the minister inform the house of any Baillieu government initiatives to support regional aviation in Victoria?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Minister responsible for the Aviation Industry) — I thank Mr Koch for his question and for his interest in regional aviation in Victoria, particularly in the Geelong region. This government is committed to the development of the aviation and aerospace sectors in Victoria. As I have outlined to the house previously, Victoria has performed very well over a number of years. There are many opportunities for Victoria in the aviation and aerospace sectors.

Two of the key objectives this government has around aviation and aerospace relate to skills development and infrastructure development. These two matters are very closely interrelated. In the skills area we have a very strong export sector in pilot training. This is an area where Victoria has enjoyed substantial competitive

advantages compared to competitors in the United States and Europe, and it continues to enjoy those competitive advantages notwithstanding the challenges of a very strong Australian dollar. One of the key areas where Victoria needs assistance in order to underpin the pilot training sector is in the development of regional aviation infrastructure, and this government is committed to undertaking that support.

One of the challenges we have with regional aviation infrastructure is that a lot of it has been transferred from the commonwealth to local government over the last 20 or 30 years, and a lot of it dates from the Second World War period. That infrastructure has seen minimal investment since the Second World War in the case of some facilities throughout Victoria. This government sees an opportunity to assist with the development of that infrastructure to underpin our objectives around the pilot training sector, improve access to regional Victoria and underpin our objectives around regional tourism.

I am therefore pleased to confirm to the house today that the first budget from the Baillieu government commits \$20 million over four years for a Regional Aviation Fund. This fund will be available to assist the operators of public-use airport facilities throughout Victoria with upgrades to those facilities. This is an important initiative to assist those regional centres with the development of their regional aviation facilities, and I look forward to working with local communities to ensure that that infrastructure is developed over the course of the next four years.

Ministers: code of conduct

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government in his capacity of representing the Premier. Can the minister tell the house whether it will be a feature of the ministerial code of conduct that no minister should obtain personal financial benefit from any funds raised at events that are attended by ministers?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I thank the member for his question. The code will be released in due course, and we will see its contents at that time.

Supplementary question

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer. Following on from my initial question, I ask him in his capacity of representing the Premier whether to the best of his knowledge any minister has obtained personal financial benefit from moneys raised by the 500 Club?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will allow the minister to answer because in itself it is a valid question of public interest. I am concerned about the use of the word ‘personal’, which to me suggests a benefit and personal gain to a particular individual, which is quite separate to what I think the definition of the question might well have been had it been in respect of support for the individual’s re-election campaign if they were campaign funds. I am a little uneasy about the word ‘personal’ because of the suggestion it might imply in the context of this line of questioning, notwithstanding that I think there is a public interest in the matter the member is pursuing and that the government has issued a position that Mr Davis has been commenting on further today.

I do not know whether the member wishes to make any further comment on that question in regard to my unease. If not, I will let it go through to the minister, and he can be mindful of both what I have said and the question. I will be guided by Mr Pakula.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — I thank the President for his guidance. I used the word ‘personal’ in the question deliberately. I am asking the question that the President has suggested I am asking.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I do not administer the 500 Club, and in that sense I cannot really answer the member’s question.

Exports: government initiatives

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade. Can the minister inform the house what the Baillieu government is doing to support local exporters?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade) — I thank the member for his ongoing interest in this issue and certainly the export market that is generated from his region of Victoria is important in regional Victoria.

This government is committed to supporting the efforts of Victorian exporters and ensuring that Victorian business continues to build on its successes in the global economy. We know that our exports make a vital contribution of over \$30 billion a year to the state’s economic prosperity, with dairy products in Mr Ramsay’s region, cereals and the automotive industry being among the key export sectors. However, it is also true to say that our share of national exports has been in decline over the past decade, and the currently high Australian dollar and tough overseas

competition are making life hard for our businesses to operate in global markets.

We in the Baillieu government recognise the importance of Victorian exporters’ need for support, and they will be getting more support to develop new markets through a \$3 million boost in the 2011–12 Victorian state budget. This funding has been provided as part of the Baillieu government delivering on its election commitments to revitalise Victoria’s export performance. Furthermore, an additional \$2 million will be provided over four years for a more focused trade mission program, which will initially target high-growth export markets like India.

Earlier this year the government supported Victoria’s biggest ever trade mission to India, led by my colleague Louise Asher, the Minister for Innovation, Services and Small Business. Representatives from 60 Victorian companies participated in this delegation, which was the largest Australian trade delegation ever to visit India. The delegation showcased Victorian business capability across a variety of sectors including clean technology, food and beverage, information and communications technology and sustainable urban design. The visit reinforced the Victorian government’s commitment to its important bilateral relationship with India, which will continue to contribute to the government’s goal of an export-focused economy.

The government has also committed an additional \$1 million over two years to support a strong Victorian presence at Expo 2012 in South Korea, which is expected to attract 100 participating countries. This support includes a program of industry-focused activities to generate new market opportunities in South Korea arising from that bilateral trade agreement. This new funding will be complemented by other initiatives now being put in place, including a new export strategy, trade engagement programs and other branding programs.

I am also about to launch a series of export round tables from next week, speaking face to face in an ongoing dialogue with leaders of companies seeking to strengthen and expand businesses in global markets and hearing of their concerns and the lack of support they have had over the last 10 years. The Baillieu government recognises that we need a competitive, growing economy. We need a strong — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! It could be an early lunch, Mr Leane; I am on my feet! There is too much babble. I am sure Hansard is having some difficulty

hearing the minister respond to this question. Some of the interjection or commentary has absolutely nothing to do with the answer. Some of it is really beneath the dignity of the house as well in terms of remarks that were made — in Mr Leane's case referring to a minister in another place and suggesting how the minister might adopt a particular demeanour in his answer to this question. It is not for Mr Leane to comment, and I ask him to desist. The minister, to continue.

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — We recognise the importance of the export market. Maybe those opposite do not want to hear it, but I will highlight the support of Mr Tim Piper, who is a Victorian director of the Australian Industry Group, for this budget's pro-business focus. He says:

AI Group also welcomes the commitment to invest in school and TAFE-level education and training; the additional funding to encourage exporting; the boost to programs supporting skilled migration; the new innovation measures and the commitment to reduce the red tape afflicting Victorian businesses.

This is the reality. We have delivered a good budget that is responsible in difficult times.

Minister for Health: code of conduct

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government. I thank the minister for his previous answer, and I accept that he may not be able to speak for the 500 Club or indeed for other ministers. Let me ask whether he has ever obtained personal financial benefit from any moneys raised by 500 Club fundraising?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I do not believe I have obtained personal financial benefit.

Supplementary question

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer. I will ask now whether it is a fact that the minister's legal bills in the defamation matter brought against him by former Australian Labor Party secretary Stephen Newnham are being paid in full or in part by the 500 Club?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am uncomfortable with the question. I am uncomfortable with the line of questioning in some respects, because from my point of view the minister has been asked — and I take this one as being a bit more specific — to comment on matters that I believe are outside government administration, and that is the first and foremost aspect in terms of his capacity to answer two questions.

It is my view that the 500 Club is a fundraising organisation, which is not part of the government and which does not to my knowledge, as with other fundraising organisations, in any way contribute to individuals. Therefore, I have some difficulty in terms of some parts of this line of questioning, notwithstanding that as a matter perhaps of public interest I have allowed those questions to go through. My concern comes down more to the fact of whether or not this line of questioning has anything to do with government administration.

Mr Leane — What about the code of conduct?

The PRESIDENT — Order! The code of conduct has not yet been promulgated. Certainly it was the subject of earlier questioning, and I accept that that was a legitimate — —

Mr Leane interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Leane should not make comments to me. We are not having a conversation here.

In terms of the earlier questioning about the code of conduct, as I said I think it is a matter of legitimate public interest and the questioning was fine and the minister has provided an answer. His answer was to the effect that it is yet to be promulgated. In that sense I do not see there is a further point in that regard with this particular question. I understand the minister is happy to answer, but I am not sure I am happy to entertain an answer. It is not just a matter of how we dispatch this matter today; this is a matter of precedent, and it is a matter of how I handle these matters in the future. It is not just a matter of whether or not a minister is prepared on a day to answer a question. I have other matters to consider.

I will hear what Mr Pakula has to say.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — Thank you, President. Let me make a couple of points before you rule. Firstly, the minister has answered a number of questions on this matter, and certainly in the last Parliament, the precedent was that once a minister had commenced to answer a question on a matter, then the matter of whether or not it was strictly a matter of government administration was effectively overcome by the fact that the minister had agreed to answer the question. Secondly, I asked the minister a substantive question, which he answered along the lines of, 'I do not believe I have', so I think a supplementary question is absolutely in order given the answer to the substantive question. Thirdly, there have been a series of questions about the code of conduct, what would be contained within it and

whether matters of this very nature would be contained within it. Given all of those elements, I think it would be appropriate for the minister to answer.

Mrs Peulich — Notwithstanding the fact the minister is happy to answer the question, I am with you on this one, President. It does set a precedent for absolutely everyone.

Ms Mikakos interjected.

Mrs Peulich — Just hear my point, Ms Mikakos. I understand the question was in relation to ministers. Quite simply the action that Mr Pakula referred to was an action that took place before Mr Davis was a minister. I just ask, President, that you take that into account.

Mr Jennings — Before the President makes a determination that may create a precedent in this place, in his initial comments about being perplexed about whether he should rule the question in or out, he made comment that he is not of the view that the line of questioning relates to government administration. I would like the Chair to reflect on that assumption, because it would be the contention of the opposition that the very nature of the way in which ministers acquit their responsibility to the Parliament and to the people, and the quality of that interaction — and in fact it may be subsequently codified by the ministerial code of conduct, which is a commitment that has been made by the Premier — will relate to the standards of public administration.

It is the view of the opposition that this relates very much to the heart of the quality of government administration, the way in which ministers acquit their responsibilities to the Parliament and to the people and in fact act in accordance with what will be subsequently codified by the Premier. It would be dangerous to prematurely rule out the nature of this line of inquiry from what might be within the scope of the ministerial code of conduct and what may be matters this Parliament and the people come back to time and again.

Mr Viney — Very quickly, I draw the President's attention to the first obligation under 'Questions to ministers or other members' in the standing orders, which states that:

Questions may be put to —

- (a) ministers of the Crown relating to public affairs for which the minister is directly connected ...

I would contend that matters relating to the way Mr Pakula has asked this question, and in particular the supplementary matters relating to an organisation such

as the 500 Club, are matters of public affairs. Mr Pakula then directly asked the minister a question that would clarify whether the minister is connected to those matters of public affairs, which I would suggest is precisely in order.

Mr Lenders — Further for your consideration, President, I think the nub of the issue here in terms of whether this is a relevant question in question time is that government administration is an issue where the entire probity and appropriateness of ministers exercising authority can be compromised if a minister is receiving payments from outside government that are not disclosed. With respect to government administration and the issue of the Minister for Health, who deals with a multibillion-dollar portfolio, the question of whether somebody has paid his legal bills is a pertinent one and one he should answer.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Members will be aware that when I am in the chair I tend not to jump to conclusions. I try to consider things very carefully, because I am very mindful of precedent and of the need to go through the process properly and ensure the entitlements of all members in respect of matters that come before the Chair. Members would be aware that I raised a concern about these questions; the matter did not arise by way of a point of order. Indeed, I hasten to add that the minister is keen to answer the question. I understand that, because clearly he would want to dispatch the matter.

I suggest several things. I believe this question is quite different to the previous questions asked by Mr Pakula, notwithstanding that I also felt some unease with those questions in terms of their framing. There was in my mind a question as to whether they went to the issue of government administration, which is essentially the test in question time. Members are entitled to ask questions about government administration, and that is where the ministers are perceived to be competent in terms of an answer. Going outside government administration causes me concern.

I am mindful of what Mr Jennings said. His contribution, supported by Mr Viney, was a reasoned one. However, as the President in this place at this time, I must say I am rather bemused by that line of argument given the quick dismissal of any questions in the past about Progressive Business and associations with the Labor Party side of politics and the suggestion on every one of those occasions, whenever that nexus was raised, that that issue was not a matter of government administration. That goes exactly to where I am in my thinking at the moment.

I am mindful also of Mr Pakula's point that once a minister answers a question, that area is opened up. I think there is some validity in that but only to the extent that I am prepared to allow that line of questioning. I am quite adamant that, irrespective of whether a minister is prepared to answer a question or not, I have a broader remit with respect to these issues and I need to think them through in the context of the longer term and precedent factors.

On this occasion I will allow Mr Davis to answer this question. However, I will give this issue some further consideration, and it is likely I will make some further comment to the Parliament in terms of making sure that going forward there is absolute clarity on these matters in regard to the sorts of questions that are asked.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, President, I rise only because of the importance of precedent. My point does not go to your major point of adjudication. My point relates to the issue of when a minister begins to answer a question and whether a matter is ruled in or out of order. It is my understanding — and I raise this for you because you will take this issue away and consider it — that those matters related to matters of policy and administration for ministers who represented ministers in the other chamber rather than providing a broad canvas pertaining to any issue. I therefore ask that you consider that, because I believe those precedents are very important for the effective functioning of this chamber.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I call Mr Davis.

Mr Leane interjected.

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Mr Leane

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Leane is the first; he will leave the chamber for half an hour.

Mr Leane withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Minister for Health: code of conduct

Questions resumed.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I am confident that nothing that has been donated to me by the 500 Club would compromise my role as a minister.

Budget: heritage funding

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is directed to the Minister for Planning, Mr Guy, and I ask: can the minister inform the house what action the Baillieu government has taken in the 2011–12 budget to strengthen Victoria's heritage and provide certainty in heritage funding?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I thank Mrs Kronberg for her question. I can confidently inform the house this afternoon that, thanks to the Baillieu government's first budget, the era of the Whelan the Wrecker-style approach to heritage taken by Justin Madden, the former Minister for Planning, and John Brumby, the former Premier, is over. In this budget we have provided — —

Mrs Peulich — There's a few relics over there!

Hon. M. J. GUY — Mrs Peulich, they are the same clapped-out old faces on the Labor Party front bench. They are there today, they would be there if there were a change of government, and they would provide the same attitude to heritage if they were re-elected.

Mr Jennings — This will get you on the telly!

Hon. M. J. GUY — What will get on the television, Mr Jennings, is the fact that the coalition government has provided in its first budget \$10.5 million of ongoing funding to Heritage Victoria. This is in contrast to the lapse of funding from the Labor Party — a smaller amount — which would have resulted in Heritage Victoria cutting jobs and some of our great buildings in regional cities like Ballarat and Bendigo and in the Melbourne CBD, such as the Windsor Hotel, being threatened by the lack of heritage funding. But here is \$10.4 million over four years guaranteed in the forward estimates of the Baillieu government's first budget. It took a change of government to guarantee Heritage Victoria and to guarantee that our built form will no longer be under attack from Justin Madden and John Brumby.

I can confidently inform the house that the Baillieu government in its first budget will ensure that this funding provided directly to Heritage Victoria will result in no job losses but in fact an increase of resources to Heritage Victoria and heritage funding in this state. There are over 2200 places and objects that are on the Victorian Heritage Register. There are over 130 places around this state that are on local heritage registers and included in local heritage overlays. That is because Victorians value their heritage. We want this state to grow, we want this state to develop, but we

want it done in a manner that respects and complements the heritage that exists in this state today.

It has taken a change of government to ensure that Heritage Victoria obtains that ongoing, secure funding so Victorians can be confident that the government they have in place is one that not only looks to their future but respects their past. It is in marked contrast to the Whelan the Wrecker approach that thankfully Victorians threw out in November last year.

Planning: coastal developments

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is for the Minister for Planning, Mr Guy, if he has any voice left! I noticed his press release of yesterday in relation to coastal planning in which he said that funding had also being committed to support detailed coastal mapping of Victoria's coastline in preparation for storm surges and a probable sea level rise. My understanding is that this is a piece of work that was done thoroughly. I am looking at his government's www.climatechange.vic.gov.au website, which describes digital elevation models and says that the topographic and bathymetric digital elevation models are being captured in separate projects along the entire Victorian coast. Can the minister tell me whether this is a new project and how the data will be released and made available to the general public?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I thank Mr Barber for his question. I do have some voice left — always for Mr Barber!

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. M. J. GUY — For the member's coalition buddies over there, I do not have much at the moment. I can inform Mr Barber that we do not believe it has been done thoroughly enough, and that is why we are putting our money where our mouth is with our first budget to ensure that it is done thoroughly. This material will be released once it is produced, either through electronic means or in print form. It will be available to all councils and Victorians who need to know about this material, as it relates to a critical aspect of planning for our future.

Supplementary question

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I am sure the minister is not doing that just for the fun of it; he must anticipate that there will be some sort of planning instrument coming out the other end. In relation to flood models, for example, there are quite stringent planning controls around building on floodplains based on a 1-in-100 year event, an event that is likely to

happen once per century. Will the minister tell me how, once he has obtained this information about the vulnerability of certain areas to sea level rise and storm surges, he will convert it into some sort of planning instrument that would have an influence on the pattern of development along the coast?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I thank Mr Barber for his supplementary question. Once material is produced we will ascertain how that will be mapped in relation to the existing planning schemes or flood overlays. We need to do the work first, which is why we have committed the money. Once we get those results we will manage the rollout from there.

Teachers: specialist scholarships

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Higher Education and Skills, who is also the Minister responsible for the Teaching Profession, Mr Hall. I ask the minister to inform the house how the coalition government is supporting teachers to help them improve maths and science outcomes in Victorian schools.

Hon. P. R. HALL (Minister for Higher Education and Skills) — I thank Mr Drum for his question. As a person who spent 15 years of his life standing in front of maths classes in Victorian schools throughout the state I was pleased — that is an understatement — and delighted to participate in the announcement of \$29.7 million in yesterday's state budget to enhance maths and science teaching and outcomes. That \$29.7 million is a significant boost, which will in large part enable the employment of 100 maths and 60 science specialist teachers to operate in primary schools throughout the state. Some \$24.3 million of that \$29.7 million will be dedicated towards that purpose. We will see specialist teachers spending half their week working directly in front of classrooms and the other half working with other teachers in their schools and within their local school networks to pass on the important knowledge and expertise they have in maths and science instruction. This will be great for maths and science outcomes generally.

That \$29.7 million includes \$5 million spread over five years for the issuing of 400 science scholarships to those who have formally graduated or are undertaking undergraduate study in science to enable them to become science teachers in our schools. There have been shortages of maths and science teachers throughout the state, and this program, with an additional 400 scholarships, will be much valued.

Finally, \$400 000 of that total amount will be used to establish collaborative networks between teachers, industries, universities and TAFE colleges to build those mentoring networks and help with policy development and career choice. This total package of \$29.7 million has most aspects of maths and science covered.

People might ask why this is seen as a priority by the Baillieu government. It is a priority because there is a shortage of maths and science teachers but also because the number of students who go on to study maths and science at Victorian certificate of education (VCE) level and undertake tertiary studies in those disciplines is decreasing. There is a need to address that decreasing number of students studying maths and science at VCE level. The secret to increasing those numbers at a senior level is to capture the interest of students and engage them in their formative years of schooling. That is why this program is targeted at primary school level, so we can capture that interest and engage young students throughout the state and ensure that they have a sustained interest in maths and science. This is a great initiative and one that as a former maths teacher I wholeheartedly support.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Staffing

The PRESIDENT — Order! I take this opportunity to make a brief comment in respect of the staffing of Legislative Council standing committees. The committees will be meeting this evening, and a number of members have contacted me to discuss matters relating to the resourcing of those committees. I have received letters from both Mr Viney and Ms Pulford, as the chairs of two of the committee, in respect of the staffing of those committees.

I advise the house that the Legislative Council has completed recruitment of staff for the three standing committees on the basis of the maximum number of staff that the department's current budget allows. I thank those people for taking up the appointments and look forward to the work they will undertake in conjunction with our committees.

The staff appointments are Richard Willis, senior secretary of Council committees, assigned as secretary of the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues; Alexandra Douglas, secretary of Council committees, assigned as secretary of the Standing Committee on Economy and Infrastructure; Keir Delaney, secretary of Council committees, assigned as secretary of the

Standing Committee on Environment and Planning — he will be joining the committee on 9 May; Lisa Kazalac, research officer for Council committees, assigned primarily at present to the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues inquiry into organ donation; and Anthony Walsh and Sarah Hyslop, who will both support the committees in research assistant positions, Sarah on a two-day-a-week basis. That is the resourcing that we have been able to make available to those committees given the resources available to the Legislative Council at this stage. We look forward to the work they will undertake.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I have an issue in relation to questions on notice for the Leader of the Government. My question on notice 161 to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and my question on notice 165 to the Minister for Energy and Resources have not been answered. In accordance with custom I have approached those ministers' offices. It is not simply a matter of delay. Staff in both offices expressed some confusion about the process of responding to a question on notice. Staff in one office referred me to the Premier's office, and staff in the other asked me to email them the question. Could the Leader of the Government please take up not only those two questions but also the process for those offices answering questions on notice.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — Through you, President, I am happy to tell Mr Barber that I will follow those up. Certainly the process is that those ministers should provide the answers. I think many of the ministers have been pretty good in providing answers over the recent period, unlike some earlier times, and I will follow those two specific questions up for the member.

JOBWATCH: FUNDING

Debate resumed.

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I welcome the opportunity to speak on the failure of this government to commit to JobWatch or its funding. I think this is about more than just the funding for JobWatch; it really goes to the principles that this government upholds. It very much goes to this government's commitment to the disadvantaged. In not funding JobWatch this

government has sent a very clear signal about its commitment to vulnerable workers.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr TEE — What this government has delivered, Mr Ondarchie, is very much a slap in the face to vulnerable workers and to their families who rely on their incomes to pay the bills. These workers have nowhere else to go — —

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr TEE — They have nowhere else to go, and well may you raise the issue of conscience, Mr Ondarchie, because if there were a conscience, this decision would not have been made.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr TEE — You know that, Mr Ondarchie, because these workers, as you know, have nowhere else to go. They cannot afford lawyers, as some others might. They do not belong to unions. They are often low-paid workers, and they are often migrant workers who do not have English as a first language. They are the most vulnerable in our community, Mr Ondarchie, and they are being left behind by this government's decision. I think this decision is a very telling exposure of the hypocrisy of those opposite. They stand up on every occasion they can and they pretend to care, but when it comes to action, when it comes to walking the walk, they are missing.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr TEE — You are missing, Mr Ondarchie, you are missing in action. This decision has clearly exposed this government's attitude to the most needy in our community. This decision shows how exposed the vulnerable in our community are and how they will be dealt with now that we have had a change in government. To put this in context, not even the Kennett government was prepared to strike this blow against Victorian workers. Even Mr Kennett, who sacked teachers, ripped the guts out of the public transport system and showed nothing but contempt for workers, continued to fund JobWatch, because even he recognised the importance of this service to vulnerable workers. We have a new benchmark. We have a new low when it comes to neglect.

What is most appalling about this is the way the decision is being defended by those opposite. In his contribution Mr Ondarchie said that this motion is pre-emptive, notwithstanding the clear direction of the minister. It might be worth Mr Ondarchie taking the

time to read the minister's letter and become conversant with it, because the minister has made his position very clear. There is no funding. To suggest, as he has done, that people ought to approach Victoria Legal Aid, is rubbish. There is no funding for JobWatch out of the legal aid budget.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr TEE — Mr Ondarchie has asked about our response. Our record is a proud one when it comes to JobWatch. During the first year of the Bracks government, when we got back into government, we doubled the funding of JobWatch. Subsequently over the next 10 years we continued to maintain and increase its funding. That is our record over 10 years. The record of the coalition is that in its first budget it will cut funding to JobWatch entirely. However, the coalition does not have the honesty to fess up to that. Instead Mr Ondarchie pretended that there is hope. The government extinguished the flame of hope, and then Mr Ondarchie stood up and pretended that there is still some hope; he pretended that he still holds a flame for vulnerable families. Mr Ondarchie does not want to stand up and defend the decision that has been made, so he pretended that a decision has not been made. However, I have news for Mr Ondarchie — he should talk to the minister — a decision has been made and the hypocrisy of those opposite has been exposed.

This is an issue across Victoria. We know that some 20 000 Victorians ring JobWatch. In my electorate alone that means 5000 inquiries from 5000 workers who ring JobWatch with a range of concerns, whether they be in regard to workplace safety, reasonable hours of work or rates of pay, will go unanswered.

The Eastern Community Legal Centre, which is in my electorate, has called on the state government not to axe JobWatch. The chief executive of that organisation, Michael Smith, says:

We don't provide assistance with employment rights and legal issues, so if we have nowhere to refer them to — —

who will these very vulnerable people go to? That is a valid question. I ask Mr Ondarchie: who will they go to?

This decision has made the vulnerable more vulnerable. It will make workers less able to enforce their rights, including their right to be paid their wages, and they will be less able to work in a safe environment. This decision has made it harder for families to pay their bills. I urge those opposite to examine their conscience and reconsider this decision.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I would like to take the opportunity to thank those who have participated in this debate. Ms Pennicuik captured the issue beautifully when she described JobWatch as a ‘treasure’. Numerous speakers have spoken about some of our most vulnerable workers and the great need that exists for JobWatch to continue and for it to continue to be funded.

Mr Ondarchie described this debate as a waste of the Parliament’s time. I have to say that we are talking about people hanging from the rafters — that is, actually hanging from the rafters, rather than just as a figure of speech — of people being assaulted in their workplaces, being underpaid or not being paid at all. I would have thought that was a pretty good use of the Parliament’s time. I am disappointed that the government did not provide somebody to dignify this motion with a more respectful contribution in response to our genuine questions about the change in approach of the department in terms of ensuring that minimum wages, working conditions and other workplace safety issues, entitlements and legal standards are upheld.

I am disappointed that Mr Ondarchie did not take this motion particularly seriously, but I am not quite as disappointed in him as I am in the fact that Minister Dalla-Riva has been missing in action throughout this debate. In the middle of this debate we paused for question time, and Mr Dalla-Riva walked in as question time was beginning and walked out the minute it was finished. One could have easily gained the impression that he has been avoiding the chamber all morning. It is an absolute disgrace.

When Labor was in government, Labor frontbenchers would always be prepared to defend themselves and their records. Mr Dalla-Riva’s no-show today is just appalling. He has not even got the courage of his convictions to come in here and defend the decision he has taken to shut down JobWatch and leave thousands of Victorian workers vulnerable in their workplaces. I commend the motion to the house.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 17

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

Noes, 19

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

Pairs

- | | |
|---------------|----------|
| Darveniza, Ms | Hall, Mr |
| Hartland, Ms | Drum, Mr |

Motion negatived.

Sitting suspended 1.05 p.m. until 2.05 p.m.

RULINGS BY THE CHAIR

Statements on reports and papers

The PRESIDENT — Order! I note that the opposition feels there is no need to provide a quorum for the start of proceedings this afternoon. I also note that it is opposition business day, so it is not incumbent upon the government to provide a quorum on this day either. Perhaps tactics ought to be considered.

At this point I make a statement to give members a chance to consider whether or not this has any ramifications for their intentions to speak later this day.

Mrs Peulich — President, should we not have a bigger audience for this?

The PRESIDENT — Order! No, I am not fussed or precious. I advise the house that due to some confusion about notice given yesterday by Mrs Andrea Coote in relation to her intention to make a statement on government responses to a committee report in the next sitting week, the listing on today’s notice paper in Mrs Coote’s name relates to the notification she gave yesterday. It was Mrs Coote’s intention that her notice of intent to make a statement be listed in tomorrow’s notice paper for the next sitting Wednesday. In other words, she intended to give notice yesterday of a matter she wishes to pursue in the next sitting week. She did that in the full knowledge that she already had a matter listed for this week’s proceedings.

As a result of the confusion, because members can only have one item listed under statements on reports and papers, Mrs Coote’s intended statement for this week was taken off the notice paper and replaced with the notification relating to the report she wishes to

comment on next week. The report that was previously listed was the *Victorian Auditor-General's Report — Effectiveness of Victims of Crime Programs* of February 2011. Mrs Coote has approached the clerks and discussed this with them, and it has been discussed with me.

I rule that Mrs Coote, or any other member, may today make a statement in relation to that Auditor-General's report. The government response listed in Mrs Coote's name in today's notice paper is also available to be addressed by other members if they had been planning to discuss that item, but Mrs Coote will only have the opportunity to discuss the matter she put on the notice paper for this week. Her subsequent matter, of which she gave notice yesterday, will be listed for the next sitting week, so she will have an opportunity to address both but in the sequence in which she originally had intended that they be advised.

KINDERGARTENS: FUNDING

Debate resumed from 23 March; motion of Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan):

That this house —

- (1) notes that Victoria is experiencing a baby boom, with 200 babies born each day, increasing demand for more kindergarten places;
- (2) notes that the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to increase four-year-old kindergarten hours from 10 to 15 hours per week by 2013, which will further add to that demand;
- (3) notes that the Baillieu government has made no commitment to the Young Readers program;
- (4) notes that the Baillieu government has made no commitment to play, learning and equipment grants for community-based kindergartens;
- (5) notes that the Baillieu government has made no commitment to expand toy libraries and playgroups that enhance the development of children younger than three years old;
- (6) notes the lack of recognition by the Baillieu government of the professional development needs of staff working in the early childhood sector;
- (7) condemns the Baillieu government for only committing \$15 million over four years for kindergarten capital funding, which will mean that most of Victoria's kindergartens will miss out;
- (8) calls on the Baillieu government to amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to allow for the registration of kindergarten teachers through the Victorian Institute of Teaching; and
- (9) calls on the Baillieu government to provide considerably more funding for kindergarten capital funding, to ensure that all of Victoria's preschool children have the best start to their education.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to speak to the motion moved by Ms Mikakos regarding kindergarten funding. This debate commenced on 23 March, and I am pleased to resume the debate today, one day after the budget was handed down. The issue of kindergarten education is of vital importance to Victorian children, parents and the community generally. We know that early childhood education is crucial for the development of children and has long-term benefits for them and for society.

It is a key principle of the Victorian Green's education policy that public sector early childhood education be funded commensurate with international best practice levels. The provision of two years of preschool education to all children delivered by registered, fully qualified educators is a key priority of our education policy. That would ensure that regardless of their family circumstances all children have access to quality early education programs before formal school, reflecting the commitment made through COAG (Council of Australian Governments) for 15 hours of four-year-old kindergarten as addressed by this motion and of which we are all very well aware.

In order to achieve that aim, further investment in infrastructure throughout Victoria is urgently required and capital grants for kindergartens must be renewed. The grants should recognise the historic inequity in funding for disadvantaged areas. As we all know, many kindergarten facilities throughout the state need to be brought up to scratch in terms of occupational health and safety and amenity and bringing outdoor play space environments into line with play-based curriculum and general maintenance of buildings throughout Victoria.

There also needs to be additional general funding for infrastructure in order to support kindergartens to move to the provision of 15 hours per week of kindergarten for four-year-olds and 5 hours per week of kindergarten for three-year-olds, which is in the COAG agreement, and guarantees of wages and conditions reflecting changes to that timetable.

We all know how important it is for children to attend formal kindergarten. It is the solid basis and foundation for entering primary school. Children who either miss out entirely or do not take the opportunity to fully attend three-year-old or four-year-old kindergarten — but particularly four-year-old kindergarten, which in most cases is the year before going to school —

experience a detrimental effect on their passage through school years.

We pay a lot of attention to talking about tertiary and secondary education and then primary education, but often kindergarten is forgotten and is treated as the add-on. The kindergarten and primary years are the most important years in education for students. One only has to go back a few generations to when many people in the community did not go much past primary school at all and therefore formal education was only what they got from primary school and perhaps one or two years of secondary education. If children do not have access to full kindergarten as a foundation for primary school years, that often casts a long shadow over their educational story. It is important, and traditionally it has not got as much attention as it should have received.

Debate interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

The PRESIDENT — Order! I interrupt to draw the attention of the house to the presence in the gallery of former member the Honourable Gerald Ashman. It is nice to see Mr Ashman back here.

KINDERGARTENS: FUNDING

Debate resumed.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — The motion moved by Ms Mikakos begins by talking about the increase in the number of children born each day in Victoria placing greater demand on kindergarten places.

In response to that part of the motion in particular, in terms of what I had been able to glean in the short time between the budget being released yesterday and this moment in time, there is not a lot of time in terms of providing kindergarten places for children born now, who will enter kindergarten in three or four years. As a state the need is upon us now to accommodate the increasing demand for kindergarten places. It is not possible to plan for increases in 10 years because those children who need kindergarten places will already have gone past kindergarten age.

The COAG agreement to increase four-year-old kindergarten from 10 to 15 hours per week by 2013 will add and is already adding further pressure on the need for kindergarten places and infrastructure throughout Victoria.

It is not just an issue for this government. It was an issue pressing down upon the previous government. I have five major municipalities in my electorate, and whenever I go to the briefings that councils often have with their local MPs, kindergarten infrastructure is an issue that is always raised.

While everybody welcomed the COAG agreement, you would have to say that it is an overdue agreement. We should have had 15 hours of kindergarten for four-year-olds a long time ago as a mandated provision in terms of what I have been saying about preparing children for primary education.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Ms PENNICUIK — For everybody. Thank you, Mrs Peulich. I think there is broad support for that, but in terms of bringing the infrastructure up to scratch around Australia, not enough resourcing is going into it.

I had one of my staff prepare a table for me which looked at the budget that has just been handed down with regard to kindergarten output measures for 2009–10 and 2011–12. It appears that the kindergarten participation rate is estimated to be 93.5 per cent in 2011–12 under the current budget, and under the previous budget it was estimated to be 92 per cent and actually was 92.7 per cent. The total cost under the previous budget was \$229.7 million, and under this budget it is expected to be \$247 million, so there is a slight increase. The cost per place in 2009–10 was \$3683, and the target for 2011–12 is just over \$4000, which according to the budget papers is an increase of about 0.6 per cent.

The Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development has issued a press release entitled ‘Coalition government delivers on commitment to provide \$6 million boost for small rural kindergartens’. The government has said that it has allocated \$6 million in the budget for operational grants of up to \$20 000 over the next four years for small rural kindergartens. The media release states:

‘The coalition’s funding boost will fix this problem by helping small rural kindergartens access grants to help with administrative and operational costs,’ Ms Lovell said.

This \$6 million commitment is part of a \$94.9 million package for kindergartens in the 2011–12 budget including:

\$41.5 million to provide free kindergarten in the year before school for more than 18 300 low-income families ...

\$15 million ... for grants for capital upgrades or extensions ...

That was foreshadowed in Ms Mikakos's contribution as being inadequate, and I would have to agree it is. Given the cries of local councils — and it is obviously falling to them to make room for the 15 hours of four-year-old kindergarten in every municipality — this \$15 million is not going to stretch very far. The media release further states:

\$14.2 million to continue and expand kindergarten cluster management ...

Again, that is a very small amount of money given the need. The media release also announces just over \$18 million to:

... support kindergarten children needing extra assistance including \$10 million to expand kindergarten inclusion support services ...

That is good, but it is not going to be enough.

Kindergarten Parents Victoria (KPV) is an organisation of which I am sure everybody in this place is aware. It is an active lobby group on behalf of kindergarten parents. KPV welcomes the funding, stating in its media release:

New funding of \$6 million will provide access to operational grants for small rural early childhood services in Victoria.

We applaud this commitment to services operating in remote areas of Victoria who struggle to operate ...

KPV also welcomes the announcement of funding for infrastructure with a new capital grant round announced today, but its media release also says:

Investment in the early childhood workforce is needed not only to attract staff, but also to provide genuine professional development to enable staff to lead quality reforms that are being implemented from 2012.

All in all, KPV's reaction is that the funding is a step in the right direction, but it is not going to be enough. I could not find anything in the budget about staff development. If a government speaker wants to elaborate on that, they will have the opportunity to do so.

The states have signed up to the additional 5 hours a week of four-year-old kindergarten by 2013. Although that will not be implemented in this financial year, it must happen in the following financial year. KPV estimates that that will cost around \$135 million. If we look at the amounts that have been announced by the minister in her media release of yesterday, we can see that we are not coming anywhere near the needed amount. Perhaps the states are going to be looking to the commonwealth to cover part of this new agreement to accommodate the extra hours of four-year-old

kindergarten. Perhaps that is fair enough, because it is a COAG agreement and obviously there is more funding available at the federal level than at the state level. On the other hand, it is a matter of priorities as to what governments want to do. If governments are committed to providing access to kindergarten for all four-year-olds for 15 hours per week, then they need to put the resources in to do that. I would be very surprised if councils were happy with the capital funding that has been announced in this budget, because it is nowhere near what is needed.

I have not been able to locate anything in the budget about other aspects specifically mentioned in Ms Mikakos's motion, such as the Young Readers program, the play learning and equipment grants for community-based kindergartens, the toy libraries and playgroups and, as I mentioned, professional development.

Obviously there is a small increase in kindergarten funding in the budget announced yesterday. Given the task ahead and the need for updating capital infrastructure across Victoria and the provision of extra infrastructure to enable all children to have access to four-year-old kindergarten, as well as not taking away access to three-year-old kindergarten — because that is the aim as well — there is not enough funding to achieve that goal.

The aim is not to add or commit to the 15 hours for kindergarten for four-year-olds to the detriment of kindergarten for three-year-olds. That is the aim across the state and across the country. In any fair examination of this funding you would have to say that the government is not going to get us there and it will have to invest more money, particularly in the years of this current Parliament, if we are going to meet the obligations which all states have signed up to and with which we wholeheartedly agree.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to make some comments on the opposition's kindergarten funding notice of motion. Firstly, I am probably one of the few in this chamber who never went to kindergarten.

Ms Mikakos — That explains a lot!

Mrs PEULICH — It does explain a lot.

Ms Mikakos — Perhaps socialisation skills?

Mrs PEULICH — Let me say I spent an idyllic time socialising on my grandparents farm, riding horses, playing around in creeks, chasing the chooks,

picking the eggs. It was really a very wonderful hands-on experience which — —

An honourable member — A socialist heaven.

Mrs PEULICH — No, it was actually an agricultural heaven, the farm being solely dependent on the hard work of my grandparents, who, unlike the socialists, understood the meaning of getting dirt under their fingernails.

I also go back to my role on the Family and Community Development Committee over 10 years, during which time we undertook the first review of family and children's services, backdating to 1993–94. The blueprint we developed in our report was the basis of many reforms that are still being implemented, such as co-location of services. I am pleased that the committee's report — issued under the Kennett regime — ushered in a range of reforms in this area.

While Ms Pennicuik was making her comments I remarked that kindergarten can be a difficult commitment for working-class families. Their workplaces often have less flexibility than those of many middle-class families, who can arrange flexible hours or take time off work and are thus able to enrol their children in kindergarten. That is why we have some of the lowest kindergarten participation rates in places like the city of Greater Dandenong, where the rate is about 84 per cent, and the city of Frankston has a similar rate. Kindergartens are extremely well attended and well supported, but they can pose enormous challenges for working-class families who have less flexibility in their working lives.

That is why I welcomed the Kennett government reform to provide kindergarten through long day child care by incorporating it into the program. This enabled children to attend kindergarten. My son, for example, would not have been able to attend kindergarten were it not for the benevolence of the local child-care provider. Before these reforms, we would walk the children to kindergarten from the child-care centre and walk them back. If my child-care provider had not agreed to do that, for no additional remuneration or benefit, then even my son would not have had the benefit of attending kindergarten, which would have been a loss.

Many of the statements in this motion are good things in themselves, but the most important of them, which impacts on most of the others, is paragraph 2, which states that the house:

notes that the Council of Australian Governments ... agreed to increase four-year-old kindergarten hours from 10 to

15 hours per week by 2013, which will further add to that demand;

This will have a phenomenal impact on the provision of kindergarten services and the ability of those charged with the responsibility to provide the resources.

This demonstrates how the Labor Party at the federal and state levels has been complicit in leaving yet another ticking time bomb for communities, and we now have to clean up yet another Labor mess. Labor made an in-principle agreement with an implementation time frame. Labor members opposite, including Ms Mikakos, who was a parliamentary secretary, failed to secure the funding that would have delivered that principle. Its implementation and funding had not been fully considered when it was agreed upon at the Council of Australian Governments meeting.

I refer to an adjournment matter I raised for the then Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Ms Morand. She responded to me on 25 May 2010, saying:

In November 2008 it was agreed at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting that all states and territories would commit to universal access by 2013.

This would ensure that every child has access to an affordable, quality kindergarten program, in a range of settings, in the year before school for 15 hours per week. The commonwealth has committed \$970 million over five years for this reform. Victoria will receive \$210.6 million.

She went on to talk about how the first stage of the implementation of universal access in Victoria was municipal planning. I guess she was talking about exercises of the nature of what is described in this document. I am holding in my hand the final report of the City of Casey, which represents a phenomenal amount of work. The previous government gave an in-principle agreement to a policy which had not been funded and the implications of which had not been considered, and then asked local governments to undertake lengthy and detailed work on the implications for them of this policy, which was adopted in a silo fashion by the two Labor governments operating at the two levels. If this detailed work had already been done and if the two Labor governments had understood the funding implications, perhaps they would have secured the resources to implement this important policy objective.

It is almost reminiscent of Bob Hawke's proclamation in front of a national audience that by 1990 no child would live in poverty. We have not moved very far from the situation at the time of this statement. Although some improvements have been made, we

need to go a long way to achieve this goal, which was set several decades ago.

The former minister went on to explain in her adjournment response:

The first phase of the implementation of universal access in Victoria was municipal planning. Each local council was funded to assess the capacity of services within their municipality to implement universal access. One aspect of this planning was the consideration of the impact that universal access might have on other programs such as activity groups or kindergarten for three-year-old children and playgroups.

We certainly know that when you increase access from 10 hours to 15 with a stroke of a magic pen, you will therefore need more space, more bricks and mortar, teachers and operational funds to run kindergarten programs. Unless you provide adequate funds, other programs will bite the dust. Unfortunately in many instances that will be three-year-old kindergarten programs, because Labor failed in its duty to make sure that the agreement it was entering into — —

Ms Mikakos interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — Yes, it entered into the agreement in 2008. You have been absolutely irresponsible — yet another Labor disaster. You had no idea of what the cost implications would be, how it would be implemented or what the — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Pennicuik) — Order! Mrs Peulich should address her comments through the Chair.

Mrs PEULICH — In her response to an adjournment matter I raised in May 2010 Ms Morand said:

The 2009–2010 Children’s Capital program included grants to support kindergarten programs, expand physical facilities and support workforce development.

We know how appallingly inadequate that was. I will cite from my local region some of the huge black holes and ticking time bombs left by the then state Labor government. Ms Morand continues:

Alongside planning, pilots and trials are an important part of the implementation.

You would have thought that that would have preceded the full-scale implementation of this agreement. She goes on:

Pilots of 15-hour programs have recently been funded in 20 kindergarten programs ...

One would have thought it would have been the other way round. Ms Morand continues:

The national partnership agreement allows for a review of implementation across all jurisdictions after 18 months.

This is yet another example of a Labor muck-up. Ms Morand concludes by stating:

The review has now begun and will be reporting back in early 2011. Included within the scope is a review of the adequacy of funding to achieve specified outcomes and outputs and the appropriateness of the time lines.

There is a very clear view in my region and on the part of the Municipal Association of Victoria in relation to this. I will quote from the MAV’s policy position, titled ‘Universal access — 15 hours kindergarten — what it means for Victoria’, which states:

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) commends the Australian government on its increased investment and commitment to early childhood education through its Council of Australian Governments (COAG) early childhood reforms — ‘to build a more effective and better coordinated national early childhood development system to support the diverse needs of Australian children and their families’.

The MAV now calls on the commonwealth government to dramatically increase its investment in early childhood education and care and fully fund all of its COAG early childhood reforms.

When this Labor opposition was in government it should have made sure that it was not just getting into the laps of its federal Labor colleagues and masters, rolling over to be tickled on the belly without securing the funds that were going to dramatically impact on our local communities.

The MAV paper goes on to state:

Among the reforms is COAG’s ‘universal access’ to 15 hours kindergarten per week for children in the year before they start school. This is due to be implemented by 2013.

While local government is supportive of all the national reforms that will deliver better outcomes for young children and their families, the MAV warns that the reforms could collapse unless the commonwealth government provides substantially more investment and flexibility.

This is where it rests. The failure of the Brumby Labor government to secure this shows the sort of financial incompetence that we have seen drag this state into disasters such as myki, smart meters, the regional rail link and so forth because it did not do its planning and costings before it committed and proceeded. This is yet another example of that Labor flaw.

The South East Metro (SEM) Group of Councils, which the government had the opportunity of meeting preceding the election — and I think Ms Pennicuik was

also a participant in that meeting — also has some clear views about where those gaps are. In a paper titled ‘Providing kindergarten infrastructure and staff’ it states:

The SEM councils support the intent of the COAG national reform agenda for early childhood education — 15 hours of kindergarten for four-year-olds. However, we are unable to implement the policy due to limitations to meet the significant capital expenditure required to provide the appropriate kindergarten infrastructure and staffing levels by 2013.

...

Victoria wide: \$606 million funding shortfall exists, needs 50 per cent more kinder facilities and 600 extra trained staff to increase participation from the current 10 hours to 15 hours per week.

This is an absolutely appalling level of neglect of due diligence in terms of making a commitment for which there clearly was inadequate funding.

The paper goes on to state:

Local government will need to modify and/or build new infrastructure to cater for both the current demand for three and four-year-olds and to meet the future demand for 15 hours kindergarten for four-year-olds. If not, it is highly likely that three-year-old kindergarten will be displaced or even shut down.

I did not have the opportunity to print the more recent positions of my local councils. I apologise to them, because they have put in quite a bit of work. This is just a summary of the infrastructure shortfall, not the shortfall in staff and operations. For example, in the city of Casey there is a \$30 million shortfall over the next five years. In Kingston there is a very modest shortfall of \$2.4 million to ensure its infrastructure is fit for the purposes of delivering the policy. In Frankston there is a \$14.7 million shortfall between 2012 and 2017. A number of other matters are raised in Monash and Dandenong.

Ms Mikakos — You are supporting my motion.

Mrs PEULICH — No, what I am trying to illustrate is Labor’s incompetence as a government in making a commitment to policy reform and being absolutely derelict in its duty to secure the funding that should come along with it —

Ms Mikakos — What is your approach? Wash your hands of it?

Mrs PEULICH — No, this is Ms Mikakos’s motion. This should be Ms Mikakos’s shame, because Labor caused enormous angst for local communities and their ability to cater for what is natural growth in kindergartens in many of these communities. The

previous Labor government placed a very large burden on local communities, which certainly do not have the bricks and mortar, the staff or the operational funds. Three-year-old kindergarten is biting the dust —

Ms Mikakos — They don’t have the funding in the budget.

Mrs PEULICH — It is a COAG agreement. It is a federal government initiative. It should have been Labor’s responsibility to secure the funding. It did not. It is another failure notched up on Labor’s belt. Labor members should hang their heads in shame, in particular members such as Judith Graley, the member for Narre Warren South, and Jude Perera, the member for Cranbourne in the Assembly, who have been getting on their high horses in the local media attempting to castigate this government for failing to provide enough funding resources for universal access to kindergartens when it was their silence and sitting on their hands doing nothing that allowed this half-baked policy, without the money to go with it, to be adopted and to cause enormous angst amongst the community.

I would like to commend the Minister for Education, the Minister for Higher Education and Skills and the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development on being able to pick up as many of the lapsed funding commitments in various budgets across the whole of government where funding has not been secured or committed to in the forward estimates and in circumstances in which we have had to not only meet our own commitments but try to pick out those that are of the highest priority.

Last night I went to a briefing conducted with stakeholders by the three ministers for education — the Minister for Education, the Minister for Higher Education and Skills and the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development — and I was very pleased with their reception; certainly they were pleased to have the opportunity to engage with stakeholders. As Ms Pennicuik may have mentioned, a brief summary of the investment in early childhood development goes some way to addressing some of the issues. Clearly the biggest hole left in this sector is the one that results from the failure of the federal government to fund universal kindergartens.

Ms Lovell mentioned that \$15 million in capital grants for children’s services to form part of a record \$26 million grants round in 2011–12 was secured in the budget, as was \$41.4 million to ensure children from low-income families have access to kindergarten through that kindergarten fees subsidy — this is very important, in particular to those communities where the

participation rates are low and lack of money is an obstacle — and \$20.2 million of affordable, accessible and efficient kindergarten services was provided through grants to small rural kindergartens and supporting kindergarten cluster management. Kindergarten cluster management has probably existed for quite some time in pockets across Victoria. A central enrolment system has been operated by some local governments, which have gone even further in facilitating other management support, but that has not been across the system. I commend Ms Lovell for the progress made in these cluster arrangements because that will take pressure off kindergarten committees which, after all, are comprised of volunteers.

Funding of \$18.2 million has been provided to enable children with disabilities to participate in kindergarten through kindergarten inclusion support services and the provision of specialised services and support through early childhood intervention services. There is an additional \$6.3 million to strengthen support for parents who are raising their children, taking the total output initiatives to over \$100 million.

Investing in early childhood services is an important priority, and investing in kindergarten services is symbolic of that commitment. The coalition has made every effort to take immediate action to support early education by investing in early childhood infrastructure; ensuring that the sustainability of kindergarten services in small rural communities is assisted by easing the burden of kindergarten fees; reducing the need for fundraising through the provision of operational grants; providing more kindergarten inclusion support places to enable more children with a disability or developmental delay to participate in kindergarten programs; recognising that parents have the most significant influence on a child's life and providing better support for parents; and responding to the need for workforce development by providing additional maternal and child health scholarships, which is the point that Ms Pennicuik mentioned in passing.

At last night's briefing Mr Hall also mentioned the new reforms and concessions which will apply to those who face financial hardship in enrolling in TAFE institutes. They will enable many more people to take advantage of that support, and TAFE institutes will have the discretion to apply them. Currently a review of all of the TAFE fees and structures that apply is under way and I look forward to the outcome of that review, especially in facilitating retraining, particularly of women who are returning to the workforce or people who have lost their jobs and need to retrain. Labor's TAFE reforms, which provided concessions that were only available when you followed a linear upward

progression, were never going to deliver a flexible labour force in a changing market economy.

Mr Hall has taken early and quick action to restore some of that flexibility. It has been welcomed by members of some migrant communities in my region, especially in the city of Greater Dandenong, with whom I met recently. At that meeting they applauded the reforms and looked forward to them flowing through.

There are other pressures on children's services and kindergartens: the demand for early childhood services, including kindergarten, continues to grow; the birth rate has increased — some would say not enough — by 11 500 since 1999; and, as Ms Pennicuik mentioned, there has been an increase in kindergarten participation rates, something I would like to see apply more consistently across the system. One idea in particular needs to be pursued: how regional or subregional education plans can be developed of the sort that we have seen in Bendigo, which weave a comprehensive education plan from early childhood right through to tertiary and further education so that all the indicators are incorporated in a single document and all those who play a part in providing services, whether it is infrastructure or whatever, are doing so with common goals in mind.

The National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education commitment of universal access to 15 hours of kindergarten by 2013 is obviously the biggest claim on the biggest amount of money. It was not secured and has left a huge black hole in the budget. In addition, there is also the commitment to the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda. The government is committed to ensuring that quality kindergarten services remain affordable and accessible. The Baillieu government recognises the importance of early childhood development as the cornerstone of the developmental phase of life. It recognises that early intervention is critical to ensure better education, health and wellbeing into adulthood.

The demand for kindergarten places has continued to increase, and all levels of government are focused on that. However, it needs to attract the funding. This cornerstone of this motion has drained resources from many other areas that impact on children and early childhood. Strategies are being implemented to increase the number of kindergarten places in nine municipalities — Ballarat, Bendigo, Brimbank, Cardinia, Darebin, Geelong, Glen Eira, Hobsons Bay and Wyndham — and I welcome that. However, I look forward to the expansion of that initiative, perhaps to

some other regions where there is a need to lift kindergarten participation rates.

With those few words can I say that I think Ms Mikakos has more front than Myer in bringing a motion of this nature to the Parliament for debate, especially given the complicity of the former Labor state government in entering agreements for which it did not secure funding. I also note the audacity of Labor MPs, who sat silently on their hands and allowed these agreements to be entered into to and who are now getting on their high horses and attempting to say that somehow it is the responsibility of this government. It is yet another example of a big black hole that is being left behind by a reckless and fiscally irresponsible government that entered into commitments and plans without having full costings and full planning, and without careful implementation, and then left someone else to pick up the mess and sort it out. With those few words I look forward to the conclusion of the debate.

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to support the motion put by my colleague Ms Mikakos pertaining to the underfunding of the kindergarten industry. It is a good thing for Victoria that 200 new babies are being born every day. While it is impossible for any government to predict future birth rates, it is crucial that strategic forward plans are made before the need becomes a critical issue for parents. Government must ensure that the whole raft of support mechanisms is put in place prior to preschool children commencing kindergarten.

It is quite clear that the coalition government's present financial allocations are woefully inadequate — \$15 million to provide suitable accommodation, vocational training programs for staff and new facilities to house the expected increase to population by birth and immigration.

I have to say that one of the most successful reading programs for young students, the Premier's reading challenge, also looks set to disappear. I visited numerous schools during my first term as an MP and it was always a joyous occasion to present primary school students with a prestigious award from the Premier. Without exception, school principals applauded the concept of recognising the efforts of these beautiful youngsters. The award ceremonies were often attended by parents of recipients of the award, and I will never forget the pride shining in their faces.

I do not understand why there is no commitment from this government to continue this important program. It shows a lack of understanding of the importance of encouragement and incentives for our young children to

learn about the wonderful world of literature. Just because the Premier's reading challenge was a Labor government initiative does not mean it has to be discarded. Replace it with something better, but do not let this great initiative flounder. I believe it was extremely effective and worthy of being continued.

I will now address the inevitable impending crisis in our kindergarten system. Working parents are a fact of life and have been for several generations. Our economy is based on both parents in a two-parent family returning to the workforce once their children reach kindergarten age. It is preferable to home grow our own population than to continually rely on immigration. Therefore, to facilitate and support our childbearing working families, we need to ensure proper and adequate kindergarten places are available and ready when they are needed.

The government has an obligation to Victorian working families that is so much more than a campaign slogan. Coalition kindergarten policies do not seriously address the basic needs of young working parents who wish to return to the workforce with the confidence and knowledge that their young child is being looked after professionally and properly. I support this motion.

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — I rise to highlight the hypocrisy of the motion before us today. The motion stands as testimony to the previous government's neglect, lack of planning and what seems to be an amnesiac approach to the last 11 years and its responsibility for some of the circumstances we are in today. The Baillieu government is working to ensure that all families have access to high-quality early childhood services. We acknowledge that families are the cornerstone of our communities and that providing those opportunities in the early years of a child's life is vital. The coalition will deliver immediate action and support for early childhood development by investing in early childhood infrastructure, ensuring the sustainability of kindergarten services in small rural communities by easing the burden of kindergarten fees and reducing the need for fundraising through the provision of operational grants.

Yesterday's budget speech articulated that under the stewardship of my colleague Wendy Lovell, the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, the Baillieu government has invested in early childhood infrastructure. It will sustain kindergarten services in small rural communities and continue to expand kindergarten clusters and their management, support children with disabilities or perhaps a developmental delay and provide more kindergarten inclusion support places.

The proof of this is an investment of \$41.5 million to provide free kindergarten in the year before school for more than 18 300 low-income families through the kindergarten fee subsidy; \$6 million to make kindergarten more affordable and accessible for families in 87 small rural communities around Victoria through operational grants of up to \$20 000; \$14.2 million to continue to expand kindergarten cluster management to reduce the burden on parent-run committees, the coordination of the use of infrastructure, support for the workforce and working in partnership with other bodies to provide greater choice for families; \$18.2 million to support kindergarten children who need extra assistance, including \$10 million to expand kindergarten inclusion support services so that 246 more children with disabilities can attend kindergarten; and \$8.2 million to continue the provision of 150 early childhood intervention services and 150 flexible support places.

The budget also delivers \$6.319 million towards initiatives to support more than 2400 families through the coalition government's parenting strategy which includes \$3.7 million to maintain the maternal and child health line's capacity to answer more than 100 000 calls per year; \$2 million to implement the coalition government's parenting strategy to provide support for parents; \$350 000 in funding to the Victorian branch of the Australian Breastfeeding Association; as well as \$180 000 to expand the maternal and child health nurses scholarship program. This is a significant investment in Victoria's families and in our future.

The government is making a \$101 million investment in early childhood development and maternal and child health services. This budget has done a great deal to support young families.

I am very proud to stand here today to raise these issues because not so long ago — in 2007 — the commonwealth government made an election commitment to implement access to 15 hours of kindergarten a week for all children in the year before school. I think what Ms Mikakos was talking about when she moved this motion, because she has developed amnesia, is that the former state government and the commonwealth signed up to the COAG (Council of Australian Governments) agreement without any consideration for the extra funding or infrastructure that would be required to meet the 15-hour minimum standard.

For the Labor Party to make a commitment to this policy without first assessing the capacity of the services to deliver the additional hours without impacting on the number of places is a very unusual

way to develop a policy. Normally governments would assess the capacity of services and built infrastructure before committing to increasing hours. Labor's failure is likely to affect these sectors we are talking about today and their ability to deliver an adequate number of four-year-old places, and it may mean that other programs such as three-year-old kindergarten places are placed in jeopardy. I think that is what Ms Mikakos's motion is about, but she has forgotten the little bit at the start about the previous government's involvement and its signing up to the COAG agreement, its lack of planning and its lack of cognisance of what the result would be for Victorian families and for Victorian young people.

A number of weeks ago there was a visit to Golden Square Kindergarten in Bendigo. My sister, my brother's three children and I all attended that kindergarten. Currently my nephew Hunter is attending. He now has a place at Golden Square Kindergarten, and he is well on his way to being well prepared for school next year. The interesting thing about Hunter's journey to kinder is that he found it very difficult to get a place. He has not found it difficult to get a place under this government, but he found it impossible to enrol when he should have been able to under the previous government. The member for Bendigo East in the other place and Ms Mikakos have made some fairly outrageous statements about accessibility. I was quite taken aback by them because I know about the journey of many children in trying to access kindergarten places at Golden Square. I thought there was great hypocrisy in that.

Ms Mikakos interjected.

Mrs PETROVICH — The general public may not know about it, Ms Mikakos, but I hope they discover it, and I hope they understand how some of these kindergarten places have been underfunded and neglected by the previous government.

Hunter is well on his way to enjoying his kinder year. He is developing friendships and a love of books and his craft work is exceptional. I am proud to say he is developing socially; he has become much more aware of how he and his family have a place in and interact with the community. He is generally very excited about his kinder year and not so long ago he presented me with one of his major pieces of art. He is a great example of why the kinder year and three-year-old kinder is very important to the development of young children. It can impact on how they assimilate into their primary school years. Some of the issues of development and developmental problems can be identified and assessed through these programs. I think

it is a great shame that we have this denial of how we have ended up in this place.

I am very proud to be part of a government which places great emphasis on early childhood, and I am very proud to be associated with a government that places so much emphasis on family and on easing the pressures. I am also very proud of the commitments made through Ms Lovell's portfolio in relation to kindergartens and early childhood development. I urge others to vote against Ms Mikakos's motion today.

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — In concluding this debate I want to remind all members that in fact it commenced several weeks ago on 23 March. At that time the opposition did not seek to conclude the debate and have a division on the motion primarily because I wanted to enable the minister to make a contribution, so I am extremely disappointed that the minister, despite being in the house at the moment, has decided not to make a contribution today. I think it is a very important debate, and I would have been very interested to hear her comments in relation to the motion that I have brought before the house.

It is a very timely motion despite the fact that it was, as I said, moved back in March. It provides a context for a range of concerns that I have around the early childhood education sector. I was hoping the government would take on board these concerns and address them in the state budget that was handed down yesterday. Sadly, the vast majority of those issues have not been adequately addressed.

The Baillieu government did not make early childhood education a priority in its election commitments, and it certainly did not make early childhood education a priority in its first budget. This year's budget has failed spectacularly to address the increasing demand for more kindergarten places in this state, a demand both government members who spoke in the debate acknowledged in the course of their contributions. Both Mrs Peulich and Mrs Petrovich came into the house today and talked about the growing demand in some of their local kindergartens and yet we did not hear from them that this government has in fact funded any of their local kindergartens.

What we saw with the Baillieu government's election promises and what we saw yesterday was a commitment of \$15 million over a four-year period for additional capital funding for kindergartens, a figure that I have consistently said is woefully inadequate.

Hon. W. A. Lovell — On a point of order, Acting President, the member is misleading the house. The

\$15 million committed yesterday was not for a four-year period; it was in this year's budget and it contributes to a \$26 million funding commitment — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr) — Order! Thank you, Minister. There is no point of order. The member to continue.

Ms MIKAKOS — What a joke, Acting President! The minister had an opportunity to come into the house and make a contribution to the debate today and she chose not to do so. She is now seeking to contribute by way of points of order. The \$15 million in the budget estimates has in fact been provided in this year's budget — I acknowledge that. It will be very interesting to see; she has certainly made no commitment for the forward years.

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — Are you saying you are going to provide further capital funding next year?

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — We saw in the budget an allocation of \$15 million. For several weeks now the government has been at pains to say that its focus during the budget process would be to deliver on its election commitments — in this instance an election commitment of \$15 million, which is all it has been prepared to put in the budget despite the fact that Labor went to the election with a commitment of \$100 million.

Mrs Petrovich — On a point of order, Acting President, the member is once again misleading the house. There was a commitment of \$101 million, which I articulated — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr) — Order! I inform Mrs Petrovich that the issue here is the same as the previous issue and is not a point of order. The member is debating the issue, and she is entitled to do so.

Mrs Petrovich — On a point of order, Acting President, she is entitled to provide the house with accurate information.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr) — Order! Is Mrs Petrovich reflecting on my ruling? I advise her that she should not do that. She should take a seat.

Mrs Petrovich — On the point of order, Acting President, I would not reflect on your ruling.

Ms MIKAKOS — We are seeing a bit of a comedy act on the part of members of the government during the course of this debate.

Mrs Petrovich interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — I gave you the courtesy of letting you speak without interrupting you, Mrs Petrovich, despite you having made a number of statements I disagreed with. It might be interesting if the member paid attention: she might learn something about these issues. Mrs Petrovich should have a look at the budget papers and see for herself what the government has provided in this sector. She would find that the funding that has been provided is inadequate to meet the needs of Victorian families going forward.

The sum of \$15 million will barely upgrade 50 of the 1755 kindergartens across Victoria. The budget papers make it clear that \$3.5 million of that money has been allocated to kindergartens in one electorate, the marginal seat of South Barwon in the Assembly. Apart from those three kindergartens, there are no specifics about funding for any other kindergarten in the state, including the Golden Square Kindergarten Mrs Petrovich mentioned in her contribution and which is very deserving. I am sure Mrs Petrovich is aware of the many demand pressures it is facing. I look forward to her advocating on behalf of that kindergarten and the Bendigo community to ensure that that kindergarten can access some of the \$11.5 million that will be spread so thinly across children's services throughout the rest of the state.

In government members' contributions we heard a lot about the COAG (Council of Australian Governments) agreement — the National Partnership Agreement for Early Childhood Education — entered into by the former government. That agreement is intended to increase kindergarten hours for all four-year-olds from 10 to 15 hours per week, an increase the vast majority of parents support. It is an agreement this government should honour. To facilitate this agreement — and I would encourage government members to look at the partnership agreement — the federal government will provide Victoria with \$210.6 million over a five-year period. The previous Labor government was committed to investing in new and/or improved infrastructure to meet the additional demand for services.

Mr Ondarchie — Sure you were.

Ms MIKAKOS — Maybe you should have a look at Labor's election policy, Mr Ondarchie, because Labor took to the election a commitment of

\$100 million — a huge contrast to what your government delivered yesterday.

Concerns have also been expressed by a range of stakeholders, including Kindergarten Parents Victoria. In its budget submission, which I hope the minister took the time to look at, KPV called on the government to provide an urgent investment in kindergarten infrastructure to ensure the universal access program for four-year-olds does not displace existing kindergarten programs for three-year-olds. Correspondence I received from many local councils has made it clear that this is a very real risk and that unless there is urgent investment in infrastructure to address the kindergarten crisis in Victoria these programs for three-year-olds will be at risk. Mrs Peulich referred to this issue in her contribution.

I find it astounding that government members come in here wishing to point the finger at the previous government and do not accept any responsibility as members of the new government of the state of Victoria. They are not prepared to address the issue of the implementation of the COAG agreement; they would rather see programs for three-year-olds cut back or axed by kindergartens across Victoria.

The program to build more children's hubs, which have been extremely popular around the state, has not been given 1 new cent in this budget. These centres sought to co-locate maternal and child health services with early childhood education. I have been at events the minister has attended since she has taken office. As she has opened kindergartens or other new facilities Labor funded she has talked about her commitment to children's hubs and co-location of services. It is therefore extremely disappointing that she did not match her rhetoric with funding in the budget this year.

The Baillieu government is well aware of the growing demand for kinder places in our state in response to the baby boom we have been experiencing. As I said in a contribution several weeks ago, we are seeing 200 babies born in Victoria every day. Particularly in outer growth suburbs there is enormous pressure on local councils and communities to meet the demand being experienced.

Despite the fact that the government is aware of this baby boom we have seen a failure in the budget as a whole to provide infrastructure for these growing communities, not only in the kindergarten sector but across the board. Communities in those growth suburbs in particular will be absolutely appalled when they begin to realise what is not being provided for in the budget this year.

The government had an opportunity to affirm its commitment to Victoria's children yesterday, yet it demonstrated a clear lack of vision for Victoria's early childhood education sector. I want to emphasise the fact that there is a huge body of literature that demonstrates that the majority of a child's capacity for brain development occurs during the early learning years. Members have spoken about the importance of participating in kindergarten, and I certainly strongly endorse that point of view. All the literature shows that early childhood education is a powerful tool not only against ongoing disadvantage but also in promoting a child's overall learning and development in life. It teaches a child critical learning and socialisation skills that will be a huge part of their formal education process later in life.

The early years are critical to the long-term learning and development outcomes for all children. This is especially true for children with a disability or developmental delay. The earlier children with a disability are supported the greater will be their chance of reaching their full potential and leading fulfilling lives in the community. I welcome the additional funding for the kindergarten inclusion support services. I believe the funding that was provided in the budget for the early childhood intervention service is inadequate. During the election campaign the Labor Party committed \$24.4 million to fund an additional 1000 early childhood intervention service places to support the growing needs of preschool children with a disability or developmental delay from birth to school entry. This year's state budget delivers only \$8.2 million to continue the provision of 150 early childhood intervention services and 150 flexible support places. This will be far from adequate to ensure that children with a disability or developmental delay are adequately supported in education.

The benefits that a high-quality education can bring should be made available to every child at the earliest possible opportunity in their lives. Education has always been the no. 1 priority of the Labor Party. In government we invested a record amount into Victoria's kindergartens to give every child the best possible start in life. During the time that Minister Lovell was the relevant shadow minister she was quite vocal about these issues, but I have to ask where her support is now that it counts. This budget indicates a failure on the minister's part and a failure by this government.

The demand for more kinder places and expanded facilities will continue to grow. Despite this, it appears that under the Baillieu government many of Victoria's kindergartens will be left without adequate facilities

and, more importantly, more Victorian children will miss out on this vital early learning experience. Young families are having to book ahead for some kindergartens to secure a kindergarten place due to Victoria's baby boom, so the Baillieu government needs to get on with the job of planning for the future. With the considerable demand for three-year-old and four-year-old kinder places, I would also urge the Baillieu government to honour the national partnership agreement to ensure that children across Victoria do not miss out on an incredibly valuable kindergarten place.

I remind members, as I said in my contribution in March, that the previous Labor government had provided each local council with \$50 000 to assess capacity in their areas. Mrs Peulich came into the chamber and waved around a report prepared by her local council. The government provided the funding to enable councils to undertake an analysis of the impacts on the various services they provide to identify innovative ways of delivering the 15 hours whilst keeping their three-year-old programs going.

The important thing that members opposite need to understand but are failing to understand is that the national partnership agreement provides that the federal government will fully fund staff and operating costs as well as providing some capital funding, with a significant contribution to capital costs coming from the state government. As I said before, this is precisely why Labor took to the election last year an election commitment to provide \$100 million in capital funding over four years. We took the view that the provision of early childhood education is an excellent partnership between three different levels of government, yet the Baillieu government is seeking to vacate the field in this area.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — Mrs Peulich came in here and did the Pontius Pilate thing by saying that the state government is washing its hands of the Council of Australian Governments agreement. Unless the Gillard federal government provides all the money, the government is going to walk away from this agreement.

In conclusion, I believe the potential rewards of expanding and improving preschool programs are too great to ignore. The Baillieu government failed the early childhood sector in the budget yesterday. I urge all members to support the motion.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, President, I failed to hear the member apologise to Victorians for leaving the big black hole.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmarr) — Order! That is not a point of order.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 17

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

Noes, 19

Atkinson, Mr	Koch, Mr
Coote, Mrs	Kronberg, Mrs
Crozier, Mrs	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 (<i>Teller</i>)
Guy, Mr	

Pairs

Darveniza, Ms	Hall, Mr
Hartland, Ms	Rich-Phillips, Mr

Motion negatived.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

The Clerk — I lay on the table all correspondence and related documents between the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the University of Melbourne relating to the proposed research program on alpine grazing and the document *Department of Sustainability and Environment/Department of Forest and Ecosystem Science Research Program Charter*, pursuant to the order of the Council of 23 March 2011.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Legislative Council by 12 noon on Tuesday, 24 May 2011, a copy of all submissions from the state of Victoria since 27 November 2010 to the Australian Energy Regulator on the advanced metering infrastructure determinations.

In case members are not aware, that is in reference to smart meters. Smart meters are something that government members had a lot to say about in their time in opposition. They were very voluble. Mr Vogels, who has now gone to a better place, was very voluble.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BARBER — There is life after Parliament is the message I am sending. On a particular motion that Mr Vogels moved Mr O'Donohue was very voluble and Mrs Peulich was also very voluble. We will stroll down memory lane in a moment, but on 23 November 2010, an important period in Victorian history, a press release headed 'Coalition to tackle Labor's smart meter stuff-up' was issued. While the version I have in front of me was from The Nationals member for Morwell in the Assembly, Russell Northe, there was a very similar press release put out by the then Liberal shadow Minister for Energy and Resources, who is now the Minister for Energy and Resources, Michael O'Brien, in which the commitment was made that a coalition government would:

Immediately implement the Auditor-General's recommendation to ensure that a proper cost-benefit analysis of the smart meter project is undertaken to determine whether and under what circumstances the program is viable;

Revise the technical specifications and cost recovery regulations of the smart meter project to ensure that the technology is appropriate and the cost impact on Victorian households and business is minimised;

Take an active role — rather than an 'observer' role as Labor has done — in relation to the program in order to eliminate gold plating and waste that has blown out the cost;

Implement the Auditor-General's recommendation to commission a program review by the gateway unit of the Department of Treasury and Finance on governance and implementation of the smart meter program to date;

Regulate the use of information gathered from smart meters to ensure the private information of consumers is appropriately protected; and

Release smart meter documents that the Brumby government has kept hidden, despite the Legislative Council ordering their production.

It is quite a precise prescription there, written no doubt by the then shadow minister and now Minister for Energy and Resources, Mr O'Brien. We all know that precision is one of his hallmarks. He says what he means and he means what he says. I would have hoped to have been able to report to the house that for each of these six dot points which promise quite specific and definite actions, those actions have been commenced, especially when you see words like 'immediately' in there. I had thought that immediately pretty much meant immediately rather than still thinking about it five months later.

In fact when I went looking for the official announcements from the government as to what, if anything, it had done on smart meters, I could not find them. That is not to say that they do not exist. I am just saying that when I went through the record of press

releases announcing a range of things, I could not find a reference to smart meters or any of those matters raised by Mr O'Brien. While the former opposition, now the government, was extremely voluble on the question of smart meters before it took office, it is now almost notable for its silence. When you look for what the government has said officially on the subject of smart meters, you find that the government has been so quiet you can hear crickets chirping. It is for that reason that through this parliamentary motion I have sought a little more information.

For the information of any members who have not had time to dig deeply on this question, I will talk about the law in this area. The Electricity Industry Act 2000 sets up a procedure for regulation whereby a state minister for energy, in this case in Victoria, can make rules about things to do with the Electricity Industry Act. Since we are the only state that is seriously progressing smart meters at the moment, it is through regulations to that act, specifically under sections 15A and 46D, that the rules relating to smart meters are created. Those rules were initially created by the former Labor government quite some time ago. They have been updated on a number of occasions.

Without going into an enormous amount of detail what I will say is that when a distribution company is proceeding with a smart meter rollout all the rules are to be found in these documents — that is, the regulations created under the Electricity Industry Act. The rules govern things such as who wears the risk: the broader public, electricity consumers or the power companies; the technical specifications for the meters; entry and exit fees; how to consider a situation in which companies come back seeking more money for the rollout of the project; when companies can make a submission; and when the regulator can vary its own finding. It is really the complete instruction manual for the rollout of the smart meter project.

At the moment the power to be the umpire of the rule book is in fact with the federal regulator; we have delegated that power to the Australian Energy Regulator (AER), which continues to influence the rollout of the smart meter project with reference to that rule book. It is the state minister who writes the rules for the smart meter rollout, which the Australian Energy Regulator implements, and the rollout, at least in some aspects, continues.

Just recently we saw SP AusNet seeking a change to the allowable revenue it can collect to roll out smart meters. Amazingly, when you scan this material it seems — although it is all clouded in very technical language — that SP AusNet signed a contract to

purchase some smart meters and then found that the price was about 70 per cent higher than what it had originally estimated. It came back to the regulator saying, 'Whoops-a-daisy! Could we please have some tens of millions of dollars extra to fund this?'. Of course, those tens of millions of dollars come from our electricity bills. This occurred earlier this year during the time of this government, and of course the ongoing price path for the rollout of smart meters is continuing for the period right up through 2015 now, where the regulator must also consider not only SP AusNet's one-off request but also the ongoing funding of this through our electricity bills.

In the *Herald Sun* of 7 April we saw the headline 'Power bills to jump another \$100 due to "smart meters" bungle'. Sure enough, when the newspaper refers to the AER's decision in its article it seems that that amount is exactly the amount that has been considered. The article states:

Australian Energy Regulator documents obtained by the *Herald Sun* show that electricity distributors forecast a \$1.24 billion hit on households to build and run the system between 2012 and 2015.

That comes on top of the \$1 billion it has already been permitted to charge all of us for the 2009–11 period, meaning the total cost of the project is now \$2.32 billion if it is given the extra money it has now requested from the AER. One industry source is even suggesting that this whole process of recovering the cost of smart meters could run out for a decade or more beyond that 2012–15 period that has now been exposed.

The article further states:

Victorian energy minister Michael O'Brien said the stark figures showed why the Baillieu government was reviewing the smart meter program.

'We will make a decision on the future of the program before the implementation of charges from 2012 onwards,' Mr O'Brien said.

He is running out of time. The initial submissions by the companies have already been put out there. That is what led to the *Herald Sun* article, and around about June the draft price path will be published. From then it will only be for the companies and others to provide submissions to that before the AER makes its final decision. Mr O'Brien has apparently told us that Victoria will make a submission to the AER's draft decision.

In the Victorian jurisdiction the Minister for Energy and Resources literally writes the rules under which the AER will decide how much we can be charged for

these things and how they will be rolled out. The AER goes along and does its job, as it is required to. The minister says that he will write a submission to the AER and give his opinion for consideration, operating under a rule book that he now has the power to rewrite as he sees fit. I find that a stunning abrogation of his executive responsibility. He has the levers in his hand; no-one else does. The department itself cannot influence these regulations, not even given the amount of noise that came out of the government on smart meters.

Returning to the statements from the minister's press release that the government would 'take an active role, rather than an observer role' and 'revise the technical specifications and cost recovery regulations', it had better get cracking because things are moving on without it! It is for that reason that my motion calls upon the minister to table the submissions that he may have made to the AER, if any. We may simply get a response that there have been no submissions. A submission may have been left until June, but in any case we will all be up for billions of dollars and any capacity for the minister to implement his stated policy, at least before 2015, will have simply been bypassed.

I am not going to put Mrs Peulich and Mr O'Donohue through the indignity of quoting back to them their own comments on smart meters. I am sure they remember them well. We might be interested to hear that the fate of farmers was canvassed frequently in the debate on the motion moved by Mr Vogels, so no doubt we are in a position to hear what the government's stance is on this, particularly how it intends to help any or all electricity users get out from underneath this decision that everybody admits has been a disaster in implementation. Only Peter Batchelor can take a fundamentally good idea like helping people have more information about their electricity use and turn it into such a term of derision across the landscape. The words 'smart meters' have now become their own self-encapsulating joke.

However, Peter Batchelor is gone and a new government has made some very specific promises. What I would like to hear from the government today is how it is rolling out these promises. It may be the government is working around the clock on them, it may be that it has been so busy on these promises that it has not even had time to put out a press release, or it may be that it is right now preparing changes to the regulations under the Electricity Industry Act 2000. In any case, we hope the documents that demonstrate all that will soon be presented to the house.

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — In his contribution Mr Barber sought to turn a simple request for documents into a policy motion about smart meters. The motion before us is very simple in its content and does not foreshadow debate about the topics he canvassed. As a consequence I do not propose to respond to those particular issues, save to say that I agree that Peter Batchelor's implementation of the smart meter program was hopeless and is a legacy issue which this government is dealing with.

Having said that, the government does not oppose the motion moved by Mr Barber. However, I make the point that the proposed tabling date for any documents that may be the subject of this debate is short — less than three weeks. The government will do all it can to respond in a prompt and timely fashion, but a three-week period is a short period, and I foreshadow that to Mr Barber.

I also note that Mr Barber seeks all submissions from the state of Victoria. Mr Barber's contribution was about submissions Mr O'Brien made but, as the minister, Mr O'Brien foreshadows that all submissions will be from the state of Victoria. I do not know whether there are other agencies or parts of the state of Victoria which may have some interplay with this, and indeed this may be cause for a search through different parts of the government, which may have some impact on the government's ability to respond in the time sought by this motion. However, in an effort to be diligent and respond to the house, the government will not oppose this motion. It will conduct a diligent search for the documents that Mr Barber is seeking, and subject to the usual caveats, it will supply them as soon as is practicable.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — The opposition will be supporting Mr Barber's motion, but I put on the record that on whichever side of the chamber we may have sat last year or this year, we respect that the government has some responsibility about cabinet-privileged documents and commercial confidentiality. We respect that.

To briefly touch on smart meters, I think a little bit has been lost in the history of smart meters. Smart meters were a Council of Australian Governments initiative when Mr Howard was the Prime Minister and the leader of COAG, and I think it was deemed that Victoria was probably the state best equipped to implement these smart meters. I note that Minister Wooldridge said that the Victorian government would trial a national disability support scheme. Good on her for doing that. It is similar to that. In saying that, we support the motion.

Motion agreed to.

ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference

Debate resumed from 6 April; motion of Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan):

That this house requires the Standing Committee on Economy and Infrastructure References Committee to inquire into, consider and report on the changes to the metropolitan train timetable which are proposed to commence on 8 May 2011 and that the committee present its final report to Parliament no later than 2 June 2011.

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — The government will not be supporting Mr Barber's motion. Mr Barber's motion requires the Standing Committee on Economy and Infrastructure References Committee to inquire into, consider and report on the changes to the metropolitan train timetable.

The previous government left a significant legacy for the new government to address and fix when it comes to the issue of public transport. I am pleased to see that, with some of the commitments made by the government in the budget yesterday, progress has already been made to fix some of these problems that were left behind. The budget provides: \$220 million for the immediate purchase of seven new trains as part of a broader commitment to 40 new trains; an additional \$100 million for maintenance over four years, making a total of \$900 million; and \$16.5 million towards removing level crossings at key locations and a range of other upgrades to different stations across the network.

Importantly, the budget also provides \$10 million over four years to establish the Victorian Public Transport Development Authority to provide an overarching authority for the management of our public transport network, and funding to examine the next generation of public transport infrastructure such as the Doncaster rail link, the feasibility study into a rail line to Rowville and a feasibility study into the Melbourne airport rail link, as well as \$3 million to start planning a direct rail link to Avalon Airport. These are exciting developments and a reflection of the importance the Baillieu government puts on public transport and the development of new public transport infrastructure, because there is no doubt that patronage on our public transport system will continue to grow and that that growth is placing pressure on the system and the network.

I note that the Economy and Infrastructure References Committee, of which Mr Barber is a member, received a significant reference on 5 April — not yet a month

ago — to look into a range of matters in relation to primary health and aged-care services. I would have thought discharging that reference would provide a significant challenge for that committee. I am surprised that as a member of that committee Mr Barber is seeking to load up the committee with another reference through this motion.

Mr Barber — We could do a quick reference.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Mr Barber interjects that it could be a quick reference. The issue of timetabling is not a simple one, it is a complex matter, and Mr Barber may have underestimated the volume of work and the challenges involved in properly discharging a reference such as this. As I said, the committee was given a significant reference not even a month ago to inquire into primary health and aged-care matters and that should be the highest priority and first order of the day for the committee.

In the adjournment debate last night Mr Lenders congratulated the Minister for Water, Mr Walsh, for facilitating a briefing and information for him as the shadow minister. That is a positive reflection of the way the government is approaching its responsibility to engage with the Parliament, community and members of the opposition.

Indeed in that vein I note that Mr Barber's colleague, Ms Hartland, has raised some issues in the past about the new train timetable. In an effort to be responsive to members of Parliament the Minister for Public Transport, Mr Mulder, in good faith facilitated, as requested by Ms Hartland, a delegation to meet with the minister and the department to discuss many of the issues Mr Barber no doubt wishes to prosecute in his contribution today and should his proposed reference be instated.

Mr Barber — What was the outcome?

Mr O'DONOHUE — Mr Barber asks about the outcome of the meeting. It is interesting that Ms Hartland has not communicated the outcome of that meeting to him.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr O'DONOHUE — I will respond to the interjection, through you, Acting President. Mr Barber asked what was the outcome of that meeting. Ms Hartland would not be able to inform Mr Barber of the outcome of that meeting because Ms Hartland did not bother to turn up. Ms Hartland sought to bring a delegation to meet with the minister to discuss the very issues that no doubt will be the subject of Mr Barber's

contribution but she did not bother to turn up. For the outcome of that meeting Mr Barber would have to seek the advice of the constituents that Ms Hartland sent to the meeting with the minister and the department.

Unfortunately Ms Hartland did not bother to turn up to that meeting. There are many ways in which — —

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Mr Barber may not like the answer to the question he has put but that is the reality of the situation. Ms Hartland did not even bother to turn up to a meeting that she had organised with the minister and the department to give her and her constituents a briefing on the changes to the new timetable. Mr Barber would be aware that the introduction of this new timetable is imminent — this Sunday — and as of Monday an additional 127 weekday services will have been added to the network. On the eve of the timetable's commencement it would be putting the cart before the horse to suggest that we refer this matter to a parliamentary committee for review.

The Parliament can legitimately form a view about these matters, but given that it is only a matter of days until the timetable begins, the government believes it is appropriate to wait until the timetable has commenced and see how it operates. I am sure Mr Barber and Ms Hartland will have views on how the new timetable operates, and the government would welcome any feedback about it. It is the eve of the introduction of this timetable; let us wait and see how it operates from this weekend.

I also make the point that many of the drivers which led to the new timetable came about as a result of contractual agreements between the previous government and the operator. Whilst Mr Pakula, as he has said in previous contributions on this issue — and members of the opposition are happy to get stuck into the Minister for Public Transport about the new timetable — the reality is that some of the issues and challenges around this new timetable have come about as a direct response to the contractual arrangements entered into by the previous government. For those reasons the government will be opposing Mr Barber's motion.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — The opposition will be supporting the motion moved by Mr Barber, but I would like to formally move an amendment to it. I move:

After 'to commence on 8 May 2011' insert 'and changes to regional train timetables'.

The proposed amendment will have a modest effect, and seeks to expand slightly the reference that is proposed to be given to the Economy and Infrastructure References Committee to include changes to train timetables for regional Victoria as well. There have been a number of significant timetable changes, and I do not think this radically expands the scope, but I ask that the amendment standing in my name be circulated, even though it is very brief.

Mr O'Donohue put on a brave front, but when we were debating this matter in the last sitting week I recall government members saying, 'No, no! We do not need to debate this now; there is no urgency about this whatsoever'. If ever there was a case for urgent consideration of a reference and a quick look into a very narrowly defined area by a committee to enable it to provide information to the Parliament and to the community about something quickly, this was it. The changes to the metropolitan timetable commence on 8 May. When Mr O'Donohue says today that there is not really much point going ahead with this now because it is almost 8 May, he is making an exact counterargument to the argument made by his colleagues in what I recall was a procedural debate about whether we should deal with this matter in the last sitting week or today. Government members are pretty keen to deal with it today, because they did not want to do it.

Mr David Davis, as Leader of the Government in this place, has previously expressed the great faith he has in the capacity of members of the Economy and Infrastructure References Committee. He has such faith that he has provided this committee with a significant and complex reference. Government members have made it clear they are not very interested in resourcing these committees, so how are we going to be able to deal with these kinds of matters? In spite of a stunning lack of resources available to upper house committees in the new committee structure, members of the opposition would welcome this reference, which has both a narrowly defined timetable and narrowly defined terms. It seems precisely the type of reference that those who were involved in the establishment of our new committee structure and the discussions leading to it in the last Parliament might have had in mind when they were going about establishing it.

It is early days — we are just short of the six-month mark of this Parliament — but it seems to me that the government is hell-bent on opposing anything its members did not think of themselves. Opposition members support a properly resourced and effective committee structure of which the Legislative Council and the Victorian Parliament can be proud. A great deal

of time and effort went into establishing the framework for our new committee structure. Although, as I said, it is early days, I hope the government starts to take it seriously both in respect of resources and of allowing the committees to do some of the work it was intended that these committees would do. I believe Mr Finn might be speaking on this motion shortly, so I invite him to shed some light on whether or not the government will be entertaining references to these committees that its members did not think of themselves.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Mr Finn's contribution to the debate will be on the motion and on Ms Pulford's amendment.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I thank you for that assistance, Acting President. I have a suspicion that the government will not be supporting either the motion or the amendment, which will not come as any great surprise to Mr Barber or Ms Pulford.

I would like to ask one question, which is: how much do members of this house know about running a railway? It seems to me that Mr Barber, and indeed Ms Pulford and a few of their other cronies over there, have adopted the view that we in this house — and in particular those of us who are members of the Economy and Infrastructure References Committee, of which I happen to be a member — know more about running a railway than those who actually have the job of doing it. To say the least, I find that a very strange attitude. I do not know why, and I am hoping Mr Barber might be able to tell us at some stage in the not-too-distant future why he thinks that way. I am fascinated to know why Mr Barber would think that members of Parliament — who might be lawyers or doctors or who might even have worked in radio — would know more about running a railway than the people who actually have the contract to run the railway.

Mr Barber — You mean Metro!

Mr FINN — Metro; yes, I am talking about Metro Trains Melbourne at the moment.

Mr Barber — You are talking about the Department of Transport.

Mr FINN — No, Metro runs the railway; that is the fact of the matter. I realise Mr Barber does not like privatisation and that he has some ideological hang-ups about anything that is not extremely red or green — or perhaps both in this particular case — but the bottom line is that Metro has the contract to run this railway. That is what it is here for. That consortium has been given the contract by the previous government, so one

can understand why Mr Barber and a few others may have some doubts, because anything the previous government did seems to be a bit dodgy. One would have to be aware of that.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr FINN — Let us face facts here. This debate is not about public transport, trains or, as Ms Pulford tried to tell us, the committee system in this house. This motion and this debate are all about playing politics, predominantly in the western suburbs. Out in the west there have been some changes to services on the Altona line. Ms Hartland has seen a political opportunity.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr FINN — Mr Barber has to remember that Ms Hartland just scraped in by the skin of her teeth at the last election. For weeks we thought she was gone, but to the disappointment of many she got back in. She has seen an opportunity to run a blatantly political campaign that will provide no benefit to the local people. That is despite the fact that she — and I understand this is true of Mr Barber as well — received exactly the same briefing from the Department of Transport that Mr Elsbury and I received. In fact I think they may have received that briefing before we did. They should be totally on top of this. They should be aware of the importance of contracts and of what breaking the contract would do to the railway system in this state. They should be fully aware of the potential damage to the finances of the state if we told Metro that we know more about running a railway than it does. It is absolute and total nonsense.

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr FINN — You will have to have another shower if you are not careful, Mr Leane, if there is any soap left — I am not sure.

Mr Elsbury and I have spoken to the department and have had representatives of the department speak at public meetings in Altona — —

Mr Barber — No.

Mr FINN — We have had representatives of Metro speak at public meetings in Altona. The argument is clear, and it seems pretty fair — —

Mr Tee interjected.

Mr FINN — You have not been to Altona, Mr Tee, so you would not know. You would not know where

Altona was if I beat you around the ears with a *Melway* — and a bloke is tempted, I can tell you that.

According to Metro — and I am in no position to argue — these changes have been made to make the services more reliable. It is all very well on paper to have a train running every 10 minutes, but if it is not running in reality, it does not matter.

Mr Tee interjected.

Mr FINN — Mr Tee is cackling away like a demented hyena. I ask him to put himself in the situation of somebody in Altona who looks at their timetable on a Wednesday afternoon and says, ‘There is a train leaving in 5 minutes; I had better go down and get it’. They get down to the train station at 4.20 p.m. and they stand and wait. It is cold and windy, as it sometimes is in Altona. Then it starts to rain, and then it starts to rain even more heavily, and they are still waiting for the train. There is no train at 4.20 p.m., at 4.25 p.m. or at 4.45 p.m. Five o’clock comes and there is still no train. It does not matter that it is on the timetable; if there is no train, it might as well not be on the timetable. That is what it is all about.

These changes are about telling people when trains will actually be there, not about having a lend of people as we saw under the previous government on so many occasions. Whenever it got into trouble it just told Connex, the then operator, to stick another train on the timetable, whether that train service existed or not.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr FINN — It is a bit like a few other areas we might be getting into in the next week or so. The previous government, which controlled the public transport system up until relatively recently, had absolutely no regard for the truth. That is the bottom line. All it was worried about was spin — numbers on pieces of paper that it called a timetable. Whether the actual trains came did not matter to it, but it matters to us.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr FINN — That is what I was intimating, Mr Ondarchie, as a matter of fact, but I fear that if I get onto the crime statistics, we might be here all night, so I do not want to do that.

We on this side of the house have been accused by Ms Hartland and some of her friends of cutting services for political reasons. Apart from the fact that that is totally illogical, I am not sure what the point of that would be. It makes no sense. Members have to

remember that at last year’s election the Liberal vote in Western Metropolitan Region went from 91 000 to 124 000 — an increase of over one-third of the vote in 2006. We were elected — we came to government. Why would we turn around and give the people who voted for us a good kicking?

Mr Tee interjected.

Mr FINN — That is something you would do, Mr Tee, and it makes no sense at all — none whatsoever. It is ludicrous to come into this place and say that the people who are charged with running the railways do not know what they are doing and that we know better than they do. It makes no sense at all. This motion is purely and blatantly political. It will not help anything at all. What could referring a timetable to a parliamentary committee possibly achieve when Metro has already put so much effort into it over 18 months? I beg the opposition and the Greens to keep politics out of this.

I want a reliable train service everywhere — particularly in the western suburbs — but we have got to stop playing games, and that is what we are doing here today in debating this motion. We are playing games and it is a total nonsense. Let Metro do its job and let this Parliament do its job, because the two are very different.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — First of all, I have absolutely no problem with Ms Pulford’s amendment. It is automatic when the government introduces a timetable to change metropolitan trains in the south and west that that leads to some changes to all the other lines, including the V/Line services that go through them.

The train inquiry which was held under the previous government — the one that Mr O’Donohue was such an enthusiastic advocate for and participant in — found that there was very little coordination between V/Line and the then contractor, Connex. The role of the government in bringing the two together was equally unclear. We would have automatically considered the matters that Ms Pulford now wants to add. For that reason I have no problem with the amendment being added.

As we have heard from the government today, it is not going to support or allow any such inquiry. It was a big fan of getting to the bottom of what was wrong with our train system when it was in opposition, but now we hear it say, ‘Let’s take the politics out of this. Let’s leave it to the experts. Let’s shut down this inquiry.’

Mr Finn — Let's break the contract; let's rip up the contract, because that is what you want to do. You want to rip up the contract.

Mr BARBER — Mr Finn talks about the contract — —

Mr Finn — That is what you want to do.

Mr BARBER — Unlike Mr Finn, I suspect, I have read the contract. Has Mr Finn read the contract?

Mr Finn — Not recently.

Mr BARBER — Mr Finn has not read the contract recently, by which he means he has not read the recently created contract. If Mr Finn had taken advantage of this opportunity, perhaps late at night when nothing else was going on and he was having a bout of insomnia, he could have read the relevant section of the contract where it determines — —

Mr Finn — And that would have cured it.

Mr BARBER — It may very well have worked better than warm milk in sending Mr Finn off to sleep when there are frustrations in his life that are keeping him up at night. I think that is due mainly to the changed position of Mr Finn now being in government. It is that which is the bane of Mr Finn's existence at the moment, although not as much as it is for his more precariously placed cousin, Mr Elsbury, who is slightly less electorally secure in the western suburbs than Mr Finn.

From memory, I think it is section 14.7 of the contract in which there is a clearly laid out procedure which details how to deal with timetable changes proposed by Metro Trains Melbourne. One of the exercises that Metro has to go through in order to propose a timetable change is the preparation of a passenger impact statement. We have not seen a passenger impact statement for this timetable change. We can look at the timetable and understand its impact on passengers to some extent, but we do not know what Metro or the government thinks will be the impact on passengers in Altona and all through the west and south.

In a separate and parallel matter of business being dealt with in the house we asked the government to table that passenger impact statement. This commenced months ago, as did this motion, and yet we have not seen it. It is a pretty simple document. The contract requires it to be prepared. Parliament has requested that it be tabled. We have not seen it, yet the timetable starts on Sunday. The impact on commuters will be felt this coming Monday. If the government knows what the passenger impact

will be in Altona or anywhere else in which Mr Finn is interested, it is not sharing it with us.

I will be out there at Richmond station on Monday morning around peak hour looking for people getting off the Glen Waverley and Frankston lines, who will also be impacted by this timetable change. The people of Mount Waverley and all down the Frankston line, as Mr Elsbury would be aware, not only switched their votes from Labor to Liberal, they actually delivered government to the Liberals. They have been rewarded for this with cuts to services. There may be a different rationale for Altona, but I do not know what it is.

Mr O'Donohue was quite mean to my good friend Ms Hartland when he said she welsed on going to a briefing with Mr Mulder. Let us talk about what actually happened. When this timetable was released with no public consultation or discussion of the passenger impact statement — it was strategically leaked by the Minister for Public Transport when he found it had been left in his in-tray by the previous government — we did what we always do in the Greens; we let the public know what was about to happen to them. That led to a public meeting in Altona which attracted a couple of hundred people. A subsequent public meeting attracted 500 people. The people of Altona have been used to fighting for services on the Altona loop. They have also been putting up with substandard service on the Altona loop with many cancellations for a very long time.

Mr Finn — That is why he is planning to fix the timetable.

Mr BARBER — Mr Finn says he does not understand timetables, and yet he tells us what the problem is and its solution. He assures us that this is the answer. He does not want the inquiry.

After that second meeting we got the attention of the local Liberal members and the minister. A little event was held outside the ministerial office where a whole bunch of citizens from Altona gathered. The minister quite kindly agreed to meet four people — he said he would not meet everybody but he would meet four people. Ms Hartland, as one would expect, wanted to give the community the opportunity to deal with the minister without the political overlay of another politician from a different party being in on that meeting, and it was better to have four residents than three residents and one Greens politician. Ms Hartland stayed outside with the remainder of the crowd — 50 people — while that meeting happened. Ms Hartland did not welsch on anything; she was the only one who was willing to tell the community about a bunch of

changes that were happening which they had not been told about. The first they would have heard about it would have been when Metro released leaflets to people saying this change is coming.

To go back to the contract, which Mr Finn and, I suspect, Mr Elsbury have not read and do not want to read, there is a very detailed process that Metro has to go through when it proposes a timetable change. It has to look at the passenger impacts and the financial impacts, which are both the cost of the new timetable and any impact on the fines and incentives that Metro might end up paying — or not paying. It also has to look at the impact on reliability.

Mr Finn says this is all about reliability. Reliability is a worthy aim when it comes to the trains. We have seen it in decline in the last five months; we have seen it decline quite rapidly, and we have seen Metro out there blaming the drivers.

Mr Finn — That only happened under the Liberals? When the Liberals got in the trains fell apart. Is that right? Is that what Mr Barber is telling us?

Mr BARBER — If Mr Finn is interested in trains, he could look at reliability and the number of cancellations over many years. I initiated an inquiry into trains under the previous government, and I am now initiating another one on this aspect of the train system under this government. Metro is out there blaming the drivers, and the minister, in a very good imitation of a former Minister for Public Transport, Lynne Kosky, is saying, 'Industrial relations — don't ask me; I don't know what's going on'. The Premier, in a very good imitation of Lynne Kosky is saying, 'It's Metro's job to sort out its own industrial relations. I wouldn't know whether it is train drivers who are causing a catastrophic reduction in punctuality in a short period or whether it is something else'.

The Acting President might be interested to go back and have a read of the transcript of that parliamentary inquiry into trains and some of the information that came out during that inquiry, because the more believable of the proffered excuses that both Labor and Liberal governments put out as to why the trains are not running turn out to be not the dominant causes; they are just the ones they think the public will accept; hence the need, seemingly, for a continuous series of inquiries into the train system.

Looking at the train timetable involves not just looking at the timetable. It feeds directly into some of the issues around the regional rail link and the different sorts of expenditure that have been proffered or claimed to be

essential. If you are not getting the best out of your existing rail system and timetable and then you have your hand out for billions of dollars to expand its capacity, you could really be doing Victoria a disservice and, as we know, money is tight. Nobody is denying money is tight in the budget that has just been brought down, so it would be important to get to the bottom of whether there is any spare capacity in the system and whether the timetable in relation to the trains squeezes as much juice as it can out of the existing system. What Metro and the government told me in my meeting with them is that the timetable that has been presented, which is for the western and southern groups of lines, reflects the fact that those lines are now maxed out. We cannot squeeze any more trains onto those lines.

While the previous government might have been willing to accept the advice of its department, which it seems actually comes from Metro — because if I agree with Mr Finn about anything, it is that expertise is in short supply when it comes to running trains in the state of Victoria — if this government is willing to accept that advice, then it is going to find itself in a lot of trouble. First of all, come Monday, people on the Glen Waverley line are going to find out that their morning peak hour trains do not go through the city loop any more and another 10 or 12 minutes has effectively been added to their journey. People on the Frankston line who travel between peak times are going to find out the same thing. Fortunately the people of Altona, those most impacted by this timetable change, found out well and truly in advance and in time to have a chance to do something about it. These timetable changes are then going to roll out around the rest of the clock face. The government has kind of disclosed — not publicly, but it has told us as MPs — that it is going to review all of the lines in sequence over coming years, so this adjustment to the timetable is going to roll out to the Belgrave, Lilydale, Greensborough, Epping and Upfield lines and so forth.

There cannot really be a matter of bigger public interest than the operation of public transport in Melbourne. Nobody would come in here and say it is a small issue. I have argued that this timetable is the nexus of all the issues that are going on in our train system and certainly our public transport system, including right out to regional areas, because they share the same tracks as Metro trains. Nobody would argue that this is not a major issue. If you understand what is going on with our public transport, you understand that the timetable is the linchpin. In at least one area, the sacrificial lamb of Altona, people have become aware.

Citizens of Frankston — —

Mr Elsbury interjected.

Mr BARBER — In response to Mr Elsbury, who is now joining in the debate, I went to the briefings and saw the material that Metro eventually put forward to the public after Ms Hartland organised her second public meeting. What it was saying was, ‘We have to do this to the Altona line to benefit the other lines’. The answer was, ‘You have to take one for the team’. Reliability is good for citizens, but it is also really good for Metro, because it pays fines when it is not reliable. When you look through the proposed timetables you see it is not about increased frequency of services, it is about — —

Mr Elsbury — Phantom trains is your answer.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — As I said, Mr Elsbury, cancellations and delayed trains were a pretty major problem for the previous government. For whatever reason, whether it is its legacy or as a result of government intervention, in the first part of Mr Elsbury’s government Metro services have been in decline. They have declined further — quite dramatically, actually. The government may have some amazing plan to fix the system. Last week it was the timetable; this week it is the drivers. It is a never-ending rolling set of excuses, which only a parliamentary inquiry can get to the bottom of.

There is no doubt that Metro’s big focus is on reliability, and it has achieved that at the expense of frequency. It has further reduced services, which has significantly added to journey times to some key areas, including Altona, Glen Waverley and down along the Frankston line. You can see why Metro would do that. It is a private operator. It does not operate for the optimum benefit of the public but for its own optimum profit. The department’s role, with the minister at the top, is to ensure that the public gets the best deal.

The documents set out in my other motion, which I requested some time ago and which have not been provided, would have shown us exactly that. If those documents were on the table, we would not be having this argument. It would not be my opinion versus that of Mr Finn. We would be looking at what these documents say about passenger impacts and whether Metro will be able to improve its viability; whether these changes are necessary, what they are costing and whether in fact the timetable in those areas is maxed out; and whether the infrastructure can carry any more trains, because it is a lot cheaper to squeeze extra trains into a timetable than it is to spend \$6 billion on extra tracks. It is going to be a lot cheaper, and that was canvassed by the previous parliamentary inquiry, which

included the non-government parties which then included the Liberal Party.

If you understand the history of rail privatisation in Victoria, and there have been three goes at it now — the third time unlucky — you will understand that this all makes perfect sense. Metro is a self-serving entity serving up something that optimises its profits but does not necessarily maximise the public good.

We have heard that the parliamentary inquiry is not going to get up. Do government members really think that is the end of it? Whether or not we have an inquiry, the experience of the citizens come the Monday morning commute is going to be the same. We can try to get to the bottom of the causes. We can try to do our jobs. We can unpack this thing and ask some questions about it, but either way citizens get the same level of service. The real question is whether in subsequent budgets the government brings down it is going to get the best value out of the public transport system.

So far the record is that it gets served a prepackaged meal by the department. The government says, ‘We’ve got no choice; we’ve got to sign off on this’. We talk about the contract, but we do not say which section of the contract, because we have not read it. Then the Minister for Public Transport just ticks the box. Within a month of taking over, his department gives him advice and he comes out and says, ‘I am just doing it because it is my department’s advice’. He does not say it is a great timetable. He does not say it is a great process. He does not say that he cannot do anything about it. That is more about Mr Finn, who is out there freelancing and saying, ‘The Labor Party made us’. What would one predict from that pattern? If that is the Minister for Public Transport’s attitude to his job in his first month, what can we predict will happen over the next four years?

For every 1 per cent increase in morning peak patronage, we need to add an extra train to the morning timetable; they are just the statistics of it. A train carries about 800 people, so if you get 1 per cent growth in morning peak hour patronage, you need to add an extra train. It has been nothing for patronage to grow by 10 per cent or 20 per cent over a few short years, and yet I have been told by Metro that this timetable is it; it is all over. We cannot squeeze any more trains into the west or the south unless we spend \$6 billion on the regional rail link. The citizens of Altona have been told that if they want an extra train on the Altona line, it will cost \$6 billion. My proposition is: let us have an inquiry and get to the bottom of it. Can we really run some more trains? What is the process we need to go through?

Mr Finn — What would parliamentarians know about running trains?

Mr BARBER — For that matter, Mr Finn, I do not know a lot about federal-state relations when it comes to health funding, but we have a dirty big reference that we have to deal with on that one, and I am sure at the end of —

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr BARBER — You would be amazed how much I have picked up on the subject of rail timetabling in the last two months, and I am going to learn a lot more about health funding when we do our next reference.

I question what Department of Transport bureaucrats know about running a railroad. In fact, the reason I think we have this problem is because over time the technical ability to run a railroad has been lost from the state of Victoria. When Metro arrived in Victoria it replaced 12 managers. Everybody else in the Department of Transport and everybody else working on the railroad stayed exactly where they were, and 12 managers were brought in. One of those managers, Andrew Lezala, was soon promoted from the job of CEO — and it is pretty hard to be promoted once you are a CEO — to the job of stakeholder relations. Someone from the department was sent over to do his old job, which was to run the railroad, and his job was to deal with the stakeholders — in other words, us. When you are running a privatised railroad — when you are in effect granted a monopoly by the government and when you really only have to compete for that once — stakeholder management is the most important part.

Back in the 1920s the guy who ran Victoria's railroads said that running a railroad was 10 per cent machine and 90 per cent men, and I believe that is equally true today.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr BARBER — It was back in the 1920s, Mrs Peulich. That is what he said, and I believe that is still the case today despite modern technology and the rest of it. It is actually the expertise in running a railroad that is missing.

This government is in the same trap as the last government. It will sign off on whatever the department gives it. The department and Metro are on a self-sustaining axis of incompetence. Basically they are there to protect each other, and the users of the passenger rail line do not really get a look in.

Nevertheless, that is what the next four years are going to be about.

Mr Finn is much less entertaining than he used to be when he was in opposition. It is fundamentally the same act, but it is just not funny any more because he is in government. He was good in opposition; he was a good attack dog. But in government it just does not work; he has nobody to attack. You can run, but you cannot hide; that is the point. So far government members have voted down every proposal for an inquiry into their government. They were great fans of such inquiries when they were in opposition, but now they are voting them all down. It means the Parliament does not get to examine the issues using its formal processes, but it does not mean the issue does not get examined. Everybody is out there. They are using the trains, and come Monday morning they are going to experience it.

We will see how things go. There is no question about this continuing to be a major issue, so the government will not change that just by talking it down. The citizenry might never find out exactly how it is that they have been let down in this way, with performance declining even in recent months. The pressure is up. We will only need an oil shock, a post-global financial crisis increase in growth or some of the other factors that put Connex and Ms Kosky in their place, and the government will be in equally as big a hole. I think it is right on the lip of the hole, even if it does not understand it. I look forward to further debates on this topic.

House divided on amendment:

Ayes, 17

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

Noes, 19

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
Drum, Mr	Petrovich, Mrs
Elsbury, Mr	Peulich, Mrs (<i>Teller</i>)
Finn, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Ramsay, Mr
Guy, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Koch, Mr	

Pairs

Darveniza, Ms
Hartland, Ms

Hall, Mr
Atkinson, Mr

Amendment negatived.**House divided on motion:***Ayes, 17*

Barber, Mr
Broad, Ms
Eideh, Mr
Elasmar, Mr
Jennings, Mr
Leane, Mr
Lenders, Mr (*Teller*)
Mikakos, Ms
Pakula, Mr (*Teller*)

Pennicuik, Ms
Pulford, Ms
Scheffer, Mr
Somyurek, Mr
Tarlamis, Mr
Tee, Mr
Tierney, Ms
Viney, Mr

Noes, 19

Coote, Mrs
Crozier, Ms
Dalla-Riva, Mr (*Teller*)
Davis, Mr D.
Davis, Mr P.
Drum, Mr
Elsbury, Mr
Finn, Mr
Guy, Mr (*Teller*)
Koch, Mr

Kronberg, Mrs
Lovell, Ms
O'Brien, Mr
O'Donohue, Mr
Ondarchie, Mr
Petrovich, Mrs
Peulich, Mrs
Ramsay, Mr
Rich-Phillips, Mr

Pairs

Darveniza, Ms
Hartland, Ms

Hall, Mr
Atkinson, Mr

Motion negatived.

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Reference

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house acknowledges that, as a result of the prorogation of the 56th Parliament, the Environment and Natural Resources Committee was unsuccessful in producing a report into the environmental effects statement processes in Victoria and therefore this house again requires the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, utilising the evidence it previously gathered in the 56th Parliament, to inquire into, consider and report by 1 September 2011 on the environmental effects statement processes in Victoria, including the operation of the Environment Effects Act 1978, and in particular —

- (a) any weaknesses in the current system, including poor environmental outcomes, excessive costs and unnecessary delays encountered through the process and its mechanisms;
- (b) community and industry consultation under the act;

- (c) the independence of environmental effects examination when government is the proponent; and
- (d) how better environmental outcomes can be achieved more quickly and predictably and with a reduction in unnecessary costs.

Without canvassing too much of the content, this is a procedural matter but one with some decisions for the Parliament to make. In the last Parliament the Environment and Natural Resources Committee commenced an inquiry into the Environment Effects Act 1978. It heard from witnesses and took evidence, but it did not manage to complete its reference before the election was called and that Parliament came to an end. What I am putting to the house is that we provide a reference to the same committee to complete the reference that the previous version of the committee started.

This procedure is routine. The Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 provides for the committee to self-reference. The same act requires the minister to send a reference through the Governor in Council, but as neither of those actions have been forthcoming I am moving this motion in the Council. I hope, given the work that was done by the previous version of the Environment and in Natural Resources Committee and the fact that it had gone most of the way through its reference, save for the writing up and conclusions part of its job, the house will support this motion, or the government will in some other way facilitate this inquiry being completed so that all the work of that former committee and the time of those witnesses who appeared before the committee and wrote submissions will not have been wasted.

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — The government has indicated to the Greens in discussions, and I am happy to indicate this to the house, that it does not oppose Mr Barber's motion and is happy for this matter to be dealt with by the committee. It need not have come through via a motion, but now it has we will not be opposing it.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — The opposition will be supporting Mr Barber's motion.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I thank the house for its support and look forward to the completion of this reference. It will mean that for the next four years of this Parliament we will not be able to say that the government opposed all inquiries that we moved in this house, because it has just supported one.

Hon. M. J. Guy — One is better than none!

Mr BARBER — One is better than none; I agree with that absolutely, as a matter of mathematical fact if nothing else, but we will see how many more times I am on my feet discussing the same matter. I sincerely thank all members of the house, particularly those of the government, for supporting me in this matter.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Auditor-General: *Facilitating Renewable Energy Development*

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's 2011 report entitled *Facilitating Renewable Energy Development*.

Mr Pearson, the Auditor-General of the state of Victoria, has delivered another report to the Parliament of Victoria. I know this is a little in another direction, but I must state that I am amazed by the energy of Mr Pearson and the leadership through which he inspires his staff. The number of reports that they produce based on in-depth investigations is proof of how the former Labor government made the right decision in appointing him to his post.

But do any of these reports sink in for our political opponents? This report will be controversial because it looks at renewable energy. While the Labor Party believes in renewable energy, I am not sure that the government does. Government members certainly argue against climate change and everything associated with it. The Premier, despite making positive statements about climate change some two years ago, has pulled back now that he is in government.

However, we have to consider the basics behind this report. While most of our current energy supplies are derived from fossil fuels — from oil and from coal — they are running out. Whether or not you believe in the theory of peak oil, which argues that we have already passed the halfway mark of world oil supplies, clearly the oil supply is not endless. Similarly, coal supplies are not endless. Putting aside the issues of clean coal, of pollution and such, coal will eventually run out. Renewable energy must therefore be considered as viable, and the former Labor government was heading solidly in that direction with solar energy, wind-powered energy, methane gas produced from waste, hydroelectricity and geothermal energy. To quote from the Auditor-General's report:

Renewable energy research and development projects, and state-funded projects aimed at developing new technologies have been generally well managed by the responsible

agencies. These projects have contributed positively to developing the capability required to generate renewable energy.

This is evidence of how well Labor managed this critical area for our future and for the future of our children. Of course it could all have been much better, and the report identifies a number of external factors that prevented a higher degree of utilisation of these alternative energies.

I again quote from the report:

In July 2010 the then government established additional renewable energy generation targets. Through ... *Taking Action for Victoria's Future — Victorian Climate Change White Paper* ... a commitment was made to increase Victoria's electricity supply from large-scale solar power to 5 per cent by 2020 ...

The then government also committed to the Victorian large-scale solar feed-in tariff — a fixed financial payment per unit of electricity produced or sold by eligible generators, over a fixed period of time — as an incentive for private sector investment.

Yet the Labor government met with opposition from those on the other side of this house regarding wind power, a proven and cost-effective form of energy that is environmentally successful and worthy of expansion — as are all of the other areas of renewable energy. If we failed as a government, it was in not pushing harder with these alternatives to oil and to coal.

I have lost count of how many times I have heard someone say something along the lines that the future is something that we borrow from our children and that it is up to us to return it to them in at least as good a condition as it was given to us, if not better. This report reminds us that we must all do more, much more, with respect to alternative energy. The responsibility for the future is in our collective hands.

Auditor-General: *Facilitating Renewable Energy Development*

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to give my account of the Victorian Auditor-General's report *Facilitating Renewable Energy Development* of April 2011. The Victorian Auditor-General reports that efforts to increase the proportion of electricity generated from renewable sources in this state have not been effective. That is no surprise given that that regime was presided over by the former Labor government. Those efforts have not been effective even though total renewable energy generation has actually increased.

Two measures have failed to measure up. Neither the setting of renewable energy targets nor the

establishment of investment incentives have delivered the expected results. Clearly the Labor Party has not got a clue when it comes to talking to people about ushering in an investment regime. These failings are proof positive of that. Unfortunately the volume of renewable energy presently generated falls well short of expectations and growth in the state's capacity to generate renewable energy is not on track to meet future targets.

Furthermore, the Victorian Auditor-General has seen the need to emphasise the following brutal fact: that the failure to achieve targets is a direct result of poor planning on the part of the former Labor government in this state. The lack of a documented needs assessment, which was a signature failing of the former Labor government, and the simple lack of a business case, which is another classic failing of Labor, be it federal or state — Labor cannot configure or direct the composition of a business case — have directly impacted on large-scale solar projects that have been funded out of the public purse to the tune of a gargantuan \$150 million. Labor was short of the target and without a business case.

Frankly this report highlights cringe-worthy conduct on the part of the former state government. The next high-profile failing, the Victorian large-scale solar feed-in tariff, was sabotaged by a limited analysis of associated costs and benefits, which again illustrates the gap in the accountability framework for considering and approving off-budget initiatives involving significant economic costs to consumers. None of us should tolerate any further bleating on the part of the state opposition about the cost of living to consumers, because it had scant regard for the cost of access to power to heat and light homes in this state.

Back in the heady days of 2002, in its *Sustainable State* election statement, the former government said with respect to the targets that it would increase the share of Victoria's electricity consumption that comes from renewable resources from 4 per cent to 10 per cent by 2010. Guess what? That date, just like everything else, had to be extended. In fact it was extended to 2016. That policy was to facilitate the development and construction of up to 100 megawatts of wind energy facilities in environmentally acceptable locations throughout Victoria by 2006. It is amazing. The Labor government's new horizon was set a decade beyond the targets envisaged in 2002. What a lot of hyperbole and what a lot of nonsense that the people of the state of Victoria fell for in 2002.

The Victorian Auditor-General stresses the simple fact that relying on setting targets to facilitate the

development of renewable energy has now proven to be ineffective. The emphasis that I have placed on matters in my speech on the report is interesting. For the benefit of the house, I have to say that I think that my speech is in stark contrast to that made by the preceding member, Mr Eideh, who cherry picked elements that could be spun into something resembling something positive against a background of constant failure.

Back in 2002, when these targets were set for Victoria's share of electricity generated by renewable resources such as wind, biomass, hydro-electric and solar sources, the percentage of Victoria's electricity consumption of renewable resources was 3.6 per cent. However, seven years later, in 2009, that figure had only nudged up to 3.9 per cent. In the halcyon days of the Labor government — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Eideh) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Auditor-General: *Problem-solving Approaches to Justice*

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to make a statement on the report of the Auditor-General entitled *Problem-solving Approaches to Justice*. I would like congratulate the Auditor-General on his work in reviewing this important part of our justice framework. No discussion of this report would be complete without a discussion of the process that was undertaken to set up the programs that support the problem-solving approach to justice.

This was debated in part back in July and August 2006 in both houses when there was a bill before the Parliament to create the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC). The bill was opposed by the Liberal Party at that time and some very interesting contributions were made. Dr Napthine, now the Minister for Ports, described the Neighbourhood Justice Centre as the 'apartheid of the justice system' in Victoria. A lot of members thought that contribution was somewhat over the top, but it was trumped in this place by Mr Dalla-Riva, who is now the Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and the Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade. He was even more measured than Dr Napthine. Amongst other things he called the bill 'tokenism', 'stupidity', 'madness', 'a left-wing little joke jaunt', 'dumb' and 'left-wing ideology'.

Mr Barber — Is there anything else in the lexicon after that?

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — It was quite lengthy, but I just pulled out the most interesting and entertaining bits of Mr Dalla-Riva's contribution. The problem for those who opposed the creation of the Neighbourhood Justice Centre is that in this report the Auditor-General has found that it has actually worked. Both the Neighbourhood Justice Centre, which is in the city of Yarra, and the Court Integrated Services Program (CISP), which is based in Melbourne, Sunshine and the Latrobe Valley, are, according to the Attorney-General, doing what they were meant to do and that which the previous government believed that they would do.

To take the house to some of the findings of the Auditor-General, the report states that:

Both NJC and CISP have shown positive indications of achieving their client and community outcomes. Each program supported its intended client groups and provided high-quality reports to the judiciary to assist in their decision making.

Both NJC and the CISP showed positive indications of reducing reoffending.

Minister Dalla-Riva might think that is all just lefty tokenism, but I would have thought that if you were really interested in enhancing community safety, then the notion of reducing reoffending was pretty important.

Whilst some members of the government might persist in their view, they seem to have lost the Attorney-General along the journey, because the day after the Auditor-General released this report the Attorney-General said the Koori Court, the Drug Court and the Neighbourhood Justice Centre were all safe. We have seen funding for the CISP in the budget. Unfortunately for Minister Dalla-Riva and Dr Napthine it seems that the lefty stupidity is about to spread because the Attorney-General is quoted as having said on the day he announced that those programs were going to continue that the government is 'looking to identify successful elements of the Neighbourhood Justice Centre and other specialist court lists which can be taken and implemented more widely'. Not only is the Neighbourhood Justice Centre going to survive, but the lefty tokenism about which Mr Dalla-Riva complained looks like it is about to spread more widely. I am not sure where that leaves the minister; he might have to get out of Dodge.

In closing I want to congratulate the Auditor-General on this report that says that the specialist courts are making a positive contribution to justice in this state.

Auditor-General: *Effectiveness of Small Business Victoria's Support Programs*

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report entitled *Effectiveness of Small Business Victoria Support Programs*, and I am pleased to do so. I come from a family of small business operators and have also worked in small business during part of my career. Victoria's economy is a very large contributor to the overall Australian economy, and small business contributes significantly to that. Australia has an economy worth approximately \$1.3 trillion, and Victoria's small business sector makes up about 8 per cent of that. I think that is significant to this state. In the audit summary on page 7 the report states that:

The small business sector makes a vital contribution to the state's economy. There are over 470 000 small businesses which account for 96 per cent of all businesses ... It is estimated that the sector accounts for 35 per cent of the gross state product.

The top five sectors with the greatest number of small businesses are property and business services; construction; retail; agriculture, forestry and fishing; and finance and insurance, but the sector as a whole is extremely diverse, as we know, with nearly 30 per cent being regionally based. This is important to the future growth of this state. Small businesses comprise by far the largest proportion of businesses in regional Victoria, and they contribute enormously to export markets, local economies in those areas and certainly to the social cohesion of towns in regional and rural areas.

The report goes on to state:

Small Business Victoria (SBV), a branch within the Department of Business and Innovation (DBI), previously the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, provides advocacy for small businesses and develops strategies to address issues impacting on the small business environment.

The audit summary states:

In August 2006, *Time to Thrive* (TTT), the \$98 million small business policy statement, outlined the overall framework to support the sector. Various departments and agencies across government were involved in the delivery and implementation of TTT programs —

of which there were eight.

The agencies across government involved in delivering those various programs had a number of key themes including skilling small business for growth, more time for business, cutting the cost of doing business, eChange workshops, and Energy Enterprise.

This government certainly supports small business. It understand the many constraints that are placed on small businesses and the imposts they face on a day-to-day basis. Small business people in rural and regional Victoria cannot always attend metropolitan Melbourne programs, including some of the programs highlighted in the audit summary. I am pleased to see that as part of this government's recognition and understanding of some of those constraints on small business the Minister for Innovation, Services and Small Business addressed this issue earlier in the year by announcing the small business Mobile Business Centre program. It offers free business advice, mentoring and face-to-face assistance for small businesses both in metropolitan Melbourne and throughout rural and regional Victoria.

On page viii the report highlights that while the support programs were well-received, participation rates were low. I have some concerns about these participation rates. On page 13 the report states that less than 6 per cent of small businesses actually access the workshops, seminars, festivals and mentoring services. Small business people do not often have a lot of time to close their businesses and attend festivals. They are usually more focused on delivering services to their customers and keeping their businesses operational and viable.

What is particularly concerning with this report is the lack of business case analysis undertaken in a number of programs. In addition, the number of reviews of these programs undertaken in a four-year period totalled 21. It seems to me there is a theme of continual reviews of process in relation to these programs.

As I said, this government is very committed to small businesses. We want to be able to let them get on and do what they need to do rather than undertaking various reviews into programs. We want to give them support programs, such as those announced by the Minister for Innovation, Services and Small Business, and allow those business operators to undertake their business and get on with their lives.

We have been listening to the concerns of small businesses. We have received feedback, and part of that was in relation to the increasingly complex and costly regulation of doing business in Victoria. That is why this government is acting upon — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Eideh) —
Order! Time!

Budget sector: midyear financial report 2010–11

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — It is now the dramatic occasion of rising to speak on the 2010–11 midyear financial report, incorporating the quarterly financial report no. 2, which was tabled in Parliament in March and has 'Kim Wells, Treasurer' written on the bottom.

I rise to speak on this report which is a report on the first six months of the financial year, five months of which were under the stewardship of the Brumby government and one month of which was under the stewardship of the Baillieu government. It is an interesting report that is appropriately printed in black, because it quite clearly shows the state's finances are in the black. It is an interesting report because of the debate and the spin that has been coming from the government's media unit in the lead-up to the state budget. It is worth seeing the last document put out before the budget, and the state was under the jurisdiction of the Labor government for 83 per cent of the time that it covers. It is interesting to see what this document says.

Firstly, it is worth noting that five months into this document, when the Baillieu government was sworn in, Mr Baillieu made it quite clear that 'the state's finances were in sound shape'. That is what he said at the start of December when he had been briefed by the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Treasury and Finance on the state's finances. It is worth noting that the midyear financial report shows that there was a surplus going forward and that debt was going down at that time as part of the previous government's strategy. We know at that stage that GST revenue, which was an 84 per cent return when Labor was elected to office in 1999, had gone up to over 90 per cent, primarily through the work of John Brumby as Treasurer. He was not just speaking a bit of rhetoric; he was going to the Commonwealth Grants Commission and arguing line by line, detail by detail, how to improve Victoria's position. He got us up from the 84 per cent GST return that we had under Jeff Kennett to over 90 per cent through hard work, understanding the situation and finding ways to get things from the federal government.

We also saw at the time of the global financial crisis that there was a budget statement — the midyear financial report — which showed payroll tax performing well. That is a reflection of job numbers performing well under the previous government, which had a strong financial position. It is worth noting that the foundations of this particular report were laid at a time when there was a vision for where the state should

go. There was a vision of taking the state into the future and delivering jobs for Victorian families. It is no coincidence that job numbers go up when you have a policy of boosting ICT, financial services and the number of overseas students, as well as various other growth areas in the service economy that deliver jobs for Victoria.

It is also worth noting that we see depreciation provision rising in so many of the tables in this report. There is only one reason depreciation provision rises — because the government has invested heavily in new capital works. If you invest heavily in a new children's hospital at \$1 billion, if you invest heavily in a women's hospital, if you invest heavily in the Box Hill Hospital or the Bendigo hospital — although they are not caught in the depreciation provisions because they were not finalised — if you invest in regional rail, if you invest in schools, if you invest in roads, if you invest in water infrastructure, then you are required under the accounting standards to provide money for depreciation. We see depreciation provisions climb to close to \$3 billion, and the reason they climb — the reason they are in this report — is because we had 11 years of a government which made a heavy investment in capital works.

I will not speak much further on this report other than to say that it summarises a strong financial position. It summarises hard work, it summarises a strength in the economy that the ratings agencies, the Department of Treasury and Finance and the incoming Premier all said was a solid financial base. Coming from this bit of data was the unbelievable spin coming from the Treasurer and the government's media unit that there were rocks and black holes — black holes under every rock. In closing I say that the only black hole under a rock I have seen in the last few days is the phenomenally big black hole under a grimy rock called the new government's protective services officers costing blow-out.

Auditor-General: *Effectiveness of Victims of Crime Programs*

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — As explained by the President in the chamber earlier today, I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report *Effectiveness of Victims of Crime Programs* of February 2011. The report on the notice paper today is the report I will speak to in the next sitting week, so members can look forward to that. It is very interesting to read this report on the effectiveness of victims of crime programs, and it is important to understand at the outset how difficult it is for victims to report crimes.

We know for a fact that women who have been raped often cannot talk about it at all, and they do not report it. It is a hidden crime and something that people cannot speak about. Particularly if rape or sexual abuse is perpetrated within a family context by somebody close to the victim, it is very difficult to report. When discussing victim issues we have to be cognisant of exactly how difficult it is to collect data, and this report clarifies that. If we cannot collect data, however, it is very difficult to implement valid programs that can be acted upon. I was pleased to see a recommendation in this report for that the comprehensive collection of data to be commenced, and that will be welcomed.

Under the heading 'Evaluating outcomes for victims' at page 16 the report states:

Effective evaluation can identify outcomes, the impact of policy and service delivery, and the extent to which objectives have been met. Information from evaluations can inform decision making and continuous improvement activities.

There are difficulties in collecting information about outcomes for victims —

And the report gives an example:

Evaluations of victims often rely on feedback from victims themselves, but it is difficult to engage with a sufficient number of victims to have a statistically valid sample size, because victims may not wish to be involved.

As in the example I gave earlier about incest and other sexual abuse within families, that is a very valid point.

The report continues:

It is difficult to define what an outcome for a victim is, particularly in developing quantifiable objectives and outcomes, as there is no clear definition of what 'recovery from' or 'management of' the effects of crime may be from a case management perspective.

We can measure and understand the enormity of something as horrific as a victim suffering an acquired brain injury, such as in the case of James Macready-Bryan, who while celebrating his 21st birthday in the city was hit over the head by a thug and now has severe, profound and long-term disabilities. That is tangible; we can see it.

At its outset this report says that crime overall has been gradually decreasing but crimes against the person have been rising. Under the subheading 'Background' in the audit summary at page vii the report states:

Victoria Police classifies crimes against the person as homicide, rape, assault, sexual assault, robbery and kidnapping/abduction.

It says the annual number of reported crimes against the person increased to 33.1 per cent. That is seriously unacceptable. It cannot be hidden by saying that statistics overall have gone down, because we must look at this type of assault and the ramifications. As I said, in James Macready-Bryan's situation it is very tangible; we can see what the effects are and measure what the long-term impact is going to be. But for someone who has been raped, that is not as easy to assess.

One thing that is very important to understand is that if there was no crime on our streets, there would not be any victims of crime and therefore we would not have to be looking at programs. I was pleased to see in the Victorian budget brought down yesterday by the Treasurer, Kim Wells, that there is going to be a hugely strengthened police presence. There will be:

\$602 million to fund an additional 1600 front-line police and 100 transit safety police;

\$212 million over four years to deploy 940 protective services officers to patrol all metropolitan railway stations and four major regional railway stations ...

\$30 million in capital funding over three years for:

police station upgrades at Ashburton, North Ballarat, Sebastapol, Mooroolbark and Mooroopna — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Crozier) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Auditor-General: *Facilitating Renewable Energy Development*

Mr ELSBURY (Western Metropolitan) — I rise today to speak to the *Facilitating Renewable Energy Development* report of April 2011 by the Auditor-General. As someone who in the past has purchased green energy I would generally be supportive of reasonable government initiatives to promote renewable energy use in this state.

We all appreciate that renewable energy costs a lot more to produce than coal, and the report says that brown coal is the cheapest form of energy, followed by hydro-electricity and then gas-powered production. Then we move on to geothermal, biomass, wind and solar energy. The report mentions wave and tidal energy, but unfortunately there is no way to quantify the cost of such projects, as I do not believe they have yet been proven to work. The report shows that solar energy is the most expensive source of electricity and has the third lowest capacity factor of all the renewable energies. If I was paying for renewable energy, I would want to see a return.

The report says that when targets were established in 2002 Victoria's share of electricity generated from renewable sources as a percentage of electricity consumption was around 3.6 per cent. At the end of 2009 this figure had increased to only 3.9 per cent, so there was a 0.3 per cent increase.

The report further states:

... no plan was subsequently developed to set out how the targets would be achieved. In the absence of these key planning inputs, there was no evidence to show that planning was effective or the targets soundly based.

Again, we are talking about an initiative that is being paid for by Victorian taxpayers, but members of the former government might as well have been saying, 'We don't know where we want to go, we don't know how we are going to get there, but we will spend the money anyway'. The report goes on:

In 2005, the Victorian government was advised that the state's renewable energy targets were unlikely to be met and that investment in renewable energy in the state would cease by 2007.

This shows what a hotchpotch the whole program was.

If I was told about an increased cost that would be incurred by me as a consumer of electricity, I would be interested in finding out exactly how much that is. According to information I have with me, the former government came out and said that the large-scale solar feed-in tariff would cost between \$5 and \$15 per household. Now the Auditor-General's report comes out and says that it is floating around \$23 to \$47 each year per household over the lifetime of the program. That would seem to be quite a discrepancy and cost overrun by the previous government. I know many would be sitting back and saying, 'Say it isn't so', and perhaps even saying that I am making this up, but with the chequered history of the former government you would have to say that that is about on a par with what its members were able to achieve in developing the budget black holes that they seem to deny exist.

One of the big issues I have, and that Victorian taxpayers will have, with this program concerns the solar energy generation targets. The Auditor-General's report states:

The 2010 solar energy targets underpin the effort to facilitate solar energy development. Despite their importance, no assessment was undertaken to support or substantiate either the targets, or the time frames for delivery. The Department of Premier and Cabinet, the department responsible for developing the white paper and the associated targets, could not demonstrate that the targets were practicable.

The Premier's office is unable to tell that it was able to achieve anything with this program, but then two large-scale solar projects — the SilexSolar project and the Victorian large-scale solar project — were both publicly funded, totalling about \$150 million, and neither was supported by a business case that demonstrated the need for the project. That just goes to show exactly how things were run under the previous government.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Princes Highway: upgrade

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Regional and Rural Development, Mr Peter Ryan. Last Friday I had the great privilege of attending one of the East Gippsland field days in Bairnsdale. It was a great day at the aerodrome, with thousands of people and many stalls. It was a glorious day. There were machinery dealers and cattle dealers, people from the plant nursery and camping industries, and many other people showing the wares of East Gippsland. I also had the great privilege of meeting with a number of people from horticultural and other businesses that have done so much to transform East Gippsland and generate jobs there. Particularly in the food area many businesses have gotten together and are working out how they can market this agricultural region.

East Gippsland is 300 kilometres from Melbourne. It has plenty of land, good soil, a good workforce and lots of opportunity. It is always a pleasure to be in Gippsland and particularly to hear such positive views coming from that area. While wandering around the field day I came across a stall called The Nationals. I thought, 'This is interesting. Good on The Nationals!'.

Mr Barber — A show bag?

Mr LENDERS — They had show bags and balloons as well. I declined to take some balloons, but they were certainly there. I was pleased to see The Nationals there, because it is important to be out and about. I saw they had a petition at their stall; it was a 'Fix the highway' petition. If you signed this petition, you could do your bit to lobby the government to fix the highway. I thought, 'This is very interesting. Good on The Nationals for wanting to fix the highway!'.

It was not a petition about fixing the highway through Morwell, which slowed my trip to Gippsland and back from Gippsland by between 20 and 25 minutes. That is what I found when I was driving through. I am not a regular visitor to far East Gippsland; my Gippsland visits normally stop on this side of the Latrobe Valley where my mother lives. Nevertheless that is the slowdown experienced by everybody in East Gippsland who needs to commute to Melbourne for work, for recreation, for family or for whatever purposes.

I was intrigued, but the petition was not about fixing that problem. The petition was asking the federal government to address a problem further east: the duplication of the highway. I found that quite interesting.

Mr Barber — Collecting names for their database.

Mr LENDERS — Perhaps they are collecting names for their database. I am pleased that Mr Philip Davis is in the chamber, great friend of The Nationals that he is, being a coalition partner. I thought it interesting that that is The Nationals' response to get things done, particularly when the government has six members representing Gippsland, if you count Gippsland as not including Bass, or seven if you see it as including Bass.

I saw Darren Chester, The Nationals' federal member for Gippsland, strolling through the area, and I would have thought it would have been a little bit easier to talk to the members than getting a petition signed so you can add those people to your database and do a bit of a scare campaign against federal Labor. How hard would it be for any of those seven MPs — or six if you take out the Deputy Premier — to actually get on the phone to the Deputy Premier and say, 'There is a road to be fixed'. Members of The Nationals have been talking an enormous amount about this extraordinary regional fund that is going to be the panacea for fixing every problem in regional Victoria, so perhaps they could pick up the phone and talk to the Deputy Premier and say, 'Apply some of this'. The action I seek is that these members actually go to the Deputy Premier — —

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

Liquor licensing: City of Casey

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs in his capacity as minister responsible for liquor licensing. The matter relates to a letter I have received from the chief executive officer of

the City of Casey asking me to make representations to the minister on a particular application for a packaged liquor outlet following a council decision that has been taken. The letter states:

The City of Casey, at its planning committee meeting of 22 March 2011, resolved to write to you to seek support in a council decision made to object to a packaged liquor application proposed for Marriott Waters at 945S Thompsons Road, Lyndhurst.

...

The current Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 affords councils the opportunity to address various amenity-based issues when assessing referred applications and in this instance council believes the matter of current outlet density in Casey is one that requires essential consideration.

Numerous suburbs within Casey have been identified as demonstrating some of the highest rates of social and economic disadvantage within the state. In addition Victoria Police and Monash University Accident Research Centre data also reveals the area identified in the report as having some of the highest rates of crime including alcohol-related family violence and alcohol-related injuries.

Whilst the minister may not have call-in powers in his role — and I am aware of the Minister for Planning having recently made some changes which mean that liquor licensing outlets will need to go through a planning process, and I am not sure whether this is captured by those particular reforms — following receipt of this letter I am asking Minister O'Brien to make representations to the director of liquor licensing to ensure that the views of the local community, as represented by the resolution by the City of Casey, is taken into account in dealing with the application for this new packaged liquor outlet, especially given the evidence that has been cited.

Office of Public Prosecutions: review

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — The matter I wish to raise is for the Attorney-General, and it relates to His Honour Justice Frank Vincent's review of the Office of Public Prosecutions (OPP). The coalition, when in opposition, was talking about this review before the last election. I will not in any way apportion responsibility or prejudge the outcome of that review, but it is fair to say that the Attorney-General believed this review was necessary because of numerous reports which suggested the relationship between key individuals in that office had broken down or were at least becoming dysfunctional.

The Attorney-General announced the review on 10 or 11 January this year — four months ago. On that day I made two points: firstly, that the Office of Public Prosecutions, and in particular its independence, should

not be undermined by the inquiry; and secondly, that the report should be made public and released in full upon its receipt by the government.

The government is failing on both counts. It seems quite clear from recent media reports that the issues — whether they are personal conflicts or differences in approach to prosecutions — are ongoing. The ongoing uncertainty that is being visited upon the office by the failure of the government so far to deal with a report it has in its possession cannot be helping. I have no doubt that having all the staff of the OPP and the Director of Public Prosecutions himself waiting to find out what the report says, what the recommendations are and what the government is going to do about it cannot be helping morale, must be a massive distraction and would not be assisting with the administration of justice.

We know the government has had this report for something like six weeks and that it has been seen by cabinet, but it has not been released and we have no commitment from the government that it ever will be. Whatever action the government may choose to take, it will be impossible for anyone to assess the justification for that action without seeing the report.

What I seek from the minister is simple: that he release the Vincent report in full and indicate what the way forward will be. The time has come for the report to be released. I ask the minister to advise me and the Parliament whether he will release the report and, if so, when he will do that.

Kindergartens: funding

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. On Sunday I had the pleasure of attending an event at Victoria's oldest regional kindergarten, the Bakery Hill Kindergarten in Ballarat, which was celebrating its 100th year. It is a shining example of community, care and education coming together. The land on which the kindergarten was built was donated by the local council. It is managed by a dedicated team of volunteer parents and is staffed by an equally focused team, some of whom have devoted decades of their lives to teaching at the facility. It is a vital centre that now provides two four-year-old kindergarten groups and two three-year-old kindergarten groups.

Kindergarten provides the building blocks for early childhood development in an environment where respect, family and community are fundamental. However, I am concerned about the ability of that

kindergarten and others to adequately service the surrounding population in the face of rapid population growth. I refer to areas such as the Ballarat West growth area, Warnambool and Wyndham, which is predicted to need 26 new kindergartens by 2020.

The challenge is enormous in the face of the former government's failure to adequately plan for Victoria's population boom. It is made all the more formidable by federal Labor's 2007 election promise to move to 15-hour kindergarten programs for four-year-olds, which the Brumby government signed up to through a Council of Australian Governments agreement. Four-year-old kinder is currently funded for 10 hours and 45 minutes a week. The increase to 15 hours a week is due to be implemented by 2013.

On paper this is to be applauded, but the impact of the increased hours is troubling kindergartens and parents across Victoria. Kindergarten teachers say they are already stretched and have no more room, teachers or support to offer the extended hours. They also fear that programs for three-year-olds will be displaced by expanded hours for four-year-olds. It is clear that the federal government has failed to provide sufficient resources for the implementation of the plan, that the Brumby Labor government failed to secure an adequate deal at the time of signing and that it is up to the Baillieu government to rectify this.

My question to the minister is: how will this government stand up for Victorian families during negotiations with the commonwealth in respect of the implementation of this agreement?

Kangaroos: control

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment and Climate Change. Permits to cull wildlife are being issued by the Victorian government with, in my view, little consideration of the requirements of the relevant section of the legislation and less regard for the impact on species and the ecosystem as a whole.

Recently the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT) campus in Eden Park commenced a cull of eastern grey kangaroos, an otherwise protected species, under a Department of Sustainability and Environment permit. Having examined the application for that permit, I believe it is incomplete and fails to adequately address the criteria required for the issuing of an authority to control wildlife under the Wildlife Act 1975. Nevertheless, the department has approved a licence to cull 300 kangaroos a year for three years.

This is on a rather small block of land in the peri-urban area — the outer edge of the suburbs. Those concerned for the welfare of kangaroos generally have concerns about the humaneness of the culling and have been protesting in the area. Nearby residents have been hearing gunfire at night. They do not know where it is coming from. They only received one up-front notification that this activity might occur, and that is for a permit that stretches over three years.

I made a request to meet with the CEO of NMIT, Brian McDonald, and he wrote back to me saying, and I quote:

As a government agency NMIT's interests are represented in the Victorian Parliament by the relevant minister and not by individual members of Parliament of various political persuasions.

NMIT therefore does not believe that any meeting on this issue would serve any worthwhile purpose.

This has left me in a situation where I must come back to Parliament to raise the issue again.

I am in the middle of putting in a number of freedom of information applications regarding NMIT and its application under this section of the act to cull wildlife. I believe it is time there was more accountability brought to bear on those who issue culling permits and those who are issued with them.

Therefore my request of the minister is that firstly he commence a review of the operation of this section of the act, including an internal review covering how it is administered by those responsible under the delegation of the secretary for issuing these permits and how they follow-up on those permits, and secondly, that he offer a public review of this section of the act so the public can examine its performance and determine whether they believe it meets the community's values.

Budget: Northern Victoria Region

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — I wish to raise an adjournment matter for the attention of the Treasurer. The action I seek from the Treasurer is that he provide information to me and Northern Victoria Region electors identifying funding in the 2011–12 Baillieu-Ryan budget for implementation of the following election promises made by the Liberal Party and The Nationals in the Assembly district of Benambra in Northern Victoria Region along with a timetable for their implementation.

These election promises included \$1.4 million to build a passing lane along the Wodonga–Corryong corridor of the Murray Valley Highway, \$35 000 for the

Eskdale community hall, \$130 000 to construct safe access to fishing on Dartmouth pondage, \$15 000 to install air conditioning in the Bethanga memorial hall, \$200 000 to upgrade facilities at the Corryong youth hall, and \$5.4 million to construct a new Belvoir special developmental school following the expenditure of \$600 000 in the budget for planning only. I call on the minister to provide this information — information that electors have a right to have — because there is no mention of funding for implementation of these promises either in the next financial year or in future years.

In addition, there is silence on the matter of funding for a number of schools that were not the subject of election promises. Nonetheless, funding is much needed in a number of places to help schools provide quality teaching and learning for regional students. Those schools include Wodonga Senior Secondary College, which needs funding to build on the former government's investment in the two middle-years colleges, Huon and Felltimber. A great deal of work has been done by parents, teachers and the whole school community, and a final investment is now required in the senior secondary college. This is a matter on which the Liberal Party and The Nationals have been completely silent.

I call on the minister to indicate the government's intentions in relation to the future of the Wodonga Senior Secondary College as well as its intentions in relation to investments in the Yarrawonga and Barnawartha primary schools, which are also in much need of investment.

Finally, I call on the minister to indicate what the government's intentions are in relation to funding new fire stations at Barnawartha, Biggara, Gundowring, Bethanga, Eskdale, Leneva and Berringama, all of which would have received new fire stations under funding committed to by the former government. However, the new government has been silent on this.

Parks Victoria: land management

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — My matter is for the attention of the Minister for Environment and Climate Change and concerns Parks Victoria. Firstly I note the disappointing level of public land management over the past decade in Victoria. I congratulate the government on additional resourcing in this year's budget for Parks Victoria. However, I call on the minister to take decisive action to address the performance of Parks Victoria in relation to its responsibility for more than 40 per cent of Victoria's public land.

I would like to refer the house to a letter published in the *Bairnsdale Advertiser* on 1 April this year headed 'Take care'. It says, and I quote:

Your readers should know to take care in the Mitchell River National Park ... Last weekend two of us walked, on a pleasant Sunday afternoon, the 8 kilometres from the Billy Goat Bend to the Den of Nargun car park. The views of the river and the cliffs were well worth it, but the track was completely overgrown, so that it took far longer than expected.

Signage is rare and generally obscured by vegetation now. We became anxious we would not be out by nightfall. A machete would have been useful!

The ranger must have forgotten this track — it is clear it has not been tended for many months.

It is signed by Andrew Firestone of East Malvern.

Mr Firestone's experience is similar to the experience of others who have used that particular track over recent years. This is a matter I raised with the previous Minister for Environment and Climate Change. I urged him to urge Parks Victoria to improve its performance in the management of public land. Approximately three years ago I met some Israeli tourists who had become lost on that same track, and I had to give them directions on how to get out. I have to concur with the writer of this letter to the editor of the local paper and those Israeli tourists about the state of that track. My experience of the track was that it took much more bush bashing than was reasonable in a Victorian national park that has a high-profile visitor information area and walking tracks. This is not dissimilar to many of the other tracks on land managed by Parks Victoria.

I congratulate the Baillieu government for committing additional resources to Parks Victoria to deal with improving public land management. However, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change will have to take many more measures in terms of getting better performance out of Parks Victoria, and I urge him to do that decisively.

Roads: Nagambie bypass

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — The matter I wish to raise today is for the Minister for Roads, and it relates to the \$222 million construction of the Nagambie bypass. This is a vital road project connecting the rich fruit-growing industries in the Goulburn Valley to Melbourne.

As part of the delivery of the project the major contractor, Abigroup, has agreed to maximise the use of local employment. This is a welcome initiative, as I understand it, because it ensures the promotion of local

jobs and the enhancement of local skills. The use of local labour also makes a valuable contribution to the local regional economy and has the long-term legacy of delivering a more skilled regional workforce.

There have been allegations that some of the local labour provisions that were agreed to by the contractor are not being complied with. The allegations are that individuals who are not locals are being engaged at the expense of local labour. My request of the minister is that he take steps to investigate these allegations and ensure that the requirements in relation to the use of local labour are not being abused or misused.

Special schools: Officer

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Education, Martin Dixon. It relates to the outstanding announcement in the budget of funding for the Officer special school. The development of a new special school in Officer was a contentious issue before the last election, and I was very pleased that Minister Dixon was willing in his capacity at the time as shadow minister for education to engage with and listen to the views of the local community on the need for a new special school in that growth corridor, given the demands on other special schools in the south-east and the distances that many students travel from Pakenham, Nar Nar Goon and elsewhere to Cranbourne, Dandenong and other areas closer to Melbourne.

The budget has delivered significantly on the election commitment that was made and additional resources have been made available for this new special school. I congratulate the minister on that announcement and on providing those resources for this critical piece of community infrastructure for the growing Cardinia community.

Before Christmas last year I asked the minister to meet with the Cardinia Shire Council so that he could gain an understanding of the needs and requirements for this school as part of its plans for the development of the Officer precinct. That meeting with the minister was held. Since that time the SS4CC, as it is known — the Special School for Casey-Cardinia group — has been meeting regularly and undertaking site visits to gain an understanding of best practice in this area. I congratulate this group on the work it is doing, which is playing an important part in feeding into the development and design of this new school.

The action I seek from the minister is that he make time to meet with representatives of the SS4CC so that he can gain a firsthand understanding of its views on how

this school should be developed. It is an exciting project that has been made possible as a result of the budget that has just been handed down.

Essendon Keilor College: funding

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I ask the Minister for Education to address the lack of funding for Essendon Keilor College by the Baillieu government. Every year Essendon Keilor College educates up to 1400 students, both local and international, across the school's three campuses. Like every other school in the state, its students deserve the very best in education to set the foundation for their future. That is why I was disappointed to hear that the Baillieu government has refused to commit any funding to enhance the learning environment for the students of this college. The Brumby government committed \$10 million to Essendon Keilor College to provide crucial upgrades and to build a state-of-the-art learning environment. Mr Baillieu has neglected all students who attend the college by refusing to commit to this funding.

Education is a necessity for all young people across the state. To ensure that the students of Essendon Keilor College are not excluded from receiving the tools necessary to develop their education, the government should commit to the funding the college deserves.

Manufacturing: Geelong

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — My issue is for the Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade, the Honourable Richard Dalla-Riva. It involves confirming the Baillieu government's commitment to manufacturing and employment in Geelong.

Over the next four years the Baillieu Government will provide \$800 000 to the Geelong Manufacturing Council to help boost manufacturing jobs in the Geelong region. The funds will be administered by GMC to create a PhD scholarship program in partnership with Deakin University, and it will deliver solutions to support and grow local manufacturing industries.

As part of the program, a PhD student from Deakin will work closely with local manufacturers and apply their research skills to finding practical solutions that will benefit the local industry and, as a consequence, local jobs. This project will provide a Deakin student with a viable and stimulating learning experience and increase their career options while providing skills to the local manufacturing industry that it so desperately needs.

Over 11 years under Labor Geelong manufacturing lost thousands of jobs, but this program will help support and encourage innovation in an industry ignored for far too long. Opportunities will be created for Geelong manufacturers that will help them address innovation and product development issues. This will allow them to grow and retain staff, and it will ensure manufacturing is maintained as a vital part of the Geelong economy.

I recently accompanied Minister Dalla-Riva to a meeting with representatives of GMC. They are enthusiastic about the project and the support it will provide to industry innovation and jobs in Geelong. My request to the minister is that he retain his commitment to manufacturing in Geelong and throughout regional Victoria, thereby supporting and facilitating the growth of jobs in an industry that has been allowed to wane over the last decade.

Tonight in Parliament House, along with the member for South Barwon in the other place, I will be receiving members of the Croatian community who have made a magnificent contribution to the manufacturing sector in Geelong over the last 50 years. As a government we are honoured now to show Victoria's appreciation by assisting in the provision of aged-care accommodation for their families in their twilight years. We look forward to seeing this project completed to assist these hardworking, honest and generous community members who have given so much of their time to industry over the last half a century.

Responses

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — Mr Lenders raised an issue for the Minister for Regional and Rural Development, Mr Ryan. I note the issue he raised and note that no action was sought.

Mrs Peulich raised an issue for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Mr O'Brien, around making representations to the director of liquor licensing for a venue which has been proposed in the city of Casey, and I will pass that on to him for his response.

Mr Pakula raised an issue for the Attorney-General, Mr Clark, in relation to the Vincent report into the Office of Public Prosecutions and when that will be released, and I will pass that on to the Attorney-General for a direct response.

Mr Ramsay raised an issue for the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Ms Lovell, in relation to kindergarten issues in Western Victoria Region, and that will be passed on to her for a response.

Mr Barber raised an issue for the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Mr Smith, in relation to permits for culling kangaroos in Eden Park. He called for a review of the act in relation to some correspondence he has been dealing with in relation to that matter.

Ms Broad raised an issue for the Treasurer, Mr Wells, in relation to timetables for election commitments to be delivered in her region of northern Victoria.

Mr Philip Davis raised an issue again for the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Mr Smith, in relation to Parks Victoria and public land management.

Mr Tee raised an issue for the Minister for Roads, Mr Mulder, in relation to the Nagambie bypass and the use of local labour, and that will be passed on to the minister for a response.

Mr O'Donohue raised an issue for the Minister for Education, Mr Dixon, in relation to funding for the Officer special school.

Mr Eideh also raised an issue for the Minister for Education, Mr Dixon, this time in relation to budget commitments. Both of those issues will be sent to the minister for a response.

Mr Koch raised an issue for the Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade, Mr Dalla-Riva, in relation to Geelong manufacturing issues, and that will be sent to the minister for a response.

I have a written response to an adjournment debate matter raised by Mr Eideh on 6 April.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.10 p.m.