

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 18 April 2012

(Extract from book 7)

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

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

Legislative Council standing committees

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

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

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

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

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

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

Participating member

Joint committees

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Heads of parliamentary departments

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

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

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

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FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Leader of the Opposition:

Mr J. LENDERS

Deputy Leader of the Opposition:

Mr G. JENNINGS

Leader of The Nationals:

The Hon. P. R. HALL

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Mr D. DRUM

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Coote, Mrs Andrea	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	O'Brien, Mr David Roland Joseph	Western Victoria	Nats
Dalla-Riva, Hon. Richard Alex Gordon	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John	Eastern Victoria	LP
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Davis, Hon. David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Pakula, Hon. Martin Philip	Western Metropolitan	ALP
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Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tee, Mr Brian Lennox	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Koch, Mr David Frank	Western Victoria	LP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Kronberg, Mrs Janice Susan	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Viney, Mr Matthew Shaw	Eastern Victoria	ALP

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Wednesday, 18 April 2012

The PRESIDENT (Hon. B. N. Atkinson) took the chair at 9.36 a.m. and read the prayer.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I wish to inform the house that I have been advised that the Economy and Infrastructure References Committee, the Environment and Planning References Committee and the Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee are meeting this day following the conclusion of the sitting of the Council.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Auditor-General's Reports on —

Casual Relief Teacher Arrangements, April 2012.

Freedom of Information, April 2012.

Performance Reporting by Local Government, April 2012.

Deakin University — Report, 2011.

La Trobe University — Report, 2011.

Monash University — Report, 2011.

Ombudsman — Report on the death of Mr Carl Williams at HM Barwon Prison — investigation into Corrections Victoria, April 2012.

RMIT University — Report, 2011.

Swinburne University of Technology — Report, 2011.

University of Ballarat — Report, 2011.

University of Melbourne — Report, 2011.

Victorian Law Reform Commission's Final Reports on —

Guardianship.

Sex offenders registration.

Victoria University — Report, 2011.

NOTICES OF MOTION

Notices of motion given.

Ms MIKAKOS having given notice of motion:

Hon. D. M. Davis — On a point of order, President, I am not sure if I heard the member correctly, but she used the word 'stealing'. That may not be parliamentary in this context, and I wonder whether that is what the member actually meant.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will look at the motion and make a determination in a moment.

Further notice of motion given.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The Leader of the Government raised a point of order on the inclusion of the word 'stealing' in a notice. Ms Mikakos and I have just looked at the notice and Ms Mikakos is willing to amend it to delete that word. I invite her to give the amended notice and we will then move on to other notices.

Further notices of motion given.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Ms Pennicuik was concerned that I may have forgotten, but I take this opportunity to assure her that I did not forget. In fact this is a very auspicious week, because we have three birthdays. I extend congratulations to Mr Elasmar on his birthday on Monday, to Ms Pennicuik on her birthday yesterday and to Mr Jennings on his birthday today. I think between the three of them they ought to be able to shout all of us sufficient cake to celebrate properly.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Parliament: enterprise bargaining

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — My Greens colleagues, Colleen Hartland and Greg Barber, and I fully support the protected industrial action being taken by parliamentary staff. The work of the Parliament could not proceed without our parliamentary staff. The work they do behind the scenes, so to speak, to ensure that things run smoothly and to assist MPs on a daily basis with all manner of requests should never be taken for granted. Our experience of the staff is nothing but positive. Whenever we have needed assistance in whatever way the staff have gone out of their way to provide that assistance.

To give a few examples, in the chamber apart from their myriad official duties the attendants are always making sure we receive messages, filling our glasses of water and generally ensuring that we are supported in our work. If a member wishes to arrange a meeting or a public forum in Parliament or has a group of elderly or disabled people coming to visit and needs assistance to get them into the lifts in a building that is far from disability friendly, who is it that helps the member with this? It is the attendants. The staff in the papers office are always professional and courteous in response to our requests for information and assistance, as are the library staff. We do not understand why the

government is forcing this issue and will not negotiate and resolve this issue quickly and smoothly.

Toyota Australia: job losses

Ms PENNICUIK — On another matter, we also wish to put on record our dismay at the manner in which Toyota has gone about dismissing 350 people from its workforce. Surely a company like Toyota could have achieved its purpose through voluntary redundancies and not a mass sacking in such a publicly humiliating way. Our thoughts go out to the Toyota workers.

Carbon tax: council rates

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I can report to the house that the identity crisis over the Labor-Greens collective approach to government is not only affecting Labor federally but also affecting it here in Victoria. It is also causing confusion and anxiety in the City of Yarra, where a Labor-Greens coalition is about to impose a 5.9 per cent increase in rates. As one independent councillor, the lapsed Trotskyite Stephen Jolly, was quoted as saying in the *Melbourne Leader* of 9 April, 'They're absolutely slamming people with rates'.

To what key factor does the Labor-Greens coalition attribute its decision to hike its levy on ratepayers at double the rate of inflation? The City of Yarra mayor, Geoff Barbour, is reported as having said:

... the council faced a number of external cost pressures next financial year, including a \$750 000 bill for the new federal carbon tax.

As you might expect, Cr Barbour and his Labor-Greens coalition are supportive of the world's biggest carbon tax because they say it will help the environment. I doubt the ratepayers of the City of Yarra will be as appreciative. As we have said, the carbon tax will hit Victorians hard in a multitude of ways. It will impact on the cost of living and it will impact on jobs, and it could not come at a worse time. My challenge to the Victorian opposition and the Victorian Greens is for them to ring their federal mates and tell them it is time to cancel this great big new tax.

Rail: Geelong–Ballarat line

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — Last week many people, including many from this place, attended heritage recognition ceremonies in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the opening of the railway line between Ballarat and Geelong. A number of festivities marked the 150th anniversary at which people were

able to reflect upon the process involved in linking Ballarat to Melbourne via Geelong, which at the time was a more practical approach than building a direct Ballarat–Melbourne rail link. Passengers and freight travelled from Ballarat to Geelong and then on to Melbourne via a then privately owned line until 1889, when the direct Ballarat–Melbourne line opened. Given the terrain, this was an easier option.

Today passengers wishing to travel from Ballarat to Geelong must catch a bus or travel on two trains to make that journey by rail. In the lead-up to the last election a commitment was made by the Liberal-Nationals coalition to review reopening the rail link between Geelong and Ballarat and then on to Bendigo, once again providing a passenger line connection. In the budget I hope to see some money where coalition members' mouths are. There are many things to be celebrated in the heritage of regional rail, particularly in this part of the state, but it is up to the government to deliver on its future.

Housing: Kensington redevelopment

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — Last week I had the honour of officially opening a public housing redevelopment that was 16 years in the making. The redevelopment of the high-rise housing estate at Kensington spanned two centuries, three governments and six ministers. In 1996 the then Minister for Housing, Rob Knowles, first announced the tower at the estate would be demolished. Following the 1996 election the then minister, Ann Henderson, appointed the Parliamentary Secretary for Human Services, Robert Doyle, now the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, to chair the redevelopment committee.

After the change of government in 1999 the then minister, Bronwyn Pike, the member for Melbourne in the Assembly, continued the vision of the Kennett government and progressed the redevelopment. In 2012 I was delighted to be the minister who officiated at the completion of the project and particularly delighted to see the vision of my former colleague Ann Henderson come to fruition. With my colleague Craig Ondarchie I saw firsthand how much can be achieved when someone thinks outside the box. The demolition of one of the high-rise buildings and all of the walk-ups at the estate set the scene for a new approach that changed the face of a traditional public housing estate.

The redevelopment of new low-rise public, private and social housing has turned an ageing 1960s block into a vibrant, modern and inclusive community. Whereas nearby residents would once avoid the estate, they now walk through the community. They catch up for lunch

or grab a coffee at the social enterprise cafe Fifty-Six Threads, which provides employment and training opportunities for tenants. The Kensington estate's welcoming atmosphere is a credit to the Becton Property Group, which built the new homes, and Urban Communities, which manages them. The estate is also a shining example of what can be done to better integrate public housing with the community that surrounds it.

Shire of Moira: flood recovery officers

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — Last week I was pleased to visit Moira shire and receive a briefing on council's priorities and issues. Following that briefing I was pleased to visit Numurkah and view the fantastic progress the community has made following the flood emergency earlier this year. Moira shire will very soon open a flood recovery centre in Numurkah, because the recovery has a long way to go, even though the emergency has passed. Some 1800 requests for assistance have already been received, not including those from rural areas, which are yet to come.

Moira shire has requested assistance from the Baillieu-Ryan government in the form of two flood recovery officers to support the work at the flood recovery centre. I urge the Baillieu-Ryan government to agree to this request and provide at the earliest opportunity funding support necessary to provide those two flood recovery officers to assist with this very important work in a community which has been well and truly battered by these flood events. Given that these people do not have a lot of resources themselves, they are going to need all the assistance they can get to deal with this recovery for a long time to come.

Timber industry: action plan

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — I rise to comment on the timber industry action plan and the support given to the Victorian native and plantation timber industry by the Baillieu government which will allow the industry to have the confidence to invest and play a significant role in our state's economy. The industry provides employment to over 25 000 people and generates more than \$400 million annually in log production and far more in domestic and export-oriented value-added product. It puts around \$1.5 billion annually into Victoria's economy through forestry business expenditure, primarily in rural and regional townships. The minister described the plan as ambitious, and it has needed to be to restore confidence in the industry following the destruction by the Bracks and Brumby governments of so many businesses in the timber industry.

Thousands of jobs disappeared, with an estimated 80 per cent of hardwood sawmilling and timber production businesses closing down. As the sawmills are often one of the largest employers in towns, the flow-on effect was distressing and disastrous. Those opposition members who complain about Victoria's job losses need a mirror to reflect those who were responsible for stopping progress in thriving industries through their brutal policies. Messrs Bracks and Brumby oversaw the Our Forests Our Future policy as Premier and Treasurer respectively and did not deliver the promised balance for communities, jobs and the environment as the profits from the sale of our Victorian timbers were sent to Tasmania.

I congratulate the forest and timber industry for remaining resilient and wish it well for the future. I congratulate the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, Peter Walsh, and the Department of Primary Industries on their work on the government's timber industry action plan. It has instilled confidence in the timber industry after it was all but brought to its knees by the Bracks and Brumby regimes.

Rail: government performance

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — My members statement today relates to the appalling lack of trains available to public transport commuters in my electorate. The 2011–12 Liberal budget contained funding to purchase seven new trains. However, prior to the last election the Liberals also promised to retire seven Hitachi trains. The seven trains funded in the Liberal government's first budget will therefore not add additional capacity to the system but will simply replace the seven trains to be retired.

Figures released recently by Metlink show that for the 12 months to September 2010 patronage on Melbourne's trains increased by 2.1 per cent, or 4.7 million commuter trips, to 227.1 million trips. This increase was less than the 18.8 million extra trips forecast in the budget. The continuing steep petrol price rises are affecting most commuters and forcing them to utilise our train network. I can see no comfort, literally or physically, for our train-travelling public in the foreseeable future.

Northcote Junior Football Club: lighting

Mr ELASMAR — On another matter, on Saturday, 14 April, I attended the Northcote Junior Football Club to see the switching on of the new night lights for night games. The event was well attended. My son Riad played a footy match on the day and he and his team thrashed the opposing team. I thank the organisers, in

particular the Darebin mayor, Cr Steven Tsitas, and the president of the Northcote Junior Football Club and his executive committee.

Rail: Cardinia Road station

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — From this Sunday we will see more than 350 extra weekly train services commence across the Melbourne metropolitan rail network as a result of timetable changes. I am also pleased to note that V/Line will introduce 208 extra annual trips on the Traralgon line, which will be welcome news to Gippsland residents. The new timetable will also see the first services depart from the new Cardinia Road railway station in Pakenham. Together with my colleague Brad Battin, the member for Gembrook in the Assembly, I was pleased to have the opportunity to have a sneak peek at the much anticipated Cardinia Road railway station during a family day held on 15 April.

The event was a huge success, with hundreds turning out to take a look at the station's new facilities, which include two platforms, an underpass connecting Lakeside and Devonia Park, 450 car parking spaces, bus stops, a taxi rank, closed-circuit camera surveillance and a secure bike cage. A barbecue, face-painting and clowns kept families entertained. It is a credit to the government that the station is opening early, notwithstanding Labor's failure to plan for sufficient power for this station, which was a gross piece of negligence by the previous government.

Australian Floorball Open 2012

Mr O'DONOHUE — On another matter, the Australian Floorball Open 2012 was held in Pakenham from 12 to 15 April. The event brought players and visitors from interstate to Pakenham for the four-day tournament. It is a credit to the organisers, who put together such a large event, which attracted many visitors to the town. I congratulate Joanne Staindl-Johnson and her organising committee on their hard work in not only securing the tournament but also making it such a wonderful success.

Assyrian Babylonian new year festival

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the great Assyrian Babylonian new year festival I attended on 31 March along with state and federal colleagues. It was great to see so many people in the community join together to celebrate such a remarkable event and very significant tradition in the Assyrian culture. This year's event celebrated 6762 years of history and tradition for the Assyrian

people. The Assyrian Babylonian new year festival is an ancient celebration that marks either the beginning or end of the barley season. Akitu, meaning 'barley', is celebrated either when it is sown in autumn or when it is cut in spring. The community festival I attended marked the cutting of the barley and coincided with the renewal of nature and springtime in the Assyrian calendar. It was a truly wonderful day, and I congratulate the Assyrian organising committee, made up of many Assyrian community groups such as the Assyrian Council of Australia, the Victorian Assyrian community and the Assyrian Democratic Movement, just to name a few who put their tireless efforts into organising the event.

The day was testament to the Assyrian people and their proud heritage. Australia has a proud multicultural society. Each race and culture brings a unique contribution to making Australia the country it is today. This can also be said of the Assyrian people. I once again thank the organisers and congratulate them and the Assyrian community for hosting such a wonderful community and family-friendly event. I look forward to the autumn festival, which will start the barley process for the new year.

Anzac Day: commemoration

Mr O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — I know the house needs no reminding, but I rise to bring to the attention of members the importance of Anzac Day and commemorating all our fallen soldiers for their service, as well as extending our sympathies to their widows and families. I am particularly mindful of the 32 Australians who lost their lives in Afghanistan. For their families it will naturally be a difficult time, but it is also a proud and memorable time in which to express their private grief together with the nation as it expresses its public grief, recognition and sympathy, without statements about the rights and wrongs of war but rather in commemoration of the service that was given by individuals on behalf of and to our nation, particularly the greatest sacrifice, which is the loss of life.

I encourage all members to continue to honour the memory of our fallen soldiers, as they do each year. I look forward to peace in our time. I am mindful of the quote attributed to Winston Churchill that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. In the present-day Afghanistan conflict 32 Australian lives is a high price to pay, but it is a price that has been paid, and those soldiers should be honoured for it.

Rail: Geelong–Ballarat line

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — I mark the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Geelong–Ballarat railway line. This line was one of two goldfields railways built between 1858 and 1862 to service the rapidly growing mining towns of Ballarat and Bendigo. The decision made to build the line from Geelong to Ballarat was largely due to the difficult terrain between Melbourne and Ballarat. Building the line from Geelong was not without its problems, the most obvious being crossing the Moorabool River, which caused major challenges for the engineers of the day, but they triumphed by building a magnificently designed viaduct. The viaduct was made of wrought iron truss girders with 10 spans resting on 9 bluestone piers up to 33.5 metres above the valley floor. This impressive structure is still admired by visitors to the Geelong region today.

The standard of workmanship shown by the hundreds of workers who constructed the railway line over 150 years ago has guaranteed its continued use to this day. This vital rail link plays a key role in carrying much of the state's grain harvest to the Geelong port for export. The Baillieu government has commenced planning to revive passenger services on this major regional rail link. My congratulations to Engineers Australia, Engineering Heritage Victoria, V/Line, all those involved in commemorating 150 years of rail between Geelong and Ballarat and also the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport, Edward O'Donohue, for bringing forward the government's support on this occasion.

EMPLOYMENT: GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I move:

That this house calls on the Baillieu-Ryan government to use the 2012–13 budget to —

- (1) deliver on its election promises; and
- (2) create and maintain jobs in Victoria.

These ought to be bread-and-butter matters for any government, but some 17 months have passed since the state election and this is clearly an area the state government struggles with — the bits about creating and maintaining jobs and keeping election promises.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics labour force figures from March reveal that seasonally adjusted

unemployment rates in Victoria increased from 5.5 per cent in February to 5.8 per cent in March. This is higher than the national average of 5.2 per cent, and some 11 500 Victorians joined the unemployment queue in that period. Victoria now has the highest unemployment rate in mainland Australia and is one of just two states where unemployment increased last month. By contrast, unemployment decreased in New South Wales last month. Some 177 000 Victorians are unemployed — more than previously in Victoria. This is in stark contrast to the record of the Labor government. To illustrate that point I take the final two years of Labor's most recent time in government, during which 198 000 jobs were created in Victoria. The Baillieu government talks a good game of course. It promised to deliver 55 000 new jobs each year, but instead unemployment is on the rise.

There are few things more important to Victorian families than somebody in their household, if able, having a job. It is incredibly important for the whole family and the community that the family is a part of. The government has really dropped the ball in terms of supporting Victorians in something that is most important for their wellbeing and autonomy — having a job. This is why the Baillieu government needs to start working hard to keep Victorians in jobs. The budget to be brought down next month will be an opportunity for it to do so.

Victoria is quickly losing its reputation as a place to do business in Australia. The Victorian government has no jobs plan or regional jobs plan. I believe the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional and Rural Development, Mr Drum, was on the radio about a week ago saying that there was no need for a regional jobs plan, which is nothing short of breathtaking.

Mr Lenders — Unemployment has only gone up by half in regional Victoria!

Ms PULFORD — Taking up Mr Lenders's interjection, I note that it is incredibly important that the government does not lose the momentum that was created around job creation and economic opportunity for people in regional and rural Victoria. That is the part of the record of the Bracks and Brumby governments that I am most proud of. It was a big task to put the show back together after the rampaging cuts the Kennett government made throughout regional Victoria, and there has been a loss of momentum and a stalling of activity. Everywhere I go people say, 'Everything has ground to a halt under this government'. The budget is an opportunity for the government to address this. Mr Ryan, the Minister for Regional and Rural Development, promised \$1 billion

before the election, but there is a great disconnect between the promise of \$1 billion and what people in regional communities are saying about access to those funds.

The government needs to pull its socks up. Victoria is at risk of losing its reputation as the jobs engine room of the nation. There is a need for vital job-creating infrastructure projects, but projects have been scrapped, abandoned or not progressed by this government. They include initiatives like purchasing new trains for the metropolitan and regional rail networks and supporting the capacity of local companies to be involved in their construction and maintenance and the election commitment Ms Tierney raised with the health minister in question time yesterday for a new hospital in Geelong — a crystal-clear election commitment that the health minister was a little shy about confirming. The commitment was that construction of a new public hospital in Waurn Ponds would commence by the end of this term, but there is little evidence to suggest that this is going to happen. The minister's answers to Ms Tierney's questions yesterday further confirmed that this is something people in the Greater Geelong region need to be greatly concerned about.

There is a need for the government to deliver on its promise to upgrade schools across Victoria as well as to honour its election promises for a number of specific schools, but of course the government has scrapped Labor's Victorian schools plan. If it had — —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Ms PULFORD — Just a plan, says Mrs Peulich — just a plan that delivered in its first five years over 500 school upgrades, rebuilds or modernisations. I think Mrs Peulich — —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! I understand there is a remote chance that Mrs Peulich may have her chance to make a contribution to this debate a little bit later, and we are all looking forward to that, but we are also looking forward to hearing Ms Pulford making her contribution unassisted.

Ms PULFORD — I can understand why there would be some sensitivity about abandoning the schools plan, because there are some 500 or so schools that were expecting that they would be part of the continued rollout of that 10-year plan — Dimboola, Horsham and Timboon, to name but three. On the subject of delivering on election commitments, indeed, the — —

Mrs Petrovich interjected.

Ms PULFORD — It was a 10-year plan that was halfway through with 500 schools having been done and 500 still to occur. Government members with their magic pudding of election promises have perhaps woken up to the real world of government responsibility, and they have nothing more creative to say about the schools plan that they scrapped than, 'You had 11 years'. We were halfway through a 10-year plan that was proceeding ahead of schedule. Government members are embarrassed by their record on this, and they should be. While government members are squawking about their record, perhaps we could invite some of the interjectors to reflect on where the funds are for the Monash children's hospital — a \$250 million proposal for a specialist children's health service in the south-eastern suburbs — a commitment matched by the Liberal-Nationals coalition during the election campaign towards which last year's budget committed only \$8.5 million. It has obviously got a long way to go.

I had cause to visit the new children's hospital in Parkville recently, and I was stunned to see what remarkable infrastructure that is for the benefit of all Victorian families. Although I am sure that going to a children's hospital is something none of us really ever wants to have to do, it is an incredible facility that we on the Labor Party side are enormously proud of, and all Victorians can be proud of the government's capacity to deliver such a significant project. It is truly a state-of-the-art facility, as I said. I hope no one has cause to be visiting sick children, but if you ever are in that situation, I am sure you will appreciate what a truly remarkable facility has been delivered at Parkville. However, the Monash children's centre is yet to be delivered by this government, and it is time to get on with it.

Housing construction provides thousands of jobs in Victoria and has a huge flow-on effect for the state. The government has failed to indicate that it will continue to support the very popular first home owner grant. The first home owner grant has been incredibly important in enabling many young people to purchase their first home. Under the first home owner grant, eligible first home buyers can receive \$7000 when buying a new home, and under the first home bonus and the regional bonus an additional \$19 500 is available for those building or buying new homes in regional areas. This initiative had a direct stimulatory effect on housing construction in regional Victoria, and I certainly know construction firms that, during the great challenge to their businesses that came with the global financial crisis, were kept afloat by the timely intervention of the

government with the regional home bonus, which promoted new construction and provided ongoing stimulation for that sector, which employs so many people.

Each and every month, as more Victorians are faced with unemployment, the Baillieu government's failure to deliver and articulate a jobs plan to deal with this is greatly concerning. The government has continued to fail to support strategies that have been proven to keep Victorians in work. Indeed the government's rhetoric is about contractionary policies and a tight budget and slashing and burning wherever you look. The budget is an opportunity for the government to begin to turn this around.

Labor has recently announced the first stage of its plan to keep Victorians in work. We are very proud of our record of economic management in government, but we are now in a new role and have commenced consultation with business and the community around what the important elements are to promote investment and sustain a high level of job creation. This is in stark contrast to the government, which appears to have barely consulted with key stakeholders in the development of its budget. I certainly look forward to participating in Labor's consultations on jobs and investment in Victoria and in an ongoing conversation with the community about this.

During the election the Liberal-Nationals coalition talked tough on crime. Neighbourhood Watch groups were told that there would be street-by-street crime data, and for over 14 months Victorians have been told that the government would be keeping this election promise. However, after a year of dithering, the government has finally admitted that it has no intention of coming good on this promise. I believe the first PSOs (protective services officers) have been deployed. I have yet to run into a PSO on a train platform myself, and I am concerned that the government has stepped away from its commitment of two PSOs on every station in regional cities. This has been somewhat watered down.

The government has also demonstrated an inflexibility in its policy. Funding for security guards for the patrolled bus interchange in Ballarat has been scrapped. We have a proposal from the government for protective services officers on rail stations that is so inflexible that it is unable to be adapted to a location that the community might argue is more needy of some security guards for a transport service, notwithstanding the government has said it is not going to fully deliver on its commitment for two PSOs at each station in the

cities of regional Victoria as promised before the election.

The Liberal-Nationals government has also foreshadowed the selling off of public housing. The government's recently announced homelessness plan fails to set out any plans for assisting young people experiencing homelessness, women and children escaping domestic violence and people currently living in crisis accommodation. The 2011–12 state budget did not provide one drop of new funding for building or acquiring public and social housing, and I sincerely hope that the budget brought down next month will address that.

In this place yesterday the government pressed ahead with its legislation to facilitate the withdrawal of \$471.5 million from the Victorian WorkCover Authority through the payment of a dividend. Members canvassed these issues at length yesterday afternoon, but it is an illustration of this government exploring any means to balance its budget, and of course this is indirectly a measure that will impact on Victorian businesses. Labor left a AAA-rated economy and a budget in surplus, and it was able to do it year in, year out without needing to raid the bottom line of the Victorian WorkCover scheme.

The government's decision to cut support for industry training advisory boards also illustrates that there is no real commitment to provide Victorians with the skills they need to get jobs. Victorian employers and parents of young people hoping to make a start in the workforce know that having the right skills for the jobs that are available is an essential part of the equation. The 16 industry training advisory boards have expertise in training needs and in providing advice to government and industry on issues such as skills shortages.

This cut means that Victoria will be the only state in mainland Australia to not have an industry skills advisory board. The cut is in addition to the \$481 million of cuts to the education budget, which has a significant impact on schools' ability to provide VCAL (Victorian certificate of applied learning) as a pathway for young Victorians. On previous occasions I have spoken about the impact of this in Hamilton where the one state secondary school provider is facing the predicament of deciding whether to provide three VCE (Victorian certificate of education) classes or to continue the VCAL program for the next school year. That is a decision this government forces that school to make, but in terms of providing opportunities for young people in Hamilton, being able to undertake a VCAL option is just as important and just as valid a choice as having a good breadth of VCE subjects. It is a cruel

choice the government is inflicting on the community of Hamilton, and that is but one example of many.

The government has indicated it will be cutting numerous services across Victoria, and it is yet to deliver on many election promises. There is its decision to scrap 30 regional bus services, and a further 10 are under review. The government has decided to shut down Victoria's only dedicated 24-hour mental health advice line, putting further strain on services across regional and rural Victoria. Indeed almost one-third of the 9500 calls received by the advice line were received from regional and rural Victoria. This is a cruel, cruel cut.

Today in the *Weekly Times* there is an article indicating that the government is cutting funding to support midwives in rural Victoria. This is a cut that is of the order of \$500 000. In the scheme of the state budget it is not an enormous saving, but this is a program that provides support and training to midwives in rural and remote parts of Victoria. Midwives tell me they cannot do without this support and this service, because to access training and have up-to-date information about best practice is critical to the support they provide to mothers and babies in the communities in which they work. I have spoken to people who have been able to continue as midwives because of the support they received from the people who are funded by this program, which the government is winding up at the end of this financial year.

This budget is an opportunity for the government to redress some of these problems, to restore some of these important programs and services and to invest in job-creating strategies to restore Victoria's position as the engine room of the Australian economy. I wish the government well in its budget deliberations. I sincerely hope the government is able to deliver a budget that provides Victorian communities with the health and education services they need — indeed, the types of services they were promised by the government before the election — and that the government can develop and execute a plan that will create job opportunities for Victorians for years to come.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — It is my pleasure today to rise to speak on Ms Pulford's motion, which is listed as no. 319 on the notice paper. I like Ms Pulford, so I thank her for asking the house this question today; it is a good question. Victoria is feeling the pinch of the stresses of the global economy. If you look at one of our biggest trading partners, China, you see that it is down to a consumption rate of about 37 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP); when less than 10 years ago it was at 49 per cent of GDP. It is

rumoured that it took about a 75 per cent whack on the Greek bond market.

We know for a fact that the Norwegian Petroleum Fund took a similar whack on Greek bonds. We know that globally the Spanish bond market is in trouble; there was that sudden climb from 4.9 per cent to 5.16 per cent in a fortnight. The UK is stressing, and already the National Australia Bank is reviewing its investments in the Clydesdale and Yorkshire banks. The European Union bond auction, which happened not that long ago, was such a disaster it could not even raise the floor price.

What is that doing to Victorian companies? It is putting more stress and more pressure on them because of the high Australian dollar and the pinch of the global economy. What is happening in parallel to that is that the federal government is imposing a great big new tax right at the time when the economy is extremely stressed. A great big new tax called the carbon tax is being introduced by the federal Labor government. When members of the state opposition and the Victorian Greens come into this place every day and lament the fact that Victoria needs to support its jobs market, in parallel to that I would expect them to say, 'It is about time we scrapped the carbon tax as well', but they are silent on this great big new tax that is going to affect Victorian jobs.

I have been out visiting many businesses in the Northern Metropolitan Region — small to medium to large businesses — and they are saying the same thing to me every day: that the carbon tax is going to have a significant impact on their business. Not only are they measuring that cost in terms of their increased energy spend, but they are rationalising what that cost is going to mean for their ability to retain jobs. They are saying, 'The carbon tax is going to cost me two jobs', 'It is going to cost me four jobs' and 'It is going to cost me six jobs'. We are seeing this time and again. They cannot pass on those costs to their customers. They have to wear them internally, and that is going to cost employment. Where are the Victorian state opposition and the Victorian Greens on this matter? Silent — cue the sound of crickets — there is not a word about the carbon tax. Do we assume from the silence that they support businesses taking a whack because of the carbon tax?

Mrs Peulich — They are enthusiastic about it.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I suspect that is what they are saying, Mrs Peulich. I am looking for them to advocate for Victorian jobs, and one of the ways they could do that is to call on their mates in the federal Labor

government to scrap this great big new tax, but they have been silent. The challenge for them is to avoid the rhetoric, stand up and say, 'We are going to oppose the carbon tax, because it is going to affect Victorian jobs'. But there is not a solitary word from across the chamber.

Members have already heard from me this morning about what the City of Yarra is going to do in terms of the \$750 000 impact on it of the carbon tax. It is going to pass that on in a huge rate increase to its ratepayers. That is unacceptable.

Ms Pulford has asked the question, and I thank her for asking about the Baillieu-Ryan coalition government delivering on its election promises. Let us talk about some of the things the government has done. We have secured new disability accommodation. We have announced funding for GLBTI (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex) youth projects. We have delivered on our pledge to support Victorian self-help groups. We have responded to the Community Visitors annual report of 2010–11. We encouraged our youth to come and be part of Youth Parliament 2012. The Minister for Housing and Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, the Honourable Wendy Lovell, and I had the pleasure of visiting the creation of the Carlton Work and Learning Centre in my electorate, which is now open for business creating jobs. That was another commitment.

We have given local decision making to schools and worked with Australian Centre for the Moving Image to deliver new screen workshops for young Victorians. We have recognised in law the vital role of carers — and I was a carer myself. That is a very important piece of legislation. This government has given \$1.6 million to Scouts Victoria for facilities upgrades. As Ms Pulford announced, the first PSOs (protective services officers) are out there now doing their job. We are going to fulfil our election commitment in regard to PSO numbers, and what that is going to add is safety and security, which will make railway stations places of activity. With the increase in security and safety around railway stations, businesses see them as places where they can do business. If they can do business in those places, that will create jobs.

We have delivered on liquor reform, and we have given the girl guides \$870 000 for facilities upgrades. This is a new era for liquor and gambling regulation in Victoria. Maths and science specialists are now operating in schools. We introduced Brodie's law. We made bullying illegal at school, in the workplace, in the community and online. We are delivering on our election commitments. More than 4500 Victorian kids

have now had the chance to learn to swim through the new VICSWIM program that the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Mr Delahunty, and I announced not long ago in Ivanhoe.

The coalition government has delivered on its commitment to set up an inquiry on feed-in tariffs and barriers to local generation. We have banned the bong; we said we would, and we have. We have also funded collaboration between business and research. We have funded the Cradle to Kinder program; that intensive support for vulnerable young mothers and babies was announced recently. We have done it. We have introduced new measures to reduce knife crime and the number of illegal weapons, and we have delivered on the FOI commissioner. We have also delivered in regard to paramedics on motorbikes. We said we would, and we have.

Mr Finn — Where are they?

Mr ONDARCHIE — They are up and running, Mr Finn. You should see them. Maybe they do not get out to the west, because everyone is fit and healthy out there, but I have seen them in Northern Metropolitan Region.

There has been a \$2.8 million boost to regional and rural planning. We delivered on our promise to deliver safer schools. The regional living expo, which we said we would introduce, kicks off on 27 April. The coalition government delivered on its commitment to clean up at Brookland Greens estate in Cranbourne. I know Mrs Peulich is particularly interested in the clean-up at Brookland Greens estate. We said we would do it, and we are doing it.

A \$3.2 million pilot plan has opened the door for people with mental illness. The emergency management legislation has been passed by Parliament. We cracked down on illegal puppy farms with Oscar's law. We said we would do it, and we have done it. Ms Pulford has kindly asked the question, 'What are you doing to fulfil your election commitments?'. There are lots more achievements, and I will allow others in the chamber today to talk about them. We have given communities a greater say on wild dog control. We have given communities a greater say on that sort of thing, and that is terrific. We have also delivered on our commitment to help problem gamblers. We are dealing with hoons; we said we would, and we are. We delivered a website on hospital performance. We have abolished forced euthanasia of pound animals. We delivered the keys to new homebuyers. We gave them the opportunity to be a part of that market. We cut

ambulance membership fees in half; we said we would, and we have.

Children can now visit the zoo for free. We said we would do that, and we have done it. We have introduced a new loans scheme to support bushfire-affected small businesses. The regional Melbourne Cup holiday act passed through Parliament. We reformed the growth areas infrastructure contribution to increase housing affordability. The coalition government has also honoured indigenous Victorians with the nation's first-ever indigenous honour roll. It was also a historic day for Country Fire Authority volunteers when we passed legislation to recognise the fantastic work they do in the community. I note particularly that in my electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region through the tragic Black Saturday bushfires the CFA volunteers were absolutely amazing. I take my hat off to them.

Our Minister for Health, David Davis, has unveiled a landmark health plan. We delivered on our commitment to expand Frankston Hospital, and we gave true independence to the bushfire implementation monitor. We also delivered on our Rock Eisteddfod challenge; we said we would, and we have done so. We have been asked the question this morning, 'What are you doing about delivering on your election promises?'. We have, we are and we continue to do so. The coalition government has extended its freeze on late-night liquor licences.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I am glad you asked the question, Mr Ramsay, because all this sits in contrast with what happened over the previous 11 years. Let me give some of those examples. When in government, the ALP said that by 2009, 90 per cent of young people in Victoria would successfully complete year 12 or its educational equivalent; a South Gippsland — that is, to Leongatha — passenger rail service would be in place; it would standardise Victorian rail; it would introduce passenger rail to Mildura; it would cease logging in closed water catchments; and it would construct a third rail track from Caulfield to Dandenong. Did that happen? That third rail track from Caulfield to Dandenong did not happen. It was a failed election promise.

Having been asked today by the opposition what we are doing to fulfil our election commitments, I have outlined many of the things we are doing, and I am confident that many of the speakers on our side of the house will be doing a lot more of that today. Moreover, there was an abject failure by the previous government

to deliver on its election commitments. It talked about a tram line to the city of Knox and about closing Essendon Airport. Then there is the desalination plant that is costing Victorians \$2 million a day.

Ms Pulford said the budget is an opportunity to redress — and it is. It is an opportunity to redress the failings of the Bracks and Brumby Labor governments over such a significant time. The Labor Party has not only failed residents in the northern suburbs but has also left a long and sorry legacy of failed projects and massive mismanagement in its 11-year wake, which has impacted on all Victorians. Bringing this motion before the house today is the height of arrogance and hypocrisy. It is attempting to deflect its own significant failures by moving a motion which is nothing short of farcical.

Labor is in complete denial about what happened over its time in government: the mismanagement of the desalination plant that will cost Victorians \$2 million a day for the next 30 years; the monumental mismanagement of the Melbourne Markets relocation project that will see a cost blow-out of millions of dollars, as identified by the Auditor-General; the \$3 billion of revenue lost to Victorian taxpayers due to Labor's bungling of the gaming machine licensing auction; the disastrous mismanagement of ICT projects such as the myki ticketing scheme, which will cost Victorians \$1.44 billion in blow-outs — \$1.44 billion as a result of mismanagement by the Brumby Labor government. The ineptitude of the Labor government has resulted in a \$1.1 billion blow-out in the regional rail link; blow-outs in the cost of roads of more than \$360 million, such as with the M1 upgrade; and the funding of black holes left in the Olivia Newton-John wellness centre and the Royal Children's Hospital ICT projects, which the coalition had to fix in its first budget. They made a mess; we are fixing it up.

Other examples include HealthSMART, the personal myki project of the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Daniel Andrews, which had cost blow-outs of the order of \$243 million and which the Auditor-General found had no business case; there was a lack of rigour in relation to the north-south pipeline project; and more than \$1 billion in taxpayer funds was spent on blatant political advertising by the Labor government. Labor failed students with run-down schools and overcrowding. It did not invest diligently in roads or rail infrastructure. It failed to plan for the growth of the ageing population of Victoria because it used out-of-date, inaccurate data.

There was a \$25 million blow-out in projects relating to the state's sports facilities. There was 11 years of

mismanagement of ambulance services, including Mr Andrews's botched merger of the ambulance services, as well as declining operational and financial performance as identified by the Auditor-General in October 2010. There was also the systematic neglect and mismanagement of public housing, the report on which hit the chamber in the last sitting week.

Victorians, especially those in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, will not forget how the ALP government, the Bracks and Brumby Labor governments, failed them. They took them for granted. Everywhere I have gone in the northern suburbs people have said to me that Labor thinks the northern suburbs make up the Labor heartland, so it ignores them. Labor ignored them for 11 years. They have had enough. But now in opposition Labor is demanding that the government do everything straightaway, immediately. I have already given a list today of the things the coalition government has delivered on in its very short time in office. But we do recognise that there is more to do.

Let me go to Ms Pulford's issue about a jobs plan and creating and maintaining jobs in Victoria. In the last week we have seen Labor's so-called jobs plan. What does it want to do? This is a party that has no real policy ideas. What it wants to do is seek submissions and ideas. It wants to have a talkfest. When its members talk about a talkfest I am reminded of the 2020 summit.

Mr Ramsay — What happened about that?

Mr ONDARCHIE — The 2020 summit of then Prime Minister Rudd. What happened to him?

An honourable member — What were the big ideas?

Mr ONDARCHIE — The 2020 summit of then Prime Minister Rudd — who I think suffered badly at the hands of his own party — did nothing.

Any proposal for genuine policy by the state ALP is going to take longer than a Health Services Union investigation. After 11 years in government, Mr Andrews and Mr Holding, the member for Lyndhurst in the other place, are so out of touch with business in Victoria that they have not had time to write to businesses to seek their views. They have learnt nothing from being an out-of-touch government, so much so that they are an out-of-touch opposition. They are just an out-of-touch opposition; they have no clue.

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE — As I said to Mr Leane in the chamber yesterday, we had the hysteria of One Direction in Victoria over the weekend; but we had 11 years of no direction from his party.

The coalition government strategy for generating jobs investment is to run a responsible and disciplined budget. It is a budget strategy that will allow investment in infrastructure, support a strong manufacturing sector, encourage productivity and competitiveness in our industries, and identify new markets for growth internationally. I am reminded of the Premier's own mission to India, which included representatives of 300 companies, Mr Dalla-Riva, the Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade, and Mr Rich-Phillips, the Assistant Treasurer. They headed off there to generate trade and investment for Victoria.

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Hello! Watch and learn, because this is how responsible governments act. Opposition members should have spent the better part of the last 15 months identifying all the things they did wrong. They should apologise to Victorians. They should watch the Baillieu-Ryan coalition government deliver effective results for Victoria. In contrast, the ALP's record of government was to deliver a manufacturing statement to Victorians that was over 700 days late. I understand the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly has written to a range of organisations asking for ideas for a jobs plan. Here is one idea for a jobs plan: ring Julia and cancel the carbon tax. Now there is an answer.

Mr Leane interjected.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, I know it is highly unusual for a government member to take a point of order when one of their own is speaking, but every time Mr Ondarchie opens his mouth I hear two voices coming out — one from one side of the chamber and one from the other. I am not sure whether it is a problem with the microphone system or whether the Opposition Whip needs to be brought into line, but I am finding it hard to follow Mr Ondarchie. I ask that you perhaps restore order.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! There is no point of order.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Thank you, Acting President. I thank Mrs Peulich for ensuring that this important message is heard in the chamber. The importance of this message is that we are about saving Victorian jobs. It is about time opposition members rang the Prime Minister and asked her to cancel this great big new tax,

because it is going to affect jobs. It is going to affect jobs of that often-used phrase ‘working families’. On the other side of the chamber there is a group of people who have walked away from working families — families living in Labor’s heartland. Now those northern suburban families, which Labor assumed were living in its heartland, have walked away from Labor. If Labor members were serious about committing to the benefit and growth of Victorian jobs, they would be ringing the Prime Minister today and saying, ‘Cancel the carbon tax; it’s going to hurt us’.

But, no, we have not heard a word from them; there has been absolute silence. They should be bold. Here is their opportunity. They have a big day today, they have all the opportunities. I want to hear from them; I want to hear them say, ‘We don’t like the carbon tax. The carbon tax is going to hurt Victorians’. I want to hear from them that they want to save jobs and that they are willing to back the cancellation of the carbon tax. But they will not do it, because they are following the party line. To them the party line is more important than the welfare and benefit of Victorians. That is the problem. The party line is much more beneficial to them than the care and wellbeing of Victorians.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! Mr Scheffer.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I have not finished. The Acting President said ‘Order’.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! I said ‘Order’ to bring down the level of noise in the chamber. When Mr Ondarchie sat down I thought he had finished.

Mr ONDARCHIE — While they are ringing the Prime Minister to ask her to cancel the carbon tax, could they also remind her that we need a more balanced, common-sense approach to industrial relations in this country? We need a system that encourages productivity and competitiveness and that works in the interests of all Australians — not just Labor’s union mates. It is unfortunate that in this chamber most of the speeches on the other side of the house are written by people from Trades Hall Council. They should stop running the party line and start standing up for Victorians.

Rather than acquiescing to Labor’s betrayal of the defence industry workers of Victoria, members opposite should muster up the courage to confront their federal Labor colleagues and ask them this question: why did you decide to buy military assets overseas

rather than from Thales in Bendigo or BAE Systems in Williamstown, turning your backs on Victorian jobs and choosing to spend money overseas? Members opposite should ask their federal colleagues that question, but, no, they will defend them today. Members opposite have all day to talk to this motion. I want to hear them say that the carbon tax is bad for Victorians and Victorian jobs and that their federal colleagues mucked it up by buying military assets overseas rather than from hardworking Victorians.

The opposition does not stand up for working families. It stands up for Labor Party rhetoric, and that is the problem. Where is the opposition today? Here is the chance for opposition members to put their hands on their hearts and say, ‘We are standing up for Victorians, Victorian jobs and Victorian working families. We are going to encourage the Prime Minister to cancel the carbon tax. We are going to remonstrate with the federal government about buying its military assets overseas’. The federal government has turned its back on Victorians, as members opposite did for 11 years. Members opposite turned their back on Victorians and they should be ashamed of themselves, but they could stand up today and say they are sorry.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — The motion, which is quite wide in scope, suggests that we should give some encouragement to the Baillieu government in framing its budget, which I presume is largely locked in at this stage, specifically to deliver on its election promises. There is a difficulty with that, which is that generally when I talk to Victorians I find that they have no real idea what the Baillieu government’s election promises were. Yes, the coalition ran a very effective undermining strategy against the previous government, but at the end of the day all we really know about Premier Ted Baillieu’s strategic direction for Victoria is that he is going to fix the problems and build the future. I would love to hear a coherent, well-considered short, medium and long-term strategy that runs to something more than just free zoo tickets.

Mrs Peulich — You have to fix the problems first, don’t you?

Mr BARBER — What are those problems? They might be something we can all agree on. We have some rocky international economic circumstances, some peculiar difficulties with our country’s economy and a number of other challenges that simply cannot continue to be avoided or deferred.

We need action on climate change, but it is clear, and it will be clearer when we read the budget papers, that the

government has a plan for climate change and that plan is to do nothing. At the moment the government is riding on the coat-tails of the federal Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, on that issue. You can hear the excitement getting greater every sitting week. At the moment government members are sounding like a crazy Mayan doomsday cult which has predicted the end of the world will occur at midnight on 30 June with the introduction of the carbon tax. At that moment, at the stroke of midnight, the lights will go out, the economy will collapse, great cracks will open in the earth and frogs will fall from the sky.

Everybody in Australia except for members of the coalition knows that is not going to happen, but, like one of those cults, we can predict that they will not be the least bit deterred when the end of the world does not arrive at the appointed time. The phenomenon would predict that they will in fact become even more committed to their belief in the imminent end of life as we know it. We will hear an even more excitable response from this government.

It is going to need its excitement because Tony Abbott has promised an election sometime around 2013 which he says will be a referendum on the carbon tax, not a referendum on the current federal government's performance. After all, every election is a referendum on the incumbent government's performance.

Tony Abbott is saying the election will specifically be a referendum on the carbon tax, and we are then promised — and this goes to the issue of damage to investor and consumer confidence — another election, a double dissolution election, possibly within 3, 6 or certainly 12 months. This is a core promise of Tony Abbott. He has said there will be no carbon tax under any government he leads. It will not be enough to get a few changes that he might be able to negotiate with what will be the embittered Labor opposition. It will not be enough to make a few changes, perhaps tweak the floor price or something, and not enough to simply roll back some of the Clean Energy Future funding. Tony Abbott has promised that there will be no carbon tax or else there will be a double dissolution election. He has promised two elections in short succession.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Acting President, any debate on carbon tax — and I think it is very appropriate that Mr Barber should make his comments on the carbon tax — ought to be subject to the parameters of this debate and not be a debate that Mr Barber wishes to have on entirely and exclusively federal issues and the performance of the federal opposition, because if he did want that, maybe he should put his hand up for the Senate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Tarlamis) — Order! There is no point of order.

Mr BARBER — Acting President, as you have recognised, I was in fact invited by the government's lead speaker to say whether I supported the carbon tax. I am getting to the core issue of the impact of all this on business, investor and consumer confidence. As a result we are looking at the coalition's highly excitable approach to the carbon tax, including compensation for low and middle-income earners, which will maintain their spending power, and for small business the accelerated depreciation that we have already offered and the small business tax cut being offered by the federal government. Amazingly the federal coalition's position is that it will vote against it. All those broader federal fiscal measures support confidence in the economy and have a real impact on our job here in Victoria, which is to bring down and deliver a budget which fixes the problems and builds the future.

However, at the state level, locked in behind Tony Abbott's position, there will be no meaningful action on climate change. In fact there will be the rolling back of any program that might have some influence on it. An exception to that would be a state government program which I wholeheartedly support and promote whenever I can — that is, the Victorian energy efficiency target. This program needs to be rapidly expanded to the commercial sector and to small business so that they can take advantage of that program. I would have to say that the Department of Primary Industries, which is the department of the Minister for Energy and Resources, Mr O'Brien, has been somewhat slow in that respect.

The state budget must also deliver urgent action on health, particularly spending measures that reduce the burden of disease and therefore reduce health costs at the acute end. We need not just more and better hospitals but the cure for hospitals in the area of preventive and population health. We need to be addressing the SNAP factors: smoking, nutrition, alcohol and physical activity. To that I would add a second P — poker machines, which have such a devastating impact. We are not seeing any great vision or direction in that area from the Minister for Health and associated ministers. There is no real action on further reductions to the problems of smoking and no coherent program to encourage good nutrition. We found out from the minister's department that less than 10 per cent of Victorians eat the right amount of vegies — that is, 5 per cent of males and 15 per cent of females — so we have a huge opportunity through promotion, which must be specifically provided for in this budget — —

Mrs Peulich — You have got to be able to put food on the table. You are not helping that. You cannot eat carbon.

Mr BARBER — It is interesting, is it not, that sometimes the fresh foods are in fact dearer in the supermarkets than highly processed alternatives.

Mrs Peulich — The Greens would tax us out of existence.

Mr BARBER — Mrs Peulich interjects that the Greens will tax us out of existence. Let me skip ahead and move to the specific taxation and revenue side that we are likely to see in this coming budget and looking forward. As I have said, the government is obsessed with the carbon tax, but the carbon tax is not a very big tax.

Mr Drum interjected.

Mr BARBER — I will give Mr Drum credit. He has interjected, 'Not yet'. Victoria's share, at about \$23 a tonne, is probably going to be about \$2.5 billion, but after three years we know the floor price will drop to \$15 a tonne. It is my belief that, with our weak carbon target, carbon is likely to be trading at that level. The experience whenever similar taxes have been introduced around the world has been that those who have to pay it say that it will be the end of the world but the day after it arrives they say, 'Guess what? We found all these ways to reduce carbon. We were just sitting on them — banking them — and waiting until you made it worth our while'. It is the European experience, notwithstanding its poor economic performance, that due to its low cap and large exemptions the price of emissions trading has plummeted to single figures at times.

We will see that same phenomenon. In fact there are reports in this morning's newspapers predicting that the wholesale price of electricity will rise by even less than the conservative Treasury estimates. While the coalition is getting ready to bring the rapture on and saying the world will end at midnight on 30 June, we will have the opportunity to log onto the Australian Energy Market Operator and see exactly what electricity is trading at.

This government is not shy when it comes to raising taxes. Its members say that this carbon tax — at some \$2.5 billion highly targeted to the energy sector, fully compensated for low and middle-income earners, with extensive checks and balances to ensure financial sustainability of the energy sector — will destroy the economy. Of course the carbon tax is a tax householders can avoid by being more energy efficient. I know for a fact that my home energy bill — and we

are not exactly freezing in the dark — is about half that of the average Victorian, even with all the modern comforts, including a big-screen TV and you name it. We are just highly efficient, and that is an efficiency we need to build into all of our homes and businesses.

By contrast the Baillieu government will be ripping out \$2.5 billion in extra taxes compared to the first budget by the time the state election rolls around. That is the government's existing projection — an extra \$4.8 billion of costs made up in part by an extra \$2.1 billion of taxes. This is just common political knowledge for anybody who has been around for a few cycles. Liberals do not cut taxes in government; Liberals increase taxes. They just talk about cutting them in opposition. The first thing this government did was start increasing the cost of living. There have been huge hits to public transport fares, car registration and other forms of unavoidable taxes, and because those increases barely make a day's news, government members have gotten away with it. I guarantee there will be more of the same pain in this budget, leading to increased revenues for the state rising quite rapidly and dwarfing the carbon tax over the coming years of the Baillieu-Ryan government budget process.

The government's lead speaker briefly touched upon it when he said, 'This allows us to have a disciplined budget and make investment for the future'. It is certainly true if you look at the government's cash flow statement and its projections out to the election — and it is very hard to lie in a cash flow statement, which is why it is always the first thing I go to when I open up a set of budget papers — that around about the election year the government will generate through its increased taxing and cuts to services a rather large wad of money in the investment line of the cash flow statement. It is as though government members are building up a war chest for the election year when they may be able to spend a decent amount of money on capital investment. When I say a decent amount, it is dwarfed by what we know the job is.

The Auditor-General has already told us we need to spend \$20 billion to get public transport up to snuff. Another report from the Auditor-General says \$600 million is needed just to get our existing public housing up to standard. You are not going to see any of these items in a Baillieu-Ryan budget. Government members will avoid the problems and attempt to defer the future. Even Mr Wells's war chest for 2014 as a result of all this pain — the pain now, paradise later dichotomy that they are trying to sell to us — is not coming anywhere near meeting our basic investment needs in public transport, in housing and in maintenance and protection of the environment.

On the subject of new taxes, which the Liberals love, Mr Ondarchie earlier today referred to the impact of a carbon tax on Yarra City Council being some \$750 000. That was across its energy bill, landfill disposal and other input costs. He failed to mention the \$180 000 of state landfill levies that Yarra council will have to find this year — —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr BARBER — Let us talk about that. The Liberals were somewhat reluctant about the landfill levy when they were in opposition, but in government, when they are the ones counting the cash, they love the landfill levy so much that they have decided to bring forward the increased payments. There was none of the hesitancy that they affected in opposition. My position has been quite consistent. But if we are talking about new taxes, let us talk about all of them. Let us talk about the landfill levy that is an extra \$180 000 to be made up by the ratepayers in the city of Yarra this year.

Mr Ondarchie, the lead speaker for the government, cannot be selective. The extra \$2.1 billion in taxes the Baillieu government is using to build up its war chest for 2014 comes from landfill levies, car registrations and public transport fares. As for reforming state taxes, you can forget about that. There is a zero contribution from Ted Baillieu on the reform of state taxes along the lines of the Henry review. He is jacking those up to secure his position. We have addressed what the government needs to be doing in the area of action on climate change. We skipped forward at the invitation of some government members to talk about their tax impacts. We talked a bit about action on health. We will now talk about public transport.

The government has given up the ghost on squeezing the public transport operators, notably Metro Trains Melbourne, for higher performance and is now rewriting the train timetable to match Metro's lousy performance. Where are we going to generate the funds to advance public transport if the operators are incompetent and no downward pressure is placed on that area by the government? While we are at it, let us look forward to what work practices and productivity changes Mr Mulder, the Minister for Public Transport, may be requiring Metro to introduce in its currently commencing enterprise agreement with the relevant union. Is he simply going to let Metro take the soft option and let the taxpayers pay for Metro's inability to change its operations? That is a very large item in the budget, and we expect to see it going up faster than the actual service provision it is meant to be delivering.

On education, we can bat that one across the chamber indefinitely. But here is the reality: we are the lowest spending state in Australia on education. We were for every one of the 11 years that Labor said education was its no. 1 priority and will continue to be. Unless the Baillieu government is prepared to do something quite radical, it is going to keep us in the wooden spoon position among Australia's states when it comes to education spending, because it is not committed to the \$1 billion or so that it would take to get Victoria's education spending up to just the average of other states. We know what needs to be done to address the current crisis in manufacturing. We need a major short, medium and long-term investment in education. It is clear that skills investment is the thing that drives growth in the manufacturing sector, and here is the proof.

Manufacturing used to be the home of the unskilled worker, but that has changed dramatically over the past two decades. Whenever you see a manufacturing worker getting a pay increase, it is usually because they have upgraded their skills. Employers value skills through increased wages therefore, QED, there is economic value to be created through skilling your workforce. How does this miserly, underinvesting, rank-us-at-the-bottom-please strategy for education enhance manufacturing? It cannot possibly do that. Yesterday we heard the government say it was scrapping the employer and union-based advisory committees that tell it where to make that skill investment. You cannot get better than unions and employers sitting around a table and agreeing what the skill needs of the industry are. But government does not want to hear that any more. The government feels more politically cosy in bed with its business mates, but it is missing half the story. It does not make sense, and it does not augur well for a clever state approach in the forthcoming budget that we are talking about.

I turn now to action on crime and community safety. Do we expect Mr Baillieu to fix that problem and build the future? No. The minister tasked with crime prevention gave up the ghost on day 1 at his first estimates committee hearing when he said, 'We are not going to solve the crime problem'. He at least has the awareness that if you want to solve the crime problem you have to solve the poverty problem. One of the larger elements of solving the poverty problem is to solve the housing problem. I refer to my earlier discussion about what the government will not be doing. It will not even provide a basic standard of public housing that the Auditor-General recommended. So if it knows it is not going to fix the poverty problem and it knows therefore that it cannot fix the crime problem, what can the government do? It will do the

next best thing — hire more police. The government knows it cannot fix crime, but it has to be seen to be doing something, so it hires more police.

I have already addressed a number of areas of action on the cost of living, but there are just a couple more, and they relate directly to the budget because of the concessions provided in the budget for that ever-spiralling line item. The provision of necessary concessions to our most vulnerable Victorians is a \$1 billion cost to the budget, but since there is no effective plan to control electricity and water prices, the \$300 million or so relating to that just goes up and up as electricity and water prices go up and up. This government has no plan for either. It promised to change the mix of water pricing away from fixed charges to volumetric, again giving us an opportunity to be conservers and reduce our bills. I have not seen any action on that yet on my water bill. The government is finding that one too tough.

On electricity, the government, through its legislated responsibility, simply failed to regulate the electricity sector, and it waded through and continued the smart meter program with no discernible changes. That is the hit I have seen on my electricity bill, and it is not as if I get to avoid that charge. I am paying it whether I am an electricity conserver or a profligate waster. You cannot avoid it, and guess what? You cannot get any of the benefits from the smart meter either. The benefits have been to the companies and distribution businesses with all the costs to me. Likewise, segue to Minister O'Brien's complete failure to bring under control the spiralling cost of our electricity bills, which are associated with the poles and wires. He accused the Brumby government of taking a backseat approach, but whenever that mob have their hands out for more money from the federal regulator, Mr O'Brien just sits there and says, 'Don't look at me; I am just the energy minister'. He is suing one of them, though, for \$22 million associated with the Black Saturday bushfires. I suspect that money will also end up on our electricity bills.

On the retail end of electricity, represented by the people who bill us, the competition model has failed. It is increasing our bills even faster than it is in other states. The cost of doorknockers and advertising campaigns is adding to our bills for no real competition outcome. We already know, after more than 14 months, that for the remainder of this four-year term we are not going to see any significant action from the Baillieu government on cost of living. If the government got all that right, if it addressed all the problems I have just pointed out in the way I have referred to them, then the second part of this motion, the jobs component, would

be secure. We would see a government with short, medium and long-term visions for the state that would inspire investor, consumer and household budgetary confidence. There would be money in this coming budget to commence further basic planning, design and preparation for the Rowville rail line.

I know there is no money in the budget to fully fund the Rowville rail line this year, but if further money was allocated to take the early study to the next step, there would be jobs for engineers, planners and the geotechnical teams that would be sent out along the route, and there would be a short-term stimulus pointing to a long-term investment into public transport which we and every Victorian know, is going to be a major driver of our long-term productivity. It is going to stop our inner city grinding to a halt — that is, if you like, the zone 1 travel card zone where nearly 3 million Victorians live, work and/or visit each day as part of their personal and economic activities. That is the area where public transport has to get it right. As well, the outreach areas in all corners of the state need an efficient, connected public transport system, but the government simply shrugged its shoulders on the release of the Rowville report and said, 'We have no real plan for where this is going'.

Likewise, the government's one sop to the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, simply in order to keep VECCI from getting completely out of control, is to talk about the mythological east-west road tunnel. The Premier is so committed to that that he wants the federal government to stump up \$6 million just for him to study it further, when he knows that around the world toll road projects are either going broke or simply freezing up, as private investors will not take the risk. They can see what is happening in every city around the world — a renaissance in public transport.

What is it that Mr Baillieu is really saying about this east-west tunnel — or is it a north-south tunnel, or does it head towards the city and then get scared and head off in another direction, leaving traffic pouring from the off ramps throughout the inner city? He has to say he is going to build it because VECCI wants it, but his commitment is half-hearted. Maybe his model of economic growth is simply to pay people to dig holes and fill them in again, or in the case of the road tunnel to dig holes and then fill them with cars. He is way off with the necessary investments in public transport.

There we have it. I would like to be more optimistic about the opportunities that the government is going to put forward in this budget, but all we have heard from its lead speaker this morning is a bashing of the

previous government — I would have thought its problems were self-evident to everybody, and the election itself seemed to take care of any further debate on its performance — and a grab bag of high-visibility but unfortunately low-impact measures that will get a press release for every single coalition government MP. We have not heard about the strategy, the vision for fixing the problems and building the future. There is no action on climate change, which the government knows is inevitable but from which politically it thinks it can squeeze a couple more years of fun. There is no serious action on preventive health, which every expert says is the cure for rising health bills and will make a healthier population, or on the types of diseases — —

Mrs Peulich — I think we have got an inquiry at the moment into building healthy communities.

Mr BARBER — Yes, there have been a number of similar inquiries, and they all conclude the same thing.

Mrs Peulich — No, it is still in progress.

Mr BARBER — You would not need an inquiry, Mrs Peulich, if you would open your ears to what every medical professional — including dentists, notably — is telling you. I do not want to stray back into what I think should be in the federal budget, because my federal party leader, Senator Christine Milne, has done a very good job over the last four days articulating on behalf of the Greens our priorities for federal spending. The Greens priorities are now on the lips of every journalist as a result of Senator Milne's great work over the last few days. But we do need, and unfortunately we will struggle to find in the state budget, those preventive health measures for the population that will ultimately help to get our acute health problems down. Ms Crozier, of course, understands perfectly what I am talking about.

On transport, any citizen will tell us they want 5, 10 and 30-year plans for the way in which Melbourne's and Victoria's public transport will continue to be expanded. Unfortunately it is sad but true that parents often make decisions about a school based on what it looks like from the outside, just looking at the grounds and the buildings, and every parent knows that the government could do more in the area of education.

In relation to action on crime, we need to solve the drivers of crime: poverty and poor-quality public and rental housing. The government should be introducing minimum standards for rental housing and taking action on the cost of living. Unfortunately the typical historical cycle of conservatives talking about tax cuts in opposition and then racking up taxes in government has

exhibited itself yet again. That, unfortunately, leaves a big vacuum.

The sense I get from members of this government is a very strange mix of despondency about their first 15 months in government and cockiness about their doomsday scenario for the carbon tax on 30 June meaning that they are on a road to glory. But I can guarantee that the voters who are listening are not getting a clearly articulated message from the Premier. Yes, he has a very deep voice, which is good if you are trying to sound reassuring while saying absolutely nothing, but apart from that there will be nothing in this state budget that reassures Victorians about there being a strong, confident, sustainable and smart direction for Victoria's future.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I welcome the opportunity to place a few comments on record, and in doing so I would also like to take the opportunity to make some remarks in response to Mr Barber's contribution.

Mr Barber — That was the idea.

Mrs PEULICH — Yes, I take the opportunity to comment on some ideas. If you listen to Mr Barber, look at him on the surface and observe his relaxed presentation and demeanour, hands in pockets, you might think, 'This man has savoir faire and seems to be incredibly well informed', but when you get down to the bottom of it what you have is a very well presented, understated contribution that is simply another example of the same selective Greens public relations machine generating platitudes.

Mr Barber — It's frustrating, isn't it?

Mrs PEULICH — It is not frustrating to me. I think Mr Barber will find it frustrating after the next election. It is disappointing that in light of the overwhelming concern of the community across Australia and Victoria — Victoria being home to the largest manufacturing sector — about the carbon tax and its impact on jobs and the cost of living, as well as waning confidence because it is happening at a time when we can least afford this tax and when, in a globalised economy, businesses are making decisions about where to relocate, which means that governments have to try harder, the attitude of the Greens is so condescending. From the luxury of inner metropolitan life where he can afford the new gadgets and the energy-saving devices that many other families cannot even think about, let alone afford, Mr Barber has little regard for the cost of living.

If the Greens had their way, they would print money, we would all wear it and we would all be green. The Greens would print money in order to be able to afford their cafe latte aspirations that are so removed from the real-life experience of many ordinary families, who are struggling to put food on the table, including the vegetables that Mr Barber seems to be so concerned about there being a lack of. All individuals are concerned about being able to use their money as best they can, and I am disappointed that Mr Barber is so lacking in empathy for the ordinary voter.

The reality is that the carbon tax has become an iconic and symbolic issue that demonstrates this lack of empathy and concern for the plight of ordinary families, ordinary people, pensioners, self-funded retirees, people who are trying to keep their businesses going and people who have, regrettably, lost their jobs. I know Mr Barber is well read, but he is very selectively read. I would suggest that he dust off the old book *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell and read about the importance of small things that have a cumulative effect, inspiring confidence or destroying it and making things viable or not. It is the sum total of small things that often leads to success or, conversely, failure.

The lack of empathy and the confused mix of the cafe latte, affluent perspective with ideas that are simply socialist and the desire to present as understanding and sympathetic to markets just do not gel. To imply that there is some grand vision that Christine Milne, the new Greens leader, is going to be followed and that the seas will part as though she is some new messiah is misleading. Anyone who has been in politics for 5 minutes would know that it is experience that has led Bob Brown, the former federal Greens leader, to choose to depart now so that his reputation is not marred by a horrific defeat. This train wreck that is coming not only Labor's way but also the Greens' way, encapsulated by the strong opposition to the carbon tax, will decimate the Bob Brown legacy and will reduce the Greens vote to just its hard-core, rusted-on supporters.

An honourable member interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — I am not going to be making predictions at this stage. All I am saying is that Bob Brown and the Greens have peaked. Bob Brown, as a wily old politician, has elected to go at a time of his choosing and in the face of an oncoming train, and there is going to be a very big train wreck.

Mr Leane — On a point of order, Acting President, I understand lead speakers get some flexibility, but I have not once heard Mrs Peulich mention the Baillieu government's election commitments, and I am not sure

whether the way in which people view Bob Brown in the future is relevant to the debate.

Mrs PEULICH — On the point of order, Acting President, I am directly responding to the arguments canvassed by the preceding speaker, and I would have thought that debate meant also rebuttal, as well as advancing one's own arguments, which I have every intention of doing.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr O'Brien) — Order! There is no point of order. It is in a sense a wide-ranging debate, both as the motion has been cast, and certainly as it has been debated by the speakers I have listened to from all sides. Mrs Peulich was responding in her way to the most recent contribution of Mr Barber. I ask Mrs Peulich to continue.

Mrs PEULICH — In wrapping up the federal issues, if I may, because obviously that is not largely what this debate is about, I want to make some comments on Mr Barber's pooh-pooing the idea of a double dissolution election. When that train wreck comes and the Labor Party gets wiped out and the Greens take a big hit, there is unlikely to be, in my view, a double dissolution. The Labor Party will be scrambling to rebuild itself and to rejuvenate, and if it means staying wedded to a policy that has been so comprehensively rejected by the voters, I do not believe a double dissolution will be necessary. I think the Labor Party would be absolutely politically stupid to vote against repealing the carbon tax.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — You can hold out — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr O'Brien) — Order! I ask that the debate be brought through the Chair.

Mrs PEULICH — You can hold on to your green, remote, fairies-at-the-bottom-of-the-garden interpretation, but having been around the block a few times I am telling you what I think is going to be the scenario — and I am saying that from the perspective of having served in government, in opposition and again in government — once the Labor Party suffers a massive loss on the iconic issue of the carbon tax.

It is imposing this tax at a time when we can least afford it, with jobs being threatened and businesses closing down. The carbon tax will roll over and have a compounding effect across a range of portfolios, including local government rates, which Mr Barber tried to squib on. The reality is every council will be imposing probably in the vicinity of a 2 per cent rise in

their rates as a direct result of the carbon tax. You cannot shy away from that. That is just one example.

We have heard from the Minister for Health about the impact of the carbon tax on the health budget. We have heard about the impact of the carbon tax on the education budget and across a whole range of services. It will have a compounding effect and, yes, families are very concerned about the impact on their cost of living, with negligible environmental benefits, at a time when we can least afford it. I would like to compliment the Premier on being an advocate on this issue, not in a reactionary or radical way but in a way that I think best represents Victorian interests.

This is really the main point of the debate. I cannot believe the Labor Party is bringing this motion before the chamber, but I welcome it, because obviously members opposite are suffering from a very infectious condition called collective memory loss. They have forgotten their 11 years of waste and mismanagement, the cost of project blow-outs and the fact that public sector projects cost over 30 per cent more than comparable projects funded in the private sector, which basically means that Victorians have received less for the dollars that have been collected in taxes and managed on their behalf. We know some of those iconic failures that this government is now trying to fix, and hence our slogan 'Fix the problems and build the future'. Unless you can actually fix the problems, it is very difficult to move immediately to building that vision for the future, that strategy for the future and that action plan.

There must be a direct link to the life and the experience and the challenges facing this government across each portfolio. Indeed I would like to compliment the government on getting onto fixing the problems in a very different way to the spin and the slogans used by the former government to cover what has been revealed as incompetence in so many areas. Mr Barber did say that Liberals always raise taxes.

Mr Drum interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — He has been reading that green public relations and spin again. I went to hear a very good speaker the other night on a book that he has authored called *Little Green Lies*. It was written by a Professor Bennett. I would highly recommend that Mr Barber start broadening his agenda.

But the reason the Liberals often have to fix a financial mess is precisely that — it is a financial mess we inherited that we then need to address in order to be able to build that future for Victorians. Mr Barber, and

more importantly Ms Pulford, who I would have thought would have had a brighter prospect for a career, so recklessly and so blatantly disregard the evidence on the record of the former government's failings, failings that — and everyone would know and accept this — cannot be turned around in 16 or 17 months in office. Eleven years of mismanagement, of poorly managed projects, of neglect of infrastructure, of services that failed to deliver real outcomes, of the deterioration of our integrity and accountability mechanisms in this state and of poor financial management cannot be turned around in 12 or 18 months. We can fix the problems in the first term, and this government is already very proud of its achievements in terms of fixing those problems.

I have a very long document which is headed 'ALP's broken promises'. I will not go through those except to say that the document is testimony to 11 years of wasted opportunity, and the wasted opportunity was as a result of this commitment to just resort to spin and public relations and look after mates and ignore the truth, just as Ms Pulford has ignored the truth in her motion.

Never once did we hear Ms Pulford, especially when she talked about jobs, make reference to the issues that have been canvassed by Mr Ondarchie about the global economy, the global challenges, the high Australian dollar and the need for Victoria to improve its productivity to address a whole range of other issues, including in international relations. Never once did we hear that. Never once did we hear what the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, should be doing in order to build the confidence of this nation in a globalised environment. They were very hollow words.

We are proud of what we have already done. I point members to the websites of individual lower house Liberal MPs or to their press releases for a good testament of the achievements to date. I briefly remind the house that the long list of Labor's broken promises — the wasted opportunities — are there for all to see. We are getting on with the job we need to do in order to be able to fix those problems. The bigger picture — the strategy — is of course being developed as we speak. All ministers are involved in that, and I look forward to the opportunity of being part of a government that has the chance of implementing that broader, big-picture strategy.

The Labor Party has its own problems to contend with in what will be a train wreck at the federal level. The interesting Craig Thomson affair is an important moment for the labour union movement. Is it a one-off, or does it indicate a more widespread problem across

the union movement where there is a tolerance — a nudge-nudge, wink-wink culture — of protecting the inappropriate indulgence and use of union funds?

Ms Tierney — On a point of order, Acting President, I do not think the comments that are currently being made have anything to do with the motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr O'Brien) — Order! I thank Ms Tierney for the point of order. The member's comments are in the context of the debate and depend on the emphasis placed on this issue. Mrs Peulich has couched her comments in terms of being part of the discussion of the Labor brand. I do not want to make comment on that. Whilst not actually upholding the point of order, and recognising this is a wide-ranging debate, I direct Mrs Peulich to guide her contribution back to the motion as quickly as she can.

Mrs PEULICH — I intend to make only passing remarks on that in view of there being lots of proceedings on track. The Craig Thomson test is important for the union movement, and I am concerned that the long silence on those types of practices may be indicative of a much broader malaise of how union funds are administered and how workers are represented. All I am trying to say is that if Labor were really interested in the welfare of workers, it would have stamped out those types of practices where union officials are earning huge salaries — obviously in some instances higher than the Prime Minister and the Premier — where indulgences have seemed to be characteristic of — —

Ms Tierney — On a point of order, Acting President, my point of order again relates to relevance. You have attempted to steer the member in the correct fashion in terms of pulling her back to the motion, but she has not done so.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr O'Brien) — Order! I do not uphold the point of order, because I suspect Mrs Peulich was in the process of winding up the point she was making. I ask her to continue to wind up that point and to continue with her contribution.

Mrs PEULICH — All I am saying is that the second part of the motion, which focuses on jobs, is an important focus. It is an important area of government policy. I expect that the opposition would have a strong point of view, especially an opposition that is so closely linked to the union movement. That is why it is beholden on Labor MPs, who themselves have close links and are members — —

Ms Tierney — And proud of it!

Mrs PEULICH — Absolutely. We have heard Labor's pledges to union movements. Labor MPs use this chamber to denounce the sorts of practices we have seen exposed through the Craig Thomson affair, which I certainly hope is not reflected in the broader union malaise. It shows a complete disrespect for and disregard of the interests of union members and how their funds are administered. I will move on.

I endorse the comments made by Mr Ondarchie about the broad range of issues in relation to jobs and families that make the job market situation confronting businesses more challenging. We do not want to have a future like some of our European friends where we do not take the necessary corrective action.

Mr Barber said Liberal governments are always associated with raising taxes. That is because they are often voted in to fix up economic messes. Unfortunately Labor failed to get the balance right in providing for physical infrastructure needs, especially in planning for a growing population base. Labor failed to provide for the capital needs of the community, especially in addressing law and order. Labor failed to improve the quality of education and of transport. Labor failed dismally to improve health services. In terms of finance management with the least waste and imposition on taxpayers, we know that Labor failed to rein in that mismanagement and waste, in particular with major projects, many of which were delivered by companies with strong relationships with unions. There were very lucrative arrangements. I would endorse and underscore the Premier's call for an inquiry into productivity. That is just so important.

An honourable member — Do something!

Mrs PEULICH — We are doing something. We are doing a hell of a lot more than you are.

Lastly, out of those four responsibilities of government — to provide for the physical infrastructure of the community, to build social capital for the community, to manage finances well and, lastly, to do so in an accountable way that has integrity — the last is absolutely the centrepiece of this government's vision. For those listening and those in the chamber — there are not many of them, given that this is an opposition motion; there are four members of the Labor Party and one member of the Greens in the chamber for what is considered to be an important motion — I am going to select a few bits where Labor dismally failed on that last score.

Labor promised that it would end the use of commercial in confidence to conceal government

contracts with the private sector. We know that it failed to do that. Labor promised that it would ensure that FOI requests are responded to within legal time lines. A report has been tabled today by the Auditor-General — there will be a briefing on that report today — about that sad and sorry record. This chamber, along with the Assembly, has recently passed reforms to FOI by instituting an FOI commissioner, and I look forward to that and to addressing many of those concerns. What is interesting is that the Labor Party voted against it. Labor voted against a reform to FOI even though it failed to implement its commitments.

Labor promised it would stop exempting documents from FOI merely because they are attached to a cabinet document. Labor also promised that it would enact a comprehensive new code of conduct for members of Parliament and put an end to the use of the public purse for inappropriate political advertising and promotion. Only a few weeks ago the Auditor-General tabled yet another report, and all those Auditor-General reports are scathing of the performance of the Labor government across those four areas of responsibility. There was failure to deliver on infrastructure, failure to build social capital and deliver key services, failure to manage finances and the accounts of this state effectively and failure on a range of integrity measures.

We found that as transport spending and transport woes increased, Labor resorted to increasing its public relations and spin on the Victorian transport plan. That was particularly looked at by the Auditor-General. Labor also committed to producing highly paid consultancies and restoring the independence of the public service. When it comes to that clutch of integrity measures, Labor failed, and that list of broken promises is a long one.

In terms of its reform of Parliament, Labor promised 1-hour debates on matters of public importance each sitting day. We know that did not happen. It also promised time for private members bills to be debated. Did that happen? No, it did not. It promised that times for all government business would be fixed by agreement one week in advance and publicised, but we were lucky to get a phone call the night before a sitting week. It also said that Parliament would establish internet home pages for each member of Parliament to enable them to conduct correspondence and maintain dialogues with their constituents. Unfortunately, a lot of constituents in parts of South Eastern Metropolitan Region like Dandenong and Mulgrave, those who are struggling to put vegies on the table for their families, cannot necessarily afford internet access or enjoy time on Facebook because they are stuck on congested

roads, the development of which the Greens always oppose.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — The Greens hate roads. When you are living in the country or on an estate which presents the tyranny of distance, and when suburbs do not each have a tram track — although Mr Barber may think they do because he lives in the CBD — people who are travelling to or from their business or their work have to use a motor car, and congestion — —

Mr Barber interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — I will come back to that. Congestion means that it costs people more, because 15 per cent of all pollution is derived from the transport sector, so it contributes to worse environmental outcomes. It costs people more, and of course it gobbles up even more of the time they could be spending with their families.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — Mr Barber would have them locked in a maze of roads, just like Labor did. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of traffic congestion as the reason the government won a lot of support across a number of the seats it won from the Labor Party.

Going back to other areas of broken promises in terms of the reform of Parliament, the Labor Party promised that electronic screens would be set up in galleries and entrances to list the matters currently being debated and the names of the members speaking. I am just looking around, and I know I should not mention the gallery, but I do not see any big screens. It also promised that 1 hour would be set aside for the consideration of petitions, including allowing petitioners to speak. I certainly have not seen any of those reforms, and as I said, the list is very long.

But I would like to focus very quickly and in passing, because I know there are lots of coalition members who want to speak on this matter, on some of the things we have done. This is a very important opportunity for us to get on the record that we cannot turn around 11 years of mismanagement and waste in less than one and a half years. Mr Barber mentioned that we have failed in education because we still have the lowest spending per capita of any state.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — I am sure it does, as does the Gonski report. Where I see the limitations of that particular point of view, and the Gonski report, is that they focus entirely on inputs and not outputs and not on those things that can make a real difference to improving student learning and the quality of teaching. I am a teacher; I taught for 15 years in the public school system, of which I am very proud. I was an English faculty head, I am an international teaching fellow and I have a masters in education. I am very committed to public education, and I certainly endorse the policies that have been adopted by the three ministers I have worked with.

The only way we are going to build the public education sector even further is by addressing the issues, and they are not all simply causal — that is, the more money you spend, the better the system is. We all know that it takes much more than that to improve the quality of learning and teaching in any school in Victoria. If we have a look at that correlation internationally, it just does not stand up that those who spend the most have the best quality systems. In fact some of the lowest spending jurisdictions — and I am not advocating that course; I am just pointing this out in debate — deliver some of the highest outcomes when it comes to international reporting standards.

Further, on protective services officers (PSOs), building social capital means that people have to feel confident enough to walk the streets and to use the public transport that Mr Barber would have more commuters and more Victorians use. The PSOs are very important in doing that.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — The Labor Party promised to bring back 100 inspectors on the trams; it never did that, even though it had 11 years to do it. It could have been merely 10 conductors a year, but Labor chose not to do it, so that argument — —

Mr Barber interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — What we have commented on and committed to is the PSO program, and that is well on track. It has certainly been welcomed, in particular by the residents of Frankston and users of the Frankston line amongst others.

There is a range of reforms in relation to liquor, which is a very important issue in my electorate. I commend the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister O'Brien, for that and the Minister for Planning, Minister Guy, in particular for packaged outlets now having to subject themselves to a planning permit process.

In terms of education, maths and science specialists add up to those smaller things that can lead to better outcomes, and I look forward to seeing those reflected in the national assessment program literacy and numeracy, or NAPLAN, results.

Four thousand five hundred Victorian kids have the chance to learn to swim with VICSWIM. It might seem like a very small program, but it is a very important program for South Eastern Metropolitan Region because we have a lot of kids from multicultural backgrounds, many of whom have limited experience with water, so we are overrepresented in the number of fatalities on our beaches and our inland waterways. I have pushed for this and other people have pushed for it; it is a great opportunity for our multicultural community, and our children, to learn how to swim and in doing so reduce the number of fatalities.

In relation to travel grants, I am the mother of an athlete and I have 25 years of experience in athletics and sporting endeavours. I welcome small initiatives such as, for example, the travel grants being offered to Victorian athletes to enable them to do what they do and what we take great pride in as a state and as a nation. Just to digress, sometimes the small things make a big difference. Currently the national throws coach is investigating the option of using Casey Fields for Olympic qualifiers with the agreement of the Casey council. It will take \$2000 to build a third ring for us to make a huge difference and reduce the outlay that many athletes and our sporting organisations face to get them overseas to compete when they could be doing it here.

Mr Tarlamis is listening intently. I hope that, rather than trying to scuttle this initiative, as he is trying to do with the Kingston leg of the Dingley bypass, he supports it and that he uses all of his mates on the Labor majority Casey council to agree that the — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — Absolutely. The Liberal Party has one member on Casey council; the vast majority is controlled by the Labor-Greens alliance, so there you go.

Other initiatives which are very important to the south-east include banning the bong. That is a very important symbolic action. The Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade has put out *A More Competitive Manufacturing Industry — Securing Jobs and Boosting Investment*, and I would like to commend him for that.

There are new measures to reduce knife crime and illegal weapons. As I mentioned before, community

safety is a very important issue throughout the south-east, particularly in areas such as — —

Hon. D. M. Davis interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — Absolutely. Thank you. The Liberal Party does not endorse local council candidates — that was the little aside, and that is correct. But what the Labor Party has been trying to do is to destabilise and characterise the council as being dysfunctional. If you have a look at the council's track record in major projects that have been delivered — the infrastructure and its rate structure — you see that it is doing a very good job. All the local Labor members in that area should show some support and be constructive in their relationship with the Casey council rather than trying to destabilise it and characterise it as being dysfunctional, which is clearly far from the case.

The Victorian coalition government has also delivered on its promise to create safer school environments. The coalition government delivered on its commitment on cleaning up the Brookland Greens estate.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Building Commission: appointment

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning, and I refer to his appointment of Mr Michael Kefford to head the Victorian Building Commission. I ask: when the minister appointed Mr Kefford was he aware that when Mr Kefford headed the Plumbing Industry Commission between 1990 and 1999 he spent on average more than \$40 000 each year on overseas travel?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — Mr Tee is a brave man if he wants to talk about the approval of external travel spending by statutory authorities. Shall we look at other external spending on, say, boxes to the football, the cricket or other places?

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. M. J. GUY — You made the allegation, buddy! He is a brave man to do that, President.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The term 'buddy' is unparliamentary.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I could have sworn I was on my feet! The manner in which that reference

was made was most unparliamentary. I will not ask the minister to withdraw it, because the admonishment ought to be enough.

Hon. M. J. GUY — There is one key point to note in Mr Tee attacking Michael Kefford, the acting building and plumbing industry commissioner, and that is that Labor reappointed Mr Kefford to one of those positions. Labor reappointed the man Mr Tee is attacking in question time. Is the irony not lost on Mr Tee that he walks in here to attack a man about his reputation through the 1990s, a man who was then reappointed by Labor at the start of its last term in government? Mr Tee was actually working for the minister who reappointed him at the time. If Mr Tee is going to come in here and attack someone, if he is going to use parliamentary privilege to have a go at someone, I say to him he should get his facts right and know the details.

Michael Kefford is cleaning up a \$3 million deficit bequeathed to him by the Labor-run Building Commission. Over 10 years in government the Labor Party oversaw the Building Commission run up a \$3 million deficit. The coalition government is going to see the Building Commission return to surplus operation, and we are going to see it return to surplus operation in a proper and reasonable manner that is not trips off to boxes at the football and other expenses like that. It is going to be a reasonable, measured and proper approach, one that Labor had 10 years to do and one that it failed to do.

Supplementary question

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My recollection is that for the last 10 years the Building Commission had a surplus. My supplementary question, though, goes to the appointment of Mr Kefford, and I ask: was anyone else other than Mr Kefford approached to be the building commissioner, or, like Mr Clarke, was this another person the minister hand-picked?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — Again, I am still trying to fathom why Mr Tee has walked into the chamber to criticise the appointment of someone that Labor itself appointed.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — No, we are asking about your process.

Hon. M. J. GUY — Calm down, Mr Pakula. Who is the shadow minister, you or the up-and-comer? Are you going to leak his letter, or is it just Daniel Andrews who leaks letters?

The PRESIDENT — Order! Minister! Perhaps I should have worn a brighter tie so that when I stood up I would be noticed. The minister is responding through the Chair to a supplementary question, not to the interjections of Mr Pakula.

Hon. M. J. GUY — I say again, Michael Kefford is an interim commissioner. To go through a four-month process, or in fact longer, to find an interim commissioner might be the way the Labor Party does business, but I believe an interim commissioner — and I chose Mr Kefford — is the right thing to do so that we can set up the Building Commission with the proper structures to properly appoint a new commissioner under that system within 12 months.

Carbon tax: public housing

Mr ELSBURY (Western Metropolitan) — I rise this afternoon to ask the Minister for Housing, the Honourable Wendy Lovell, to advise the house what impact the commonwealth's carbon tax will have in terms of increasing costs in the Victorian public housing sector?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — We all know of the shocking legacy that state Labor left in the public housing portfolio. We also know that federal Labor's new carbon tax — its big new tax on everything — will increase the costs of providing housing for all, including the most vulnerable, Victorians. Prime Minister Gillard just does not seem to care about the impact that this is going to have on vulnerable Victorians in her home state or about the massive effect of this tax on the public housing portfolio. In the public housing portfolio increased costs are likely in construction, utilities, maintenance contracts and council rates, just to name a few areas where we will suffer increased costs. The initial estimate of these increased costs is around \$16 million in 2012–13 alone, and that is based on a number of assumptions.

Ms Broad — On a point of order, President, the minister has just referred to a very specific figure as an estimate. I call on her to advise the house of the source of that very specific figure that she has quoted.

The PRESIDENT — Order! That is not really a point of order as such. If the minister were able to provide an indication of the source of that figure, then it would no doubt be helpful to members.

Hon. W. A. LOVELL — As I noted, the \$16 million is an estimated figure which is based on a number of assumptions, which I was just about to

mention, including the estimate from Master Builders Australia of an increase of \$5000 for the construction of a new house and the commonwealth government's own estimated 0.7 per cent forecast increase in the cost of living over the first year of the carbon tax. These impacts will be cumulative in subsequent years.

Key industry groups are equally concerned about the cost of the carbon tax. Mr Wilhelm Harnisch, the CEO of Master Builders Australia, has said that the modelling by independent consultants CIE shows that building and construction costs will increase by between 1.4 per cent and 2 per cent by 2020 due to the price increases in key emission intensive inputs such as steel, aluminium, cement and glass.

Housing Industry Association chief executive Graham Wolfe has said that the carbon tax will impact on thousands of materials that go into new homes and, unlike its impact on average weekly household expenses, the carbon tax is added to the mortgage in one lump sum. It comes as an up-front fee in the construction of a new home, so this will add to the cost of a new home. Mr Wolfe has also said that the new tax will impact on housing supply. Independent research indicates that housing stock will be reduced by up to 16 800 homes due to these higher costs. He goes on to say that this is a very unfortunate consequence of the carbon tax and will add to the existing undersupply of housing in Australia. This will also place extra pressure on the social housing sector.

The Municipal Association of Victoria has also conducted a carbon pricing survey that shows the estimated impact on council rates is expected to rise by up to 3.3 per cent, so there is no doubt that Julia Gillard's carbon tax will have a significant impact on the housing and community building division's budget. Without compensation from the federal government, Labor's big new tax on everything will mean there is less money available to invest in new public housing and maintenance of existing homes. Unfortunately vulnerable Victorians waiting for public housing will be directly disadvantaged by Labor's new big tax.

Planning: energy ratings

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is for the Minister for Planning, Mr Guy. In the coalition's policy on planning, it committed as follows:

Work with building associations and relevant stakeholders to assess the most effective way of meeting Victoria's COAG agreement to support 6-star minimum energy efficiency standards for both new and significantly renovated residential and commercial buildings.

Support the transition of all existing housing stock to meet an average of 5-star energy rating.

Can the minister update the house as to what progress he has made in his time in the portfolio to achieve those two policy outcomes?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — It is a very good question. I have had a number of discussions with industry groups about achieving not just with existing housing stock but certainly new housing stock a transition to a higher star rating — —

Mr Tee — What's the Treasurer's view?

Hon. M. J. GUY — Is Mr Tee putting his head up again?

Mr Tee — I am asking what is the Treasurer's view?

Hon. M. J. GUY — I advise Mr Barber that we have had a number of discussions both with my department and of course with industry groups to ascertain first of all what would need to be done with the existing stock and what would need to be done with new stock to bring them up to those requirements. There are some issues around commercial buildings, which we are having a look at, but I believe it is on track. We will have an outcome, which will not take two or three months, but it will be an outcome certainly within this term of government.

Supplementary question

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for giving us that update. The original commitment actually said to 'work with building associations and relevant stakeholders'. Would the minister consider that environment groups who have had long-running campaigns to promote the idea of upgrading our housing stock, such as the One Million Homes Alliance here in Victoria, would be relevant stakeholders? Would the minister be willing to meet with them to discuss this policy?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — Yes.

Health: Victorian Healthy Eating Enterprise

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Health, David Davis, and I ask: what action is the Baillieu government taking to improve health and more specifically nutrition in Victoria?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I am pleased that the member has asked this question, and I note his commitment to greater public health outcomes

in terms of obesity and a range of chronic diseases. The government is committed to public health outcomes and is working with third-sector groups that have got an important role in assisting there. I can inform the house that the Victorian Healthy Eating Enterprise, a new initiative to promote a vibrant healthy eating culture in Victoria, is taking steps forward. There is obviously a need to work with groups, and more than 20 organisations will be involved with this initiative, including Foodbank Victoria, the Melbourne Market Authority, Nutrition Australia and the Good Foundation.

The community will be aware of Jamie Oliver's involvement and the support provided to these initiatives by the Good Foundation, a third-sector organisation that has been prepared to partner with government, and also a range of other organisations. I have to say that — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister, without assistance.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — This is a serious initiative to deal with a serious community problem. It is an initiative that I would have thought would have bipartisan support and would require people to think carefully before making silly comments that would not support such an initiative. I know the 14 local governments that have partnered with the Victorian government and the commonwealth government in this process are determined to achieve better outcomes for their communities.

The eating advisory service that is part of this initiative will provide nutrition advice to early childhood services, primary schools, secondary schools, hospitals statewide and also workplaces. In particular communities the ability will be there to seek clear advice from respected authorities. These authorities will provide advice that will be driven by the best research and information to enable workplaces, early childhood centres, schools, hospitals and other institutions in communities to provide their people with the best support and encouragement for healthy eating.

I know this is never an easy task. The history of dealing with obesity and chronic disease and other matters which these initiatives will help address around the world is, frankly, not great. That applies in Victoria, it applies nationally and it applies internationally. Victoria is making a serious effort here, working in partnership with local government, third-sector organisations and

the commonwealth government to deliver better outcomes for the Victorian community.

For the first time this information will be available to a broad range of groups in the community. The information will be available in a way that also works synergistically with the prevention community model on which we are seeking to work with local governments and other community partners around the states. I know that Minister Gordon Rich-Phillips's involvement with WorkHealth and the worker checks that are undertaken is another of these initiatives on public health and outcomes for our community.

I thank Mr Drum for his question. I indicate that the Victorian Healthy Eating Enterprise is stepping forward, and I will meet with a number of people associated with it later today. As I said, I would have thought this would be something that was significantly beyond politics and that at a broad community level we would seek the very best outcomes for our community.

Midwives: regional and rural Victoria

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Health. The minister's department has indicated that the Rural Midwifery Support Program will be replaced by other projects. Can the minister outline the nature of these other projects?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — The government is very committed to rural midwifery support. We are determined to see good outcomes in terms of rural midwifery and have committed money for funding obstetric programs around the state and the collection of data around the state. There is also ongoing support for health services to support midwife placement. We will certainly be working as hard as we can to get very good outcomes on obstetric support, midwifery support and better midwifery pathways across the state.

Supplementary question

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — Given the minister's enthusiastic support for midwives practising in rural Victoria, will he now recommit to funding the positions of those people currently employed through the Rural Midwifery Support Program in the budget so that the work they do in training and advising on best practice can continue?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I think the member will well know my answer to questions about the budget by now. We have had a series of what I call pre-budget questions in this chamber. As much as I would love to spill the beans on the budget initiatives

in the chamber today, my colleague the Treasurer would probably not welcome me stealing his thunder across the whole of my portfolio. He would not welcome Mr Guy announcing all the planning initiatives, he would not welcome Mr Rich-Phillips announcing all the ICT initiatives and he would not welcome the initiatives on tertiary education being spilled in the chamber today. I suggest to the member that she will need to wait for budget day to see what the budget initiatives are. But I can indicate our commitment to supporting midwives around the state, and I can indicate that health services will make decisions across the state.

Occupational health and safety: national harmonisation

Mr O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Assistant Treasurer, the Honourable Gordon Rich-Phillips. Can the Assistant Treasurer inform the house of what impacts the commonwealth's proposed national occupational health and safety laws will have on Victorian businesses?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Assistant Treasurer) — I thank Mr O'Brien for his question and for his interest in this issue, which is very important to Victorian businesses. Indeed the package proposed by the commonwealth will have a very significant impact on Victorian businesses.

The Victorian government has said it supports the principle of harmonisation in occupational health and safety. We recognise the benefits that can accrue to business through the removal of cross-border anomalies in the OHS (occupational health and safety) area. But what we are being asked to implement by the commonwealth is not a principle; it is a package of regulation and legislation which has been put together by the state and territory jurisdictions which risks undermining the best practice framework we currently have in OHS here in Victoria. That framework has delivered the best workplace safety outcomes in Victoria over a number of years, the best workplace safety outcomes across Australia and has, on the accident compensation side, seen us deliver the lowest premiums for the WorkCover system. Victoria is recognised as having the best OHS system in Australia.

What we are now being asked by the commonwealth to implement is a system which proposes a range of compromises which have been reached across the states and territories and which would have the effect of taking Victoria backwards from a position which is recognised as best practice in Australia. The Victorian government has commissioned through the Victorian

WorkCover Authority a regulatory impact statement by PricewaterhouseCoopers to assess the impact of this national package on Victoria. That work by PWC has revealed that implementing the national package as proposed by the commonwealth will impose more than \$800 million in transition costs on Victorian businesses and a further ongoing cost of more than \$580 million a year on Victorian businesses. The package proposed by the commonwealth will over five years impose more than \$3.4 billion in costs on Victorian businesses without any commensurate increase in workplace safety.

This package has been about commonality of legislation, but it is at a cost of more than \$3.4 billion to Victorian businesses over the next five years. Importantly, while the beneficiaries of harmonisation will be the small percentage of Victorian businesses that operate across state borders, the reality is that most of the costs will be borne by Victorian businesses, particularly SMEs (small to medium enterprises), that operate only in Victoria and therefore will not be beneficiaries of the harmonisation across borders. In fact small businesses are estimated to incur around 78 per cent of the first-year transition cost, more than \$600 million, and a further 74 per cent of the ongoing costs, of the order of \$430 million a year. This will have a very substantial impact on Victorian businesses and SMEs which will not benefit from harmonisation.

The Victorian government will act in the interest of Victorian businesses. We will not undermine our best practice OHS system in this state, and we will not saddle Victorian businesses with billions of dollars of unnecessary red tape.

Mr VINEY (Eastern Victoria) — President, I desire to move that this house take note of the minister's praise of the Victorian Labor government's occupational health and safety system on the next day of meeting.

Hon. D. M. Davis — On a point of order, President, that is not the way such a motion is normally framed.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Obviously there would be an opportunity tomorrow morning for Mr Viney to give notice to the house of such a motion or to pursue such a motion. In the context of dealing with ministers' answers, where the house wishes to pursue some of the content of a minister's answer to a question, there is a different form of words, of which Mr Viney is aware. It is that the house take note of the minister's answer on the next day of meeting. That is considered the appropriate form of words and an appropriate response in this part of the proceedings. I

invite Mr Viney to move that motion or to consider moving the motion that he proposed tomorrow or to give notice of it tomorrow.

Ordered that answer be considered next day on motion of Mr VINEY (Eastern Victoria).

Charlton hospital: construction

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Health, David Davis. Given that it took the minister a year following the floods to identify a site for the Charlton hospital, when will construction of the hospital commence?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — The chamber will be well aware of the difficulties faced by Charlton not in the floods last January but the floods in the year before and the terrible impact they had on the town. As the chamber has heard me relate a number of times, the government moved swiftly to put a field primary care hospital and field primary care support in place. It then very quickly after that put a more permanent but still temporary set of demountables in place to enable the primary care to continue and other support to use that location as a hub for the town, including for home and community care and other important services.

The government also commenced the process of examining the hospital in depth, and that is a complex process. We had to establish, not only for insurance purposes but for other decision-making purposes, the situation at the hospital and the process that would go forward. The government made the decision in last year's budget that money would be committed for the purchase of land at a new site in the town. Indeed I related to the chamber the exact location of that site and the support that was provided for this process. The government is pleased to have secured that property in the town.

The government has also gone through a detailed process of planning and development of proposals for building the hospital at Charlton. As I have said, the government is also drawing on service planning that was done through the period of the last government for the broader region. It is aware of the needs and projections into the future, and it is determined to make sure that the people in Charlton have the support they need.

I will make a broader point. I suspect Ms Darveniza's question might fall into the category of a pre-budget question — 'Is it in the budget? Will you rule it in or rule it out?'. I think she knows that I am not going to

give the details of what might or might not be in the budget. I can indicate very strongly, though, that the Victorian government has moved as swiftly as it could. We are also negotiating with the commonwealth government to work in partnership to provide the best solution for Charlton. I can indicate our strong commitment, and I can indicate that I personally have had many conversations in the last few months with both the CEO and other key people in the town, as well as the chair of the board, Ken Round. I have paid tribute to him in this chamber on a number of occasions for the remarkable leadership that he and the CEO, Kathy Huett, have shown through this very difficult period.

The government is determined to continue the support for Charlton. The government put money in place to purchase the land. The land has been purchased. The service planning has been done. The planning work on a new hospital is very well advanced. I indicate to the member and to the chamber that the government is not going to wait to deliver. We are going to deliver in the fastest possible way for the town and the people in Charlton. They deserve our support, and I think this is something that is understood right across the Victorian community.

Supplementary question

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — It is very pleasing to hear that the minister is committed to Charlton hospital, but it is concerning that he is unable to outline a timetable for the building of the hospital. He is saying that he is not prepared to talk about the budget funding; when can we anticipate that this government will provide funding to build the hospital at Charlton?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I think this is another way of asking, ‘Is the money in the budget?’. Ms Darveniza is saying, ‘Is it or is it not?’. I am not going to get into a pre-budget ruling in or ruling out. Either way, I will indicate the strong commitment of the government to the people of Charlton and its determination to purchase the land. A lot of effort went into making sure that we got the right block of land in the town, which is in a position that will not be flooded in future. We were determined to make sure it was in that position. An enormous amount of work has gone into the service planning and the planning for a new building.

I can say that Ms Darveniza may have to wait just a tiny while. I am not going to give her pre-budget information, but the government is determined to do the right thing by the people in Charlton and ensure that

they have a modern facility that will service their needs into the future and continue the support that has been provided to the town.

Manufacturing: government initiatives

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I direct a question without notice to the Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade. Can the minister inform the house why Victoria is the state of choice for international companies establishing manufacturing bases in Australia?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade) — I thank the member for his question. I know he has an ongoing interest in terms of manufacturing. As we know, Victoria is the home of manufacturing in Australia. As a government, unlike those opposite, we have been very committed to ensuring that we can attract foreign investment by companies to establish or strengthen their operations here.

It was with much pleasure that I recently visited, with the member for Benambra in the Assembly, a newly expanded production facility at Wodonga for the large US-based manufacturer Parker Hannifin. At this site — one of our great regional manufacturing centres — Parker Hannifin will be centralising its production of manufacturing hose. I thought it would be important to demonstrate to the chamber through one of the company’s flyers the high level of technological advantage that we have in doing that. Not only was this centre expanded but it generated 40 additional jobs, and it was also a vote of confidence as there were three other places in the mix for the setting up of this facility. Wodonga was chosen above two other facilities, one in Auckland and one in Adelaide. The company combined those three sites at Wodonga. That demonstrates why Victoria is attracting major global companies.

We know we have excellent road and rail systems and great port facilities, and we know we have a fantastic curfew-free, 24-hour international airport. All these things make doing business easier in this state. We are also committed to attracting companies because we know that we have an attractive regulatory environment, and we are committed to ensuring that we provide strong support as a government.

Intrinsic to the coalition’s international engagement strategy, which we have delivered as part of our election commitment, is promoting and strengthening foreign investment into Victoria.

Hon. M. P. Pakula interjected.

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — I have to take up the interjection from the member opposite. We do not want to hear from those failed former Brumby Labor ministers, because what we know is that we have Mr Somyurek, who tried to put up a particular point and his letter was leaked. All I can say to Mr Somyurek is: rise up against the tyrants! Cry freedom!

Mr Viney — On a point of order, President, I think the minister may have strayed a little from the original question. This is not an opportunity to reflect on members of the opposition, and I ask that you bring him back to the question.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I uphold the point of order.

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — I am very pleased. This is one of the reasons the Victorian government led the largest-ever trade delegation from Australia to India. What we are doing is attracting investment into this state. Part of the — —

Hon. M. P. Pakula — They kept you out of the way though, didn't they?

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — Again an interjection from a failed former Brumby government minister. You are a failed minister, Mr Pakula, based on what Mr Somyurek says.

Hon. M. P. Pakula interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I take it Mr Pakula likes early lunches. The minister should address his comments through the Chair. I know Mr Pakula was being provocative, but the minister has the opportunity to ignore Mr Pakula.

Mr Finn interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Finn! I urge Mr Dalla-Riva to ignore those interjections and to remain opposite to the question he has been asked rather than to come back and reflect on members of the opposition.

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA — All I can say is that while we are supporting companies coming into Victoria, while we are supporting investment into Victoria and while we are working against the tidal wave of global competition, of the high Australian dollar and Labor's looming carbon tax, we are still out there working tirelessly to bring in investment to Victoria. We are working tirelessly to ensure that we provide the right environment for overseas companies to set up, to expand and to grow. It is disappointing that

while we are doing the hard work what we have is an opposition manufacturing minister who has been shut down. He should be out there promoting and supporting the industry like I am.

Early childhood services: funding

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is for the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. The previous government put in place an agreement with the community sector and local government in relation to early childhood services, amongst other things, with an NGO (non-government organisation) index of 3.14 per cent over the past three years. Given that this funding agreement expires at the end of this financial year, will the minister's department be providing an NGO index that reflects the true cost of running early childhood services by the not-for-profit sector and local government in its funding agreements? And without prompting from the health minister.

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — I thank the member for her question. With the type of questions that this member asks, it is no wonder the Leader of the Opposition and member for Mulgrave in the Assembly, Daniel Andrews, ignores the new shadow ministers. I have continuously answered questions that speculate about budget items and about the outcomes of negotiations with NGOs and the MAV (Municipal Association of Victoria), and my answer is still the same: these are budget questions, and all budget questions will be answered on 1 May.

Supplementary question

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — The minister certainly is building up expectations, so there may well be some very disappointed stakeholders on budget day. By way of supplementary, I ask: will the minister commit to providing for an NGO index that reflects the true cost of doing business in her renegotiated three-year agreement with MAV in respect of maternal and child health funding?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — My answer is the same: it is a budget question, and it will be answered on budget day. I may be raising expectations within the sector, but this shadow minister is raising a reputation for herself in the sector of being someone who scaremongers and who is prepared to use families and organisations for her own political gain. She is gaining a reputation of being a political opportunist rather than a good shadow minister.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. D. M. Davis — On a point of order, President, Mr Pakula used a phrase which I think was not apposite to the minister.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — The minister did not object.

Hon. D. M. Davis — The minister may not have heard it clearly. I think Mr Pakula should withdraw that comment. I am not going to repeat the phrase, but in a gendered context it was completely unacceptable.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am concerned. Whilst I have no doubt that the minister, Ms Lovell, did not hear the member — because I did not hear him and neither did the clerks in front of me — that puts me in a difficult position in terms of seeking a withdrawal. I dare say that if none of us heard, then it would not be a Hansard matter either. Whilst I appreciate what Mr Davis has indicated, I would counsel members to be careful in their remarks, particularly if they are remarks that reflect on gender or suchlike, as there are consequences for those sorts of remarks.

Now that the minister has provided me with the remark, I recall that I did hear those words. I presume that they were from Mr Pakula. I think they are derogatory and should not be part of parliamentary proceedings. As I said, on this occasion I will proceed on the basis that the remark has not been picked up anywhere else and that it is only Mr Davis's fine hearing that has picked up what I regard as a remark that ought not to have been made and should not again.

Planning: government initiatives

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning, the Honourable Matthew Guy, and I ask: can the minister inform the house what action he has taken to facilitate jobs, housing density and investment in Melbourne's high-rise property market and how any actions he has taken may protect existing neighbourhood character across Melbourne?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — With pleasure I approved a development that will provide \$270 million worth of investment in Melbourne and 800 jobs over the next six years: the Queensbridge Hotel tower development that was approved yesterday. These are real jobs that will be part of a new tower development for Southbank that is changing the face of Melbourne and indeed changing our city. The new tower development will be 71 storeys and 276 metres high — the third-tallest building in Australia and the second-tallest building in Melbourne. It is not far

behind the Eureka Tower, which is 297 metres high, Q1 on the Gold Coast, which is 326 metres high and the Rialto Towers, which are 254 metres high. This is a substantial piece of investment and a substantial vote of confidence in the Victorian building industry. It has now been approved, and this investment will go ahead in Victoria over the next six years.

This tower is 107 000 square metres of development. It constitutes 188 bike spaces and 564 car parking spaces. It will include 592 apartments. It is on the edge of the city; people who live here will not need a car to drive to work. It is conceivable that the people who live in this building will walk to work, walk to the supermarket, walk to the tram and walk to the football. It is incredibly important that buildings like this, in an appropriate zone where the municipal strategic statement supports buildings such as this, are approved and go ahead.

It is important to note that there have been a number of permit conditions placed on this building and on this investment for it to go ahead. None the least of these, and I refer to Mrs Coote's question, is how this building will attest to and support preserving neighbourhood character. This tower, at nearly 600 apartments represents 30 buildings of 20 units that could be scattered throughout Melbourne as per Labor's Melbourne 2030. Instead this government believes in containing high-rise development to developments such as this in areas that can accommodate growth and in putting them in areas where people know high-rise development will take place. That is the strength of this tower. That is the strength of bringing in buildings and urban renewal such as this.

Importantly, we have expanded the setbacks required on this building to 10 metres —

Mr Tee — From 8?

Hon. M. J. GUY — I like it when Mr Tee interjects. I hear Mr Tee scoff.

Hon. R. A. Dalla-Riva interjected.

Hon. M. J. GUY — As Mr Dalla-Riva said, he does oppose it — 800 jobs and a quarter of a billion dollars investment. They are out there saying, 'We want jobs'. Here are 800, and Labor opposes this. I am not surprised. Why should we be surprised? We advised the Melbourne City Council that the tower had been approved — by letter. The opposition has been well acquainted with letters in the last few days. Certainly staff in the office of the Leader of the Opposition are well acquainted with letters — leaking letters and sending them off to their friends.

What is important is that we have reorientated the tower so that apartments will not face one another. We have made sure that the setbacks on this building are 10 metres, not 8 metres or 7 metres — or 6 metres, as approved by a former Minister for Planning, Mary Delahunty, throughout Melbourne. Minister Delahunty approved setbacks of 6 metres under Mr Tee's time in government. Former Minister for Planning, Justin Madden, now the member for Essendon in the Assembly, approved 0–6 metres for some buildings in the CBD under the former government and again approved 4.4 metres for some towers. We have got the permit conditions right. We are approving development and investment to keep our economy strong, and we on this side of the house are proud to put high-rise towers where they belong.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — In a way I hesitate to raise the issue, but it flows from my question on 28 February when I asked the Minister for Planning whether or not he had spoken to the Premier. I raised the issue again on 1 March. I hesitate because on 28 March the minister did say he thought a response had been sent and would follow it up straightaway. I hesitate in the sense that I assume he did follow it up and it might be that there is a communication breakdown on my part. I certainly do not have any record of having received a response.

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I am sorry, President, I must have sent it to the Leader of the Opposition's office, and that office has kept it or leaked it or done something else with it. I will make sure that it is sent directly to Mr Tee this time.

EMPLOYMENT: GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Debate resumed.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I might need to recap my contribution of the previous half hour, President. Before question time I was reciting, recapping and responding to some of the arguments that had been mounted by the mover of the motion, Ms Pulford, and the lead speaker for the Greens, Mr Barber, on a motion that calls for the government to deliver on its election promises and also create and maintain jobs in Victoria. I was recapping some of the election promises that have been delivered

on and was explaining how this government has the challenge of delivering on four key areas of government activity and how in challenging times it is delivering the infrastructure that Victorians have been denied over 11 years of waste, mismanagement and overspending on major projects.

There was a failure to deliver better services in a whole range of areas, whether it was law and order, public transport, education or housing. That has been attested to by various Auditor-General's reports which have been tabled and which reflect very poorly on 11 years of Labor. Importantly they highlight what Victorians could have had but were denied by that mismanagement, waste, lost opportunity and poor financial management as well as the failure to implement a range of integrity measures and strengthen Parliament, which the former government committed to when it tried to lure Victorians to vote for it. I then moved on to explain why our election program would fix the problem and build the future, which is important.

You cannot build the future that Victorians have been denied until you deal with some of the substantial legacy issues left by Labor — issues that we would have dealt with very differently. Some of those legacy issues of mismanagement that this government has had the important task and challenge of addressing and fixing the problems include smart meters, myki, the cost of blow-outs on major projects, a range of other things such as the ultranet and other IT projects that Mr Ondarchie has mentioned, and waste through the loss of \$3 billion in auctioning off the pokie licences. There is a whole range of examples of that waste, mismanagement and lost opportunity, and as a result Victorians are getting less than they deserve.

This government has been progressively moving through its election promises to make sure that it delivers on them. At the same time it is taking the opportunity to review and put in place significant strategies for building the future as well as taking action and mapping the way forward. This is being done in very challenging times that are governed by many issues outside our direct control, including the global economy, which is shrinking and contracting rapidly, a very high Australian dollar and a range of pressures on our competitiveness and productivity. I was pleased to hear the Premier call for a national review of productivity. It is very important to put downward pressure on our burgeoning costs. We also need protection for our natural competitive advantage. We need to try to protect Victorian businesses, including by currently advocating for Victorian businesses in the timetable for the introduction of the carbon tax and, as I

said before, protection of our natural competitive advantage in relation to cheap electricity production.

Before question time I was speaking about Brookland Greens. We have committed an additional \$24 million as the state contribution towards the rectification cost of that debacle, much of which stemmed from a historic fragmentation of responsibilities which has been reported on by the Auditor-General and which this government is working to address. It also includes some of the reforms that have taken place in relation to the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). I welcome that, as a person with practical environmental commitments and values — —

Mr Barber interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — No, not the fairy at the bottom of the garden, the practical ones. For myself I want to see the proper fulfilment of our statutory responsibilities, including having the EPA respond to complaints, properly enforced permits, enforced compliance and penalties for those who snub their noses at, for example, the management — or the mismanagement — of tips and landfill. All that is happening, and I welcome that very significant commitment. It is an important promise to the Casey community, without which huge pressure would be placed on the capital works budget of an interface council that is trying to deliver better outcomes for its community. Casey has also been successful, I understand, in further third-party action to recoup some of its costs from other parties involved in that legal action. I commend that council on its work in being able to recoup some of the financial costs it has been left with.

The Victorian coalition has also strengthened the advice it has available to it by forming a ministerial advisory council of mayors. This year in particular that is largely drawn from our rural and regional communities that were impacted on by bushfires and floods, but also the interface councils that are experiencing significant challenges. That is a positive way for the government to understand the challenges that face those communities.

The coalition has also implemented statewide bushfire mapping in response to royal commission recommendations. My colleague Mrs Petrovich, in her role as Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Environment, has been involved in overseeing and implementing a program for fuel reduction across the state to minimise the risk, not just the incidence, of fires and also the damage caused and the size of fires, which is obviously governed by the amount of fuel available — —

Mr Barber — Is it?

Mrs PEULICH — Mr Barber says, ‘Is it?’, and I will not digress, but if you do not have the fuel, if you do not have the oxygen, you do not have the fire. There are three important ingredients in bushfires, of which fuel is a critical component. The less fuel the fire has to burn, the smaller the fire. It does not mean fires will not occur, but smaller fires are less destructive.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — Mr Barber, I have been reading up on the science, and next time I attend an Adam Smith Club lecture I will make sure that I invite you because clearly you are not reading all the information that is available, especially information prepared by those who are experts in the field.

The Victorian coalition government has delivered stronger gambling integrity measures, and that has certainly been welcomed by my community in the south-east. There are a range of education initiatives, including picking up the mess of capital works and maintenance caused by the former Labor government. As Parliamentary Secretary for Education I have had the honour of visiting many of those schools, and some of them are an absolute shambles. Together with Mr Elsbury, I recently visited some schools in his electorate that have not received a brass razoo for in excess of 10 years. Parts of one school had collapsed a short time before my visit and were no longer able to be used. The students had to be relocated to a nearby school. That is Labor’s legacy when it comes to capital works.

It got rid of the physical resources maintenance index, which we introduced under a former Minister for Education, Phil Gude, as a way of providing an equal, open and transparent allocation of maintenance money. It reformed that back in 2005, wrapped it up into the student resources index and much of that, unfortunately, did not translate into being spent on maintenance. We can see the result of that in our school buildings where their end of life is brought forward because that maintenance money has not been spent on maintenance, and that is regrettable. Capital works funding is under pressure. We have got a whole range of national reforms that school communities need to focus on. School communities have not been able to do that because they are dealing with the significant issues of the legacy of Labor’s school renewal and revitalisation plan, and I will come back to that.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.03 p.m.

Mrs PEULICH — I am towards the tail end of my contribution. I was just recapping some of the election promises that have been delivered, which is the subject of this motion. I had spoken about the important delivery of a \$24 million commitment to the City of Casey as a contribution towards rectification works.

The coalition cut ambulance membership fees in half, which was an important early announcement. I know someone derided the importance of the following initiative, but children under the age of 16 being able to visit our three zoos free of charge on weekends is a phenomenal opportunity for working-class families and families doing it tough. It is something that has been received very warmly by my community.

There was a \$20 million commitment to the Dingley bypass planning. Another member for South Eastern Metropolitan Region, Mr Tarlamis, has been trying to, I assume, undermine the project and stop it before it actually gets off the ground. Those opposite have been doing that for about 10 years. They did not deliver the money in 11 years in government and failed to make any advances on either that important piece of infrastructure or the Mornington Peninsula Freeway extension to which there was a firm commitment by the former member for Carrum in the Assembly, Jenny Lindell. None of that was delivered, but we are making inroads and that planning work is well advanced.

The coalition's commitment to grade separation, in particular at Springvale, is an important piece of work that is also starting. We in government are delivering on a commitment to expand Frankston Hospital. We are reinstating funding of the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge, delivering more transit police, providing better planning for bottle shops and the sale of packaged liquor, establishing a new peri-urban planning unit in the Department of Planning and Community Development, delivering year-round discounts on electricity bills, beginning work on the \$2 million Rowville rail feasibility study, improving the independence of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, changing TAFE training fees for youth health-care card holders — an important initiative — and reducing ministerial staff positions.

All of these are evidence of our four key priorities: building infrastructure, building social capital, better management of the state's finances and improving integrity measures. These are all aimed at fixing the problems that have resulted from 11 years of Labor's mismanagement and at building a strong future. With those few words, I look forward to voting against the motion.

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — We have heard from the government side, including contributions from Mr Ondarchie and Mrs Peulich, who used most of their time to identify a number of measures that they felt the former Labor government failed to implement and follow through on. They also used their time to identify other measures that they believe the coalition government has implemented very well. That is all fine; it is arguing a case, of sorts. However, what they have failed to do is use the opportunity to present an account of the government's strategy and the direction in which the government is going to take the state. Budgets are not shopping lists; they are key government policies and strategic framework tools that operate as the government's work plan and signal to the public where the government will be directing its energies to the benefit of the state.

It is obvious that for some months the government has been attempting to soften up the Victorian public for a budget that will savagely cut real spending on essential public services and infrastructure. It will also be a budget that will raise state charges and hit the less well-off. It is further clear that the Baillieu government will attempt to blame Victoria's problems, such as the collapse of revenues, including stamp duty, on the commonwealth government. The Victorian government may want to draw parallels between its aim to claw back the \$341 million deficit in the forthcoming budget and the commonwealth's objective of bringing its budget into surplus, but the fact is that there are some very big differences between what commonwealth Labor is doing to bring its budget into surplus and what the Victorian coalition government is doing.

The commonwealth government, unlike the Victorian government, has a jobs plan that it is implementing. It has a massive infrastructure plan and a manufacturing plan, both of which it is implementing along with an industrial relations model that protects workers' pay and conditions and supports the maintenance and development of skills.

Last week's Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting illustrated the point that, despite the extraordinary grandstanding by coalition premiers in attacking important Labor initiatives, there were real-world agreements on major priorities that will reform the national training system, reduce and lower business costs, improve competition and productivity, and reaffirm commitment to a national disability insurance scheme with increased commonwealth funding. There was a push to continue with school funding reform in light of the Gonski review.

There was also a signing up to the national partnerships agreement supporting national health reform. I have just named just a few achievements; quite a lot can be seen in the communiqué from COAG.

We look in vain for anything of similar dimensions from the Victorian government. Even today we see reports in the papers that the International Monetary Fund expects the Australian economy to grow by 3 per cent, and that is steady from January. I think the commentary from the IMF was that there should be a solid rebound from the situation in 2011. The latest national employment data underscores this. It shows that, contrary to expectations, the national picture was steady with unemployment at 5.2 per cent, creating some 44 000 additional jobs, which is some seven times more than expected.

This cautious optimism at the national level holds a warning for Victoria as it continues to slide, because it recorded the second-highest unemployment level in the country after Tasmania at 7 per cent. The number of jobs in Victoria is continuing to decline; the state has lost a further 15 000 jobs in the last six months, with unemployment growing from 5.5 per cent last month to 5.8 per cent this month.

During the last period of Labor's administration it is no exaggeration to say that this state was the powerhouse of the nation with consistently high employment growth despite the massive hit of the first phase of the global financial crisis. This was because Labor was absolutely focused on job creation throughout its stewardship of this state over 11 years. The coalition government has not even set up a process to talk to business and workers and their representative organisations, so Labor's recent initiative, which was announced last week, to start such a consultation is a first step, and it is a scandal that the government has vacated the field, basically leaving the job to the opposition.

Even the mainstream media now describe Victoria as the employment drain of the nation, a state of fear, not a state on the move. Talk of recession is rife, they say, and business leaders have called on the Baillieu government to do something to boost the economy. The Premier and the Treasurer must have cringed when Elizabeth Proust, a Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet during the Kennett government and now chair of the Bank of Melbourne, said last month to the Committee for Melbourne that the Baillieu government was not investing enough in Victoria's infrastructure. Ms Proust was scathing, saying that the government was taking too long to make decisions

about infrastructure investment and that the failure to make these decisions was damaging to the economy.

Think about that — a Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet during the time of the Kennett government, now chair of the Bank of Melbourne, saying publicly before the Committee of Melbourne that the coalition government of Victoria, led by Premier Ted Baillieu, is damaging the economy. Ms Proust also said that the city is being strangled by a lack of decision making on a whole range of key infrastructure programs. This is very powerful criticism, and it presents the government with a huge challenge. The hope is the government will lurch into some kind of action in the face of the serious situation the state is now in.

The first thing the government could do for the people of Eastern Victoria Region is reverse the disastrous decisions it has made during the last year and a half. The government could, for example, keep its election promise to deliver on the previous Labor government's Victorian schools plan which aimed to ensure that every government school in the state would be either comprehensively refurbished or completely rebuilt. This would not only bring greater equity to educational provision across the state but would also bring jobs to almost every community in Victoria that has a school.

We know that this state's future relies on its capacity to grow a highly skilled workforce and that, as other countries have shown, this means educational equality. We need to educate everyone to his or her potential so that excellence at the higher levels can generate innovation. Gippsland needs to improve the learning outcomes and skills of its young people, and the government's scrapping of the Victorian schools plan has delivered a devastating blow to thousands of young people and children right across Gippsland.

What the government has done, and no doubt will continue to do, is pick out schools for funding, but even here you really do have to wonder whether at the end of the four-year cycle, given the austerity that is in the offing now, schools will be funded. I ask the government to now affirm on the public record that it will honour its promise to fund Koo Wee Rup Secondary College, Officer Secondary College, Boronia Heights College, Birmingham Primary School and Emerald Primary School. I have been unable to find out how much funding has actually been allocated to Wandin Yallock Primary School. I ask whether the government will fund the Bass Coast education and learning precinct, the Somerville Secondary College technical centre and also Somerville Secondary College

itself, Bairnsdale Secondary College and Mirboo North Secondary College.

During the election campaign and afterwards I had to put together a whole table to inform me and my office of what the government had actually committed to, and that involved scrabbling through newspaper items, media releases and various documents to put it together. You cannot find anywhere on the government's website exactly what was committed to, but on my count those schools have not been funded as yet. There has been no clear commitment. Out of all the schools there was a promise for, I can only count four schools that were actually funded in the 2011–12 budget, so I expect the others will be funded in the coming budget, or at least there will be a commitment given about when they will be funded so those schools can commence their planning.

The government could also reverse its widely condemned decision to cut funding to the Victorian certificate of applied learning (VCAL). As we all know, that has very badly affected many schools and young people right across Victoria. We know that VCAL has been a primary and invaluable passage into skills development and employment for those young people. The government could restore the \$1.8 million Take a Break funding that supported families with young children with occasional child-care services and also help to provide employment for the workers at those centres, many of whom have now lost their jobs, as we know.

The government could reverse its decision to no longer support the renewable energy sector by rescinding its absurd prohibition on wind turbines being constructed within 2 kilometres of an existing dwelling, a decision which will result in the loss of an estimated \$3 billion in investment. The government could reverse its decision to remove incentives paid to households and businesses to install solar panels so that Victorian business and the environment could benefit from the growth of this incredibly innovative and emerging part of the energy industry.

For the life of me I cannot understand why this government would deliberately sabotage Victoria's renewable energy industry when we see the success and benefits of these industries in Germany, the economic powerhouse of Europe, to take one example. In Germany, from 2008 to this year, private households, farmers, small and medium size businesses and regional utilities have increased photovoltaic solar capacity sixfold. In 2000 Germany set itself a target of doubling the share of renewable energy in its power supply to at least 12.5 per cent, and by 2011 the share of power

from renewable energy sources was 20 per cent. Germany has created 380 000 green jobs. Most of these jobs are in renewable energy produced from onshore wind power, which is built by farmers.

In a very interesting ABC radio *Big Ideas* program that some members might have heard back in January, US scientist, inventor and futurist Ray Kurzweil said that with the change in technologies Moore's law of accelerating returns — that processing speeds basically double every two years — can now increasingly be applied to any industry that involves information, and one of those industries is solar and renewable energy production. Kurzweil said that the cost per watt of solar energy is coming down exponentially as nanotechnology is applied to solar panels, and as a result there is a doubling every two years of the total amount of solar energy. Right now it is only eight doublings away from meeting a very high per cent of our energy needs.

If we dismiss this as nonsense and continue to believe that solar energy is just a fringe player, we should take a look at how quickly the internet or mobile phones spread or look at the mapping of the human genome. Mapping the human genome was initially estimated to take centuries, whereas in fact it took seven years to map 1 per cent of the human genome and then it doubled each year. Mapping the human genome took in total around 15 years. The point that Kurzweil is making is that there is an exponential increase, and solar energy and other renewables will follow a similar pattern as information becomes more and more critical to those technologies.

It is very important that Victoria harnesses its economy to emerging industries, and quite frankly it is a profound tragedy that the Baillieu government is more interested in point-scoring in this chamber. For example, there is hardly a moment when a member on the opposite side does not get up with something puerile to say about the carbon price. It is a tragedy that they are more interested in that kind of thing than in serious debate on how we improve the economy or the innovative renewable energy industries in this state.

Besides these important and fundamental errors the government has made, a review of the commitments the government made during the last election shows that many of those commitments have not been honoured. Looking through my list of government commitments, they are too numerous to go through in detail, but to give you a sense of what is there, there are hospitals, ambulance stations and medical clinics, quite a lot of road construction that was committed to, railway stations, bus services, level crossings and grade

separations, sporting facilities, recreation reserve upgrades, cycle paths and rail trails. Residents in communities across the state are very concerned that many of these initiatives will be dishonoured in view of the government's commitment to reduce its \$341 million deficit.

When you look through a lot of those commitments that were made by the coalition, it is pretty clear that it never expected to get into government in 2010, so these commitments and promises were made willy-nilly. The government must recommit to funding, for example, the upgrades for football clubs at Beaconsfield, Berwick, Gembrook, Cockatoo, Rythdale, Officer and Cardinia, as well as the bus shelters for Lakeside and Yarra Ranges, the pedestrian crossing at McGregor Road, the Emerald Community House, the Cowes Medical Centre and the upgrade to the Wonthaggi hospital. The list goes on and on right across Eastern Victoria Region.

In concluding, the Premier said in a doorstep at COAG that he agreed with the business community that there should be a focus on productivity, a focus on outcomes and a focus on best practice. The budget gives us a prime opportunity to see some evidence for that and some proof that the government knows what it means. Let us see whether the government and its members in this chamber see these issues as important. There is a need to support local industry with infrastructure, and in this state we need a number of targeted programs and projects.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I do not know whether it is a pleasure to stand to contribute to this motion from Ms Pulford. It is one of those jobs that needs to be done, because it is certainly a worry when members of the Labor Party can come into this chamber and start talking along the lines of calling on the Baillieu-Ryan government to deliver on its election promises and also to create and maintain jobs in Victoria. It is so simplistic.

The accusations flying across the chamber that we are not out there talking to industry and that we do not have a genuine plan to do everything we possibly can within our limitations to create and invest in job creation are simply a folly. I know, because I have been doing the work myself, and as I am out on the traps I keep bumping into ministers who are out there, including Mr Dalla-Riva, who I followed into Wodonga. I was there last week, and he was there the week before talking to industry and trying to make sure that industry is aware that this government is prepared to partner with industry when it comes to job creation. Something we are told time and again is that industry has never

seen such a presence in the region when it comes to government ministers calling on it collectively and regularly, trying to work out ways this government can assist with industry and help it through these tough times.

This government is doing everything within its power. You do not have to be a Rhodes scholar to understand that the greatest pressure on industry today in relation to retaining jobs is the high Australian dollar, which is well above parity. If the best the opposition can do is to blame us for the high Australian dollar, it should feel free to do so.

However, there are two other issues in the north of the state that are Labor Party-inflicted pressures on government, and they are the carbon tax and the continued push to take productive water out of the Murray-Darling Basin. This is an issue that can be influenced by the Labor Party and predominantly by the federal Labor Party. We are not making this up; it is not some mythical pressure that we imagine exists within industry. These are hard, cold facts from conversations we are having with managing directors and chairmen of boards who wonder how their companies are going to be able to maintain their staffing levels because of Labor Party policy and in the face of a high Australian dollar. No-one ever blames anyone for that; everyone is prepared to work as hard as they can.

Mr Barber — The two-speed economy.

Mr DRUM — The two-speed economy is a fact. It is something that is there. If Mr Barber wants to get rid of the mining industry so we have a one-speed economy going backwards at a million miles an hour — —

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr DRUM — It is not as simple as that, and Mr Barber knows that. It is just ramping up another fight and imposing another tax regime on our mining industry. It might be more advantageous if Mr Barber and his party were to get behind a push for clean coal technology. It might be more beneficial to the state if he were able to bring his party on board with what the government is doing in helping private industry to advance the technology which is going to see our brown coal cleaned up and de-watered — —

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr DRUM — I think Mr Barber will find it will be more like 20 weeks from now when, hopefully, this state will be in a situation of being able to partake in the

\$44 billion which comes from exports to overseas markets and which we are exempt from.

Mr Barber — Are you digging up Bacchus Marsh now?

Mr DRUM — Mr Barber can keep throwing barbs and trying to embed his views. He has a closed mind on this whole issue, but he should be prepared to think about it, as Mr Scheffer was just saying, even though there was a lot of rubbish and lies in what Mr Scheffer contributed. However, he did mention that technology moves very quickly. He was talking about — —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Drum, in referring to comments made by Mr Scheffer, used inappropriate language. I ask him to desist from that. I suggest it would also be appropriate if Mr Drum were to withdraw his comments.

Mr DRUM — To say you believe a member of the chamber referred to lies — —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! This is not for debate.

Mr Drum interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! It was not appropriate language to use in this Parliament. I ask that Mr Drum desist and, while I cannot require him right now to withdraw, I suggest that would be an appropriate thing to do.

Mr DRUM — I withdraw, and I will replace the word 'lies' with the term 'factual mistruths'. Is that okay?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! It is Mr Drum's speech. He can use whatever words he wants so long as they are not unparliamentary.

Mr DRUM — In relation to the concept that technology is moving at a very rapid rate, that also applies to the technology that will enable Victoria to de-water its brown coal. When that happens we will be able to enjoy some of the spoils that some of the other states are currently enjoying. They are sending their black coal, which is full of sulphur and ash, overseas, and, we do not hear a squeak out of the opposition or the Greens about that process.

Mr Barber — I am squeaking all the time.

Mr DRUM — I say to Mr Barber that here is an opportunity to clean up the world's coal reserves, and he does not want to know about it.

The government is engaged in a whole range of actions. Hopefully the people of Victoria will see that in very tough financial times we are out there fulfilling the vast majority of the promises that we put forward in the pre-election period. Let us do a comparison. The previous Labor government made an art form of saying one thing in the lead-up to an election and then another in the three-month period after that election, because it knew it had another nearly four years to sell the message and let Victorians get over it. I cannot say the 'L' word, but I can say that some of the mistruths we were fed included the Scoresby freeway, which is now a tollway rather than a freeway, and the fact that the previous government said it would never suck water out of the north of the state and send it to Melbourne. In relation to the north-south pipeline, the Labor Party said one thing before an election but as soon as the election was completed and it found itself back in government the north-south pipeline became a reality. It was without a business case, but the government just went ahead and did it.

What about the desalination plant? When a very small project was put forward by the Liberal Party it was sold to the Victorian public as a fraud. The Labor government said that desalination was a fraud, but immediately after it was re-elected the Premier and his government wanted to build a desalination plant three times the size of the proposal put forward by the Liberal Party. Talking about financial mismanagement — \$5 billion later we have a public-private partnership and a lease agreement for 30 years at \$2 million a day, which equals \$14 million a week. That equates to a school being fully funded and built every week of the year for the next 30 years.

Mr Scheffer told us about the previous government's program to rebuild, restore or modernise every school in the state. It is all in that little last word 'modernise'. That meant it could put a bike shelter down the back of a school and say it had modernised the school. It could do a toilet block and say it had — —

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr DRUM — I will talk to Mr Barber about schools. Again, he just keeps giving me ammunition. I wish this was his motion. The funding arrangements for schools that were in the previous government's budget have been honoured. Day after day coalition members are dealing with problems created by the Labor government promising it would look after schools and provide areas with new schools if they were compliant or agreed to merge. Right around the state all these people were led to believe they were going to get new schools; however, they were just not in the budget.

Again all these promises throughout the state were totally unfunded.

When we found ourselves in government, all of a sudden principals, school committees and school presidents were knocking on our door saying, 'What's the chance of getting our funding' — whether it be half a million, \$2 million, \$15 million — 'for the school that was half-promised by the previous government?'. If the promises were there, why did the previous government not put the costings in the out years? Why did the previous government not allocate the funding in the budget? It did not have to be for the 2010 year, but in the out years the funding should have been there — and it was not. Systemically across the state there are unfunded projects that coalition members now have to work as hard as they possibly can to try to get up. Victorians need to be aware of the way the previous government hoodwinked so many school communities into believing what was not actually the case. It is another mess this government is having to fix up.

As I have said before, just one project — the desalination plant at Wonthaggi — is going to be costing us \$14 million a week for the next 30 years. You can build a pretty good school for \$14 million, and we could be building one every week for the next 30 years had we not been committed to the desalination plant.

Hon. P. R. Hall — Or a new TAFE institute every month.

Mr DRUM — Or a new TAFE institute every month. The opportunities would be endless if we did not have the ridiculous debt the Labor Party has committed us to. I invite members to listen to the preachings from the Labor opposition telling us in effect to go out there and just keep borrowing: 'We don't want to hear about tough economic times. We don't want to hear about the fact that GST receipts have fallen. We don't want to hear about the fact that it is a tough financial environment; we don't want to hear about that. We want to go down the path of Queensland: just keep borrowing. What does it matter if you have recurrent losses of \$2.3 million every year? What does it matter if you have a net debt of \$70 billion or \$80 billion? What does that matter? We just don't want to have any pain; we don't want to have any tough decisions made on our behalf. We are the Labor Party. Someone else will pay it back. If you blokes come into government, we don't want you to fix the issues up'. The hypocrisy of Labor standing here telling us that the way out of this mess is to keep borrowing!

Hon. P. R. Hall — Mr Scheffer says it goes on and on and on.

Mr DRUM — Mr Scheffer rolled off a list of schools in his electorate that he wants to make sure are going to be funded in the upcoming budget. I say to Mr Scheffer: in 11 years all he had to do was put each of those schools in his government's budget and put the funding in the out years and they would have been funded.

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr DRUM — Here we go: we are getting criticism from the opposition because we have not done what it did not do.

Mr Tee interjected.

Mr DRUM — Very good; we have not done what they did not do, so therefore they want to start criticising us. I will tell members how the previous government used to work in my patch in the Bendigo region. It had a project that is now called the Bendigo jail theatre project. Former government members had a conversation with a school and came to an arrangement. They then forbade the school and the local council talking to us, the opposition of the day, in the lead-up to the election. They ran a secret program for four or five months in the lead-up to the election so that they could announce a brand-new project 8 to 10 days out from an election. What chance does an opposition have to promise matching funding when a \$3 million package is announced in the paper?

Jacinta Allan, the member for Bendigo East in the Assembly and the former Minister for Regional and Rural Development, and former Premier John Brumby were standing there as proud as Punch because they had forbidden the local council and the local school — one of the biggest schools in Victoria — to talk to the opposition about this project. After the election the school and the council had to come to the government of the day and plead forgiveness: 'We're sorry we could not come and see you. The previous government forbade us to talk to you before the election. We had to keep this project secret so that it would get a political kick in the lead-up to the election'.

Labor Party members in the chamber think this is a proper way to do business, they think this is the way you should run government and they think the best way to get a community project up is to forbid an opposition the opportunity for a quote or the opportunity to throw its support behind the project. The former government went through a similar disgraceful performance with

Fortuna Villa, which was thrown in at the last minute on the back of promises that were never going to work.

The thing we have to make sure that everybody is aware of is that, when it comes to working to create and maintain jobs, this government, its ministers and their supporting parliamentary secretaries are out there. We are talking to industry all the time. If any industry is in a position where it can create employment or enter into an expansion, then we are in there talking to it and trying to work out ways we can help, assist and partner up to help create jobs. We are going to keep working in this space for as long as we possibly can. It is something we do on a daily basis and something we are always working on in the field.

In answer to this motion: we are in the field, working in a very tough financial environment to deliver on our promises from the election — and we are going to continue to deliver. In what are very tough financial times we are out there on a daily basis talking to industry, trying to assist it, and working out ways we can help grow this state. But we are not going to do it by way of a Queensland-style blow-out in the budget and the loss of our AAA rating, which makes money much more expensive. We are going to attempt to reel in the debt, which at this stage is on a trajectory that will become unsustainable in the long term. We are not going down that path. We are going to show the financial responsibility that Victorians expect of a coalition government, and we are going to maintain a AAA rating to ensure that the projects we do into the future are funded with the cheapest possible finance.

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to speak in support of Ms Pulford's motion, and I congratulate her on bringing this debate to the house. I want to begin by referring to the first aspect of Ms Pulford's motion, which calls on the Baillieu-Ryan government to use this year's state budget to deliver on its election promises. I have to admit that this puts me in some difficulty, because when it comes to election promises for my electorate there is very little on the ledger that I can point to and then call on the government to deliver. In numerous debates I have brought up this issue of the need for equity in terms of the allocation of budget funding to ensure that electorates such as mine, Northern Metropolitan Region, are not forgotten about as they have been during the past 16 months.

I know it would have been very difficult for Mr Ondarchie to come in here earlier to talk about election promises and have anything to point to in this regard, because the things that have been delivered in the northern suburbs are in fact projects initiated by the

previous Labor government. These are projects with which my Labor colleagues have been very proudly associated over the past few years, such as supporting the extension of the South Morang rail line, the relocation of the wholesale market to Epping, which will be a huge employer for the northern suburbs in the future, and many other projects. It is important that I remind members opposite that I will be watching very carefully to see that they in fact deliver the northern suburbs' fair share in this budget and coming budgets, because these suburbs have been very neglected so far.

Mr Ondarchie — For 11 years; I could not agree more.

Ms MIKAKOS — Particularly in the area of education, Mr Ondarchie, I found it quite outrageous that the coalition's election promises did not list a single school in Northern Metropolitan Region. Not a single school was on the list of schools to which the Baillieu government was going to deliver funds.

Mr Leane interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — That is shameful, Mr Leane. It is an utter disgrace that in the over 1000 square kilometres of Northern Metropolitan Region, from the CBD to the outer north, there was not one school about which this coalition had made a promise. We had a very extensive list of commitments for schools across the north and a very extensive list of projects that had already begun. I highlighted one of those last night during the adjournment debate, the completion of the project at William Ruthven Secondary College.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! For all the time I have been in the chair, members have been listened to in relative silence on both sides, I might say, and I ask Mr Ondarchie to continue that courtesy and allow the member to be heard without assistance from him.

Ms MIKAKOS — I realise I am touching a raw nerve here, because this government has delivered education funding based on postcode rather than on necessity, and it is embarrassed by that blatant pork-barrelling that has occurred. We have seen it in both primary and secondary education funding allocations, but we have also seen it in early childhood education. During the state election campaign the coalition committed to only 4 preschools out of the 1755-odd kindergartens in Victoria, and 3 of the 4 were in the one marginal electorate. Of course government members have got to hang their heads in shame at their blatant pork-barrelling, but I will continue to advocate

on behalf of schools and preschools across Victoria and in the northern suburbs.

We saw that only \$208 million was allocated in the coalition's budget commitment for school capital projects, which is the lowest it has been in eight years. That is why so many schools in the north are now languishing. I acknowledge the fact that the three special schools that were already earmarked for development by the previous Labor government were supported. I do come into the house and acknowledge when positive things happen, and I fully support those projects. But other than those there is not a single mainstream school that has been funded so far, and that is a disgraceful state of affairs. We have thousands of Victorian schoolchildren in my electorate who are missing out, and I know there are many in other parts of the state who are missing out too, because people in other parts of the state contact me and tell me about their plight as well.

People have to focus on the excuses that the coalition gives for this neglect occurring. In particular we hear time and again drivel from the coalition about Labor's supposed big black hole, and I want to come to that, because I think the coalition is seeking to rewrite history. Under Labor, Victoria enjoyed a AAA credit rating in each and every year it was in office. In every budget we delivered a strong operating surplus, including in the year the Baillieu government took office. The current Premier himself conceded upon his election that there were 'no surprises' in Victoria's financial position, and he did so in the *Age* of 1 December 2010. He said this advice did not threaten any of the commitments the Baillieu government made during the election campaign. I have already outlined how deficient those promises were and the fact that none of them related to my electorate.

We had projects and commitments in place previously which would have seen, for example, schools in my electorate benefit. We had the Victorian schools plan, which was a \$1.9 billion Labor initiative to rebuild, renovate or refurbish every single public school in Victoria by 2016, but the Baillieu government scrapped that commitment. Many schools are missing out because of the Baillieu government wreaking havoc with these commitments initiated by Labor.

Labor also made schooling more affordable for Victorian families by introducing the \$300 School Start bonus and providing up to \$450 for eligible families through the education maintenance allowance. The Baillieu government has introduced means testing, making it harder for families to access those funds. Labor has always regarded education as its top priority,

and it has a tremendous track record with that. By contrast, \$481 million has been ripped from the Victorian education budget by the Baillieu government. It also walked away from its promise to make Victorian teachers the best paid in the nation. I am sure the teachers will do a good job of reminding the Premier of that promise during the course of this year.

Basically we are seeing a repeat of history. We all remember well that the Kennett government gutted our education system by sacking 9000 teachers and closing 300 public schools. We have to remind people that this government has the same DNA as the Kennett government. Many coalition members of Parliament are the same, and certainly many of the advisers are the same. We see Jeff Kennett's fingerprints all over a lot of this. We know that he is secretly going into the Premier's office and advising Premier Baillieu about what he should be doing. He is certainly not shy about offering his opinions through the media. We are seeing many of the personnel who used to work for the Kennett government. In fact a former chief of staff, Anna Cronin, now works for Minister Lovell as her chief of staff. It is no surprise that Minister Lovell has taken an axe to many early childhood programs, because clearly this government has the same DNA as the Kennett government in terms of not showing any respect for education in this state.

I come now to the second part of the motion, which relates to jobs, an important part of Ms Pulford's motion. I remind members opposite that under Labor Victoria drove jobs growth and was seen as a state that had many opportunities, and that is why many businesses came and invested here during our time in office. In the last 12 months of the Labor government the Victorian economy created 100 000 new jobs, and in 2010, 92 per cent of the full-time jobs created in Australia were created right here in Victoria. Almost 17 months into the Baillieu government's reign Mr Baillieu is yet to release anything that even resembles the beginning of a jobs plan for Victoria.

In contrast, the Leader of the Opposition and member for Mulgrave in the Assembly, Daniel Andrews, has announced a jobs and investment plan for Victoria, and Labor is consulting extensively with industry, unions and other stakeholders about this plan. We are interested in focusing on the most important thing we can do for Victorian people — that is, ensure that they have a job to support their families.

The Treasurer, Kim Wells, promised to deliver 50 000 jobs a year. Instead in 2011 we saw a loss of 17 000 jobs. We have seen public investment declining and debt rapidly rising, with nothing to show for it from

this government. Unemployment has risen during the Baillieu government's first term, so far from 4.9 per cent to 5.8 per cent. My electorate, which is home to some of the most disadvantaged communities in the state, is facing the brunt of this. For example, the lower house seat of Broadmeadows has an unemployment rate of 10.64 per cent — much higher than the state average and significantly higher than the national average. We have seen no support from this government for jobs in areas like Broadmeadows. The Ford plants in both Broadmeadows and Geelong have shed jobs, and people in manufacturing are getting no support whatsoever from this state government.

Youth unemployment is now sitting at 23.1 per cent. I remind members opposite that in their own families statement that they delivered last year — they have forgotten about this year's version of course — they said that in December 2010 youth unemployment was around 12.5 per cent. This is not my figure; this is the coalition's own figure in its own document. It said that when it came to office youth unemployment was at 12.5 per cent. It now stands at 23.1 per cent. There are 16 500 fewer jobs across the state, and more than 30 000 more Victorians have joined the unemployment queue.

Victorians are losing out under this government. It is only too happy to help to add further people to the unemployment queue, having announced that 3600 public service jobs are to go during the course of this year. This is a time when this state is shedding jobs, and the Baillieu government thinks it should add to that by cutting even more jobs.

In conclusion I ask this: when the Baillieu government claims to be implementing its election promises, what is it doing and what has it actually done for Victorians? It has very little to show other than having cut back on programs and cut back on services across education and health and many areas which time does not permit me to highlight in the course of this debate today. Many election promises are yet to be delivered. It is difficult for us to find those election promises given that they have been removed from the Liberal Party's website. They are now secret election promises that only those who had the foresight — like myself — to download soon after the election are able to locate.

We in the Labor opposition will continue to hold this government to account for its promises to ensure that it does deliver on them. We will make sure that people in my electorate and in those other areas that are missing out get their fair share. We need to be clear about Labor's legacy: we left this government a healthy budget surplus. This government has put the budget

into a precarious position. It is now raiding the Victorian WorkCover Authority's funds to prop up its budget, we are continually seeing services being run into the ground, and there is the threat of services being privatised in the future.

The budget to be delivered in two weeks time will give the Baillieu government an opportunity to address some of these issues. I am not holding my breath, but I call on the government to govern for all Victorians, to ensure that Victorians receive the services that they expect from their government and, most importantly, to address the issue of the jobs crisis in Victoria to ensure that Victorians will be able to have jobs during the course of this government.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I am pleased to stand in the chamber this afternoon and speak to Ms Pulford's motion. I suspect that when Ms Pulford moved the motion some 3½ hours ago she would not have expected that the only business in relation to general business, notices of motion, to have been dealt with up until this point at 3 o'clock would be the first one. On that basis my contribution this afternoon will be relatively brief. I want to respond to a number of comments made by previous speakers. I would like to set the scene for my contribution. In the spirit of the motion that has been moved I will talk about the budget and the Baillieu government's strategy in relation to when it first came to power — and we have not moved from that course — to where it wants to be, and also to the second part of Ms Pulford's motion about creating and maintaining jobs in Victoria. It is quite a large field to cover, and many speakers from both sides of the chamber have provided their views about the positions of their respective parties.

To set the scene, obviously in relation to jobs we have a very difficult global environment at the moment. I am sure I am not giving the house any new news when I say there are a number of countries right across the world that are facing extreme financial difficulties, and Australia is no different. In fact, as we know, many in the retail and manufacturing sectors are facing extreme pressures, not from internal political policies but from the global economic climate. I would like to paint a brief picture of what is happening in Australia in relation to the present debt that many states are coming to grips with, the strategies that states are implementing to try to reduce that cost and what effect that debt has on both the budgets that are coming up and the potential job markets for respective industries.

It concerns me that many of the speakers on the opposite side have been speaking on the basis of very little real experience in small business or in fact in

business at all. One could accuse many of the members on the opposition benches of coming from an environment where they have had no responsibility for providing any sort of management of a business or workers within that business. We have heard many views from the opposition coming from a Trades Hall central casting position. The opposition is more about spin than substance.

Ms Broad — On a point of order, Acting President, this motion is not an opportunity for members of the government to reflect on what experience members of the opposition may or may not have had. I ask you to draw Mr Ramsay back to the motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Pennicuik) — Order! I draw Mr Ramsay's attention to the fact that he is not a lead speaker on the motion. He should stick to the terms of the motion.

Mr RAMSAY — I am happy to take your advice, Acting President, but I must say it is a bit rich, given that I have just listened to 2 hours of fairly wide-reaching contributions from a range of speakers that had no relevance to the motion at hand. For some reason I seem to have been picked out as a guilty party, but I take your advice.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — I beg your pardon? I think Mr Barber is helping me with my contribution, although I did not hear exactly what he said.

I took some guidance from Mr Ondarchie's contribution, given that he has significant experience in the business world. His summing up of the global impacts on both jobs and the financial position of the state of Victoria should be listened to. I reiterate that the government's position was very clear and transparent right from the start, even pre-election. We came to the election saying we wanted to create a budget surplus, to maintain a AAA rating and to increase productivity as a means of dealing with falling revenue and as a means of providing greater opportunities for jobs and business in the state of Victoria. We said we wanted to provide for flexibility in the industrial relations area and look at developing new markets, and that is why the Premier, ministers and trade delegations have spent considerable time in potential overseas markets like India, and Shanghai in China, looking at new opportunities and providing pathways for our industries, both current and future, to create stimulus in the domestic manufacturing business world and create the new jobs that Ms Pulford has raised concerns about. This methodology of staying

the course despite significant global pressures is to be admired and supported.

I will refer to some of the domestic pressures that are facing us, not only in Victoria but Australia wide. I will paint a picture of what happens to the financial position of a state when Labor is let loose in state government. I refer members to the fact that in the national capital we have a national debt of just over \$120.7 billion. Four years ago we had no debt and we had \$70 billion in net assets. We now have a daily interest payment of over \$20 million. While we talk about the desal plant costing Victoria over \$1 million per day, we have as a national debt repayment over \$20 million per day, and that is under the reign of the federal Labor government.

I also refer members to Queensland where just recently the new coalition government inherited a debt of \$85 billion. That is in the state of Queensland — one single state! Just over half the total national debt has been incurred under Labor's rule. I refer members to South Australia, which has \$11 billion of debt. For five out of its six years in office that state government has run in deficit, with total liabilities, including unfunded superannuation, assumed to reach over \$23 billion this year. It will be the largest deficit in South Australia for over 20 years. I refer members to New South Wales just prior to the coalition government taking power. It was over \$5.2 billion in debt. In less than a year and a half that has been reversed to over \$1.3 billion in surplus.

I think members will be getting the drift if I also refer them to the time when former Premier Jeff Kennett came to power. In 1992 the Premier at the time inherited from Labor a state debt of \$33 billion, plus an overall deficit approaching \$2 billion. By the time there was a change of government in 1999 it had been more than halved to \$12 billion. I think members are seeing a fairly gritty firsthand look at what happens when Labor governs in Australia: we incur large debt.

I am setting the scene for a reason, because if we took Ms Pulford's motion to its future conclusion we would find that this state would be heading into the same sorts of areas as Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales, and the nation's capital debt would be such that future generations would have to repay significant debt and interest, which would mean that we could not invest in things that really matter to people in all states such as health, education and standard of living.

I also refer to the state of Western Australia — I have not forgotten WA. At the moment it is sitting on a \$442 million surplus — another sign of a coalition government being fiscally responsible and after decades

of Labor rule moving from significant debt to surpluses and opportunities to invest in assets and infrastructure that provide the jobs that Ms Pulford is very concerned about.

I will respond to some of the commentary made in contributions to debate by other members in relation to election commitments. I refer to my own electorate of Western Victoria Region, because I do not have time to refer to all of them. I will give a snapshot of the election commitments we made and which have been delivered in western Victoria over the 18 months that the Baillieu government has been in power. We committed to producing a directory of food and wine producers in the Kyneton region, and it has been delivered. The location of an office of the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Ballarat was committed to and has been delivered. Passenger rail from Bendigo to Ballarat and from Ballarat to Geelong is presently under review. The Yarrowee River clean-up was committed to and delivered.

The Go Goldfields commitment has been delivered. Funding for Stawell State Emergency Service was committed to and has been delivered. A computerised tomography scanner for Maryborough and District Hospital was committed to and delivered. The redevelopment of the Ballarat District Nursing and Healthcare office and care space was committed to and delivered. The Leadership Ballarat and Western Region program was committed to and delivered. The Ballarat CBD security cameras were committed to and delivered. Stage 1 of the Ballarat Regional Soccer Facility project was committed to and delivered. The upgrade of the BMX track in Ballarat was committed to and delivered. The Ballarat western link road project was committed to and is being delivered. The upgrade of the historic Ballarat fire station was committed to and is being delivered. The Ballarat-Buninyong Road upgrade was committed to and has been delivered. The Creswick Bowling Club project has been committed to and has been delivered, and funding for events to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Buninyong Botanic Gardens has been committed to and delivered. In fact I officiated at the openings of a significant number of these projects which we committed to prior to the election.

I also refer to some of the new jobs the government has been successful in delivering. Work on the regional rail link will deliver 2500 new jobs, there will be 800 jobs in the metropolitan system, 940 protective services officers and, as we also know, 1700 extra police. I could go on.

I will make a couple of other quick points which hopefully will create an environment where we can encourage the establishment of new businesses and maintain those industries that are under financial pressure, certainly not from government policy but more from such global influences as the high dollar and difficult trading conditions overseas. I have attended a number of round tables with the Minister for Manufacturing, Exports and Trade, the Honourable Richard Dalla-Riva, and the carbon tax will have one of the biggest impacts and influences on manufacturing industries in particular but also on other industries that employ people in relation to ongoing contracts and business. Its impact is being felt now through a filtering effect, despite the fact the tax is yet to be introduced.

While we have global factors, we have a national domestic policy of a carbon tax that is already having significant impacts on businesses that are employers and that are making decisions in relation to how they can reduce their costs. There is no doubt that this tax will have a great influence on company decisions about reducing the labour force and on businesses wishing to not only establish but also grow their businesses with a skill base in mind.

I want to talk briefly about the Greens, if I may. I note with the change in the federal leadership that Senator Milne is talking about having greater collaboration with rural industries. I assume she means farmers. Being a farmer myself, I have to say I cannot think of a Greens policy that has helped to stimulate rural industries across regional Victoria; in fact we have been stymied by a number of policies in relation to water, native vegetation, inflexible industrial reform, red tape and regulations. Not just rural industries but also businesses are saying that much of the red tape and regulation imposed by the previous government are strangling businesses.

I say to Labor and the Greens that if they are serious about trying to stimulate jobs and business, then they should be supporting the Baillieu government in trying to reduce some of the regulation and red tape presently strangling small business in particular and to a lesser extent larger businesses. Small business is still the largest employer of workers in the nation, and anything we can do to reduce costs to those businesses will give them the opportunity to grow their businesses, increase their skill base and take on more employment.

While we are talking about those different policies, I will also refer to comments made by the president of the Victorian Farmers Federation in yesterday's *Weekly Times*. I suspect the outgoing president, Andrew Broad,

was not speaking on behalf of the organisation itself but made his comments as the outgoing president. I remind the VFF, and Andrew Broad in particular, that the Baillieu government has provided significant support to young farmers across Victoria, including over \$500 000 investment in the Victorian Young Farmers, providing stamp duty exemptions for young farmers wanting to enter the industry, trying to remove the shackles of Labor Party and Greens policies in relation to red tape and regulations, which I have talked about, and reviewing the native vegetation framework to try to improve the productivity of land-holders and farmers across the state.

I have not even talked about, as others have, the policies of Labor in relation to water in the state. I refer mainly to the madness of the north–south pipeline, the cost of the desalination plant and the lack of consultation and engagement in relation to the super-pipe to Bendigo and Ballarat. All of those things have had a significant cost imposed on rural land-holders across Victoria. I reaffirm that I am very disappointed in Mr Broad's comments in relation to the work — —

Ms Broad — Why don't you tell him?

Mr RAMSAY — I am going to tell him tomorrow when I attend a VFF conference, and I am giving him a heads-up in this house that I think his comments are not a true reflection of the Victorian Farmers Federation's view in relation to the Baillieu government's work to support farmers across Victoria.

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — Just a few more minutes, Mr Leane. I understand you are keen to add your contribution, but I am sure I have given a fairly good description of Labor's incapacity to maintain any sort of fiscal or financial management. I think I have identified six states that have accrued over \$356 billion worth of debt during their terms in office, coupled with significant deficits, loss of their credit ratings, a lack of investment and increases in rules and regulations which are strangling business. On the national platform we have Fair Work Australia, which I doubt anyone, given the events of the last month, could possibly have any trust in. We have unions running amok in relation to how they are spending their members' money — there is no accountability or transparency in the way unions operate. It does not set a good scene for people to have trust in a Labor government or its ability to provide fiscal management or stimulate manufacturing.

I am referring to Ms Pulford's motion, should the Acting President suggest that I am talking out of the

bounds of the motion; I would never do that. In fact you have to have strong fiscal management, you have to create services, you have to have AAA ratings and you have to have a strategy that stays on course and increases productivity in view of the fact that revenue is going down rather than just splashing money about in the hope that it will provide a stimulus. All that does is increase debt; it does not provide the capacity to have any investment in infrastructure.

In summary, I again reiterate that this government is very focused on creating a surplus and very focused on keeping the AAA rating. It is staying on course in relation to its agenda, which was clearly identified pre-election. Its priority is increasing productivity, providing flexibility in the workplace in relation to industrial relations, developing new markets — and the Premier has spent considerable time in other countries facilitating and creating pathways for businesses in Victoria to grow their businesses and compete globally — and providing new opportunities in relation to new markets, new businesses and emerging markets. I commend the Treasurer for looking at ways to reduce the red tape and regulation for small business to allow it to grow, to create employment and to reinvest. I say to Ms Broad that that is the big issue: it is about having the capacity to reinvest in this state. If you have high debt and businesses that cannot compete globally, they will not invest or create employment, and that is where Labor has got it wrong.

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — Judging by the long list of excuses we have just heard from Mr Ramsay, I can only presume that members of the government are being — —

Mr Ramsay — On a point of order, Acting President, I was hardly 3 minutes into my contribution before I was told that I should direct my contribution to the motion and not talk about or criticise those on the other side of the chamber. Ms Broad is some 20 seconds into her contribution and has started to do the same.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Pennicuik) — Order! There is no point of order. It is in order for a member to refer to the contribution of another speaker in a debate.

Ms BROAD — As I was saying, I can only presume that members of the government are being urged to downplay expectations of what might and might not be delivered in the forthcoming state budget.

I rise to support the motion calling on the Baillieu-Ryan government to use the 2012–13 budget to deliver on its

election promises and to create and maintain jobs in Victoria. In particular, I call on the government to do this in northern Victoria, including in electorates represented by members of the Liberal Party and The Nationals, who are governing Victoria in coalition. These electorates should not be taken for granted or overlooked by the government in the forthcoming budget.

In the Assembly electorate of Benambra, represented by Mr Bill Tilley, we have the case of the promise to the Belvoir Special School in Wodonga of some \$6 million for that school. Just 10 per cent of that promise, some \$600 000, has been allocated to date. It is important that the remainder of those funds is allocated in the 2012–13 budget so the school community can get on with doing what it needs to do at Belvoir Special School. I might add that the information that has been made available to me is that \$6 million is going to be nowhere near adequate to meet the needs of Belvoir Special School and that the government needs to be looking at augmenting that promise in order to deliver what it has promised to that school not just in terms of dollars but in terms of adequate facilities and education outcomes for the staff and students at that school.

We also have the case of the new ambulance station promised to Wodonga, which was agreed to by the former Labor government and for which funding was allocated. Mr Tilley was very vocal in opposition in supporting a new ambulance station, calling on the former Labor government to fast-track the delivery of a station and promising that a Liberal-Nationals coalition government would make delivery of a new station a priority. There are no signs at all of progress, and I did check on a visit to Wodonga as recently as the end of last week, in delivering on this commitment by Mr Tilley or any other member of the Baillieu-Ryan government. I call on Mr Tilley and the government to honour their promise by getting on with the job of acquiring a suitable site and building the promised new ambulance station for Wodonga.

In the Assembly electorate of Seymour, represented by Cindy McLeish, we have the promise to the communities of Wandong-Heathcote Junction to provide them with natural gas, a promise made not only by Ms McLeish but also by no less a person than the Premier, Mr Baillieu. Residents whom I visited last week have been somewhat shocked to learn of Mr Baillieu's response to my raising this election promise in the Parliament. In response to questioning about when this promise is going to be delivered, Mr Baillieu indicated that there is a first stage and the first stage involves direct discussion with gas

distribution businesses regarding the capture of early opportunities through a negotiated process — whatever that means.

Secondly, he has indicated that all towns, including the communities of Wandong-Heathcote Junction, will have the opportunity to be considered under the program subject to a supporting bid from one of the private gas distribution businesses. That does not sound to me, and certainly not to the communities of Wandong-Heathcote Junction, like the Premier is saying, 'Yes, I made a promise and yes, I am going to get on with honouring that promise'. I again reiterate to the Parliament on behalf of the communities of Wandong-Heathcote Junction that the Premier should allocate the funds for this election commitment in the forthcoming state budget.

In the electorate of Seymour we have the promise of \$20 million to upgrade the Kilmore and District Hospital, a promise which was not honoured in the government's first budget. I call on the government to at least commence delivering on this promise to Kilmore and surrounding districts in the 2012–13 budget. There is also the promised \$2 million commitment to fund chemotherapy chairs at Seymour District Memorial Hospital. Again there is no reference to this in the government's first budget. I call on the government to fund this commitment in the 2012–13 budget.

I further urge the government in its forthcoming budget to properly fund the promises that were made at the 2010 election to abolish regional rail level crossings. It has been drawn to my attention in my travels across northern Victoria that with increasing traffic from freight trains transporting grain, there is a lot more traffic on lines that have not been in use in recent years. There is a great deal of concern that with the totally inadequate funding provided in the Baillieu-Ryan government's first budget to implement this promise to abolish regional rail level crossings, there are many accidents waiting to happen on level crossings where action has not been taken.

There are a number of further commitments that I could refer to in the electorates of Bendigo West and Macedon, but I am aware of the time, so I conclude by referring to the \$3.5 million promise made by the Liberal candidate for the electorate of Macedon in the last election, Tristan Weston. It was a commitment to fund a contribution to the indoor sports stadium at Gisborne Secondary College. This is a \$6.3 million sports stadium for which the local community is doing its bit by making its contribution. The Shire of Macedon Ranges is also doing its bit by making its

contribution, and I call on the government to honour in the coming 2012–13 budget its \$3.5 million promise, made by the Liberal candidate, Tristan Weston.

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

Debate adjourned until later this day.

DENTAL HEALTH: FEDERAL FUNDING

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house —

- (1) notes the terrible state of dental health in Victoria;
- (2) recognises that oral health should be an integrated part of the national health system; and
- (3) calls on the federal government to —
 - (a) accept the recommendations of the National Advisory Council on Dental Health and make a significant investment in state dental programs in the 2012–13 budget; and
 - (b) make this the first step towards universal commonwealth-funded dental care for all Australians.

Public dental health is currently a state responsibility. It is administered by the states and mostly funded by the states. There is little permanent commonwealth funding, and it tends to be focused on groups for which the commonwealth is responsible, such as the defence force and veterans, or is based on programs like the chronic disease program and the teen dental program rather than being recurrent funding.

Ironically private health insurance schemes do not discriminate, so the commonwealth-funded 30 per cent rebate on private health insurance often covers dental services. By contrast there is a national health system, Medicare, for every other part of the body. It does not make sense for health care of the mouth to be treated under a completely separate health system. We have one body, and health issues are all linked. We seem to accept that dental health is treated separately because it always has been. Our teeth are treated by dentists, not doctors. Dentists are trained in dental schools and hospitals, and doctors are trained in medical schools and hospitals. But from a health perspective it makes no sense at all. For example, there are a range of other health problems associated with poor dental health. Our mouths are an integrated part of our bodies. Dental health is intimately connected with dozens of other health issues. For example, tobacco, alcohol and

diabetes affect our whole body, including our teeth. Poor dental health can also cause a range of other physical and social disadvantages. For example, it is difficult to gain employment if you have no front teeth.

Dental-care funding should be an integrated part of the national health system. A dental-care plan would make going to the dentist the same as going to the doctor. In fact it would work very well with the new Medicare Locals network, which is part of the national health reform agenda. Dental health could be included in a range of linked services that Medicare Locals would be able to coordinate.

In my previous work, in the older persons high-rise program for the Western Region Health Centre, I dealt with many older people who had very few teeth, serious gum disease and other chronic illnesses related to dental issues. One of my clients, a man in his 70s, had not been to a dentist in over 50 years. He had two or three teeth remaining in his mouth. We know that 17.1 per cent of the people who are eligible for public dental care have complete tooth loss, compared with 2.7 per cent of the rest of the population. I was able to organise dental treatment and dentures for this gentleman, and his general health improved dramatically. Before that he was suffering from malnutrition, because he simply could not eat anything that was not incredibly soft, so vegetables, salad and fruit were out of the question.

Victoria has a responsibility to provide dental care through the public dental system to all children aged 12 and under and all concession card holders. Other eligible people include all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who receive treatment at the Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne, newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers, children enrolled in special development schools and young people who are in residential care provided by the Department of Human Services.

I do not want to make this a motion about government bashing, whether it is the current government or a former government. However, we must surely all accept that Victoria's funding of public dental health services is not adequate to meet the needs of eligible Victorians, and it has not been adequate for a long time. There have been some small improvements in waiting lists in Victoria, so credit should be given where credit is due, but the reality is that waiting lists are so long that people are missing out on basic preventive treatment like check-ups and cleans. As a result dental health conditions are getting worse and turning into dental emergencies.

There are clear patterns in dental health. People in every sector of society, rich or poor, experience tooth decay. Those who visit their dentist regularly for check-ups not only receive preventive care but also receive less costly treatment for problems because they are picked up early. People who do not visit the dentist regularly are more likely to wait until tooth decay has progressed so that more comprehensive and costly treatment is required to save a tooth. However, wealthier people are more likely to visit their dentist regularly and get that preventive care and early treatment.

People who are eligible for public dentistry and adults on low incomes who are not eligible are the least likely to visit the dentist regularly, so they have the worst dental health. People who are eligible for public health care are more than six times more likely to lose all their teeth than those who are not eligible. Adults on low incomes can visit a doctor and use their Medicare card, but the only place they can access dental care is in the private sector.

In 1973 the commonwealth government funded a dental program in schools which was administered by the states for a number of years. Some MPs in this Parliament were at primary school around that time and might remember dentists coming to their school. I hope they were grateful at the time for the opportunity. That program has been continued by some states but not by Victoria. These days in Victoria public dentistry for children is provided by community-based clinics. Children are treated as a priority, so there are no significant waiting times, except for services which require hospital admission. Public dental care reaches about 80 per cent of children, which looks like a great figure, except that the burden of dental health disease is borne by a minority of children and tends to fall on kids who are disadvantaged in other ways.

Many health-care card holders do not use the public dental system. In fact only 14 per cent of eligible Victorians receive public dental treatment in any year, so if everybody who is actually entitled to receive dental care sought it, our waiting lists would be completely blown out. Two-thirds of eligible Australians go and see a private dentist, even though they really cannot afford it, and some simply do not go. One of the reasons they miss out is because waiting lists are so long. Victorians wait an average of 17 months for a check-up at a public dental clinic. The waiting time for dentures is about the same — 17 months. In some areas the wait is even longer. Some other Victorians are not eligible but are on low incomes and cannot afford the private dental care they need, so they miss out as well. That is why children, pensioners and

adults on low incomes would be amongst the first to benefit from the phase-in of a denticare scheme.

My motion refers to the National Advisory Council on Dental Health, which was established in September last year to provide the commonwealth government with strategic, independent advice on dental health issues. It reported on 23 February this year. The report describes how the current system works, identifies barriers to accessing dental care, measures the scope and consequences of shortfalls in the present system and makes recommendations. It is a comparatively brief report. It is written in plain language and gives a wealth of information. I recommend it to every member of this house who is interested in dental health.

The report employs a lovely use of understatement — for example, when it states that 400 000 people are currently estimated to be on dental waiting lists nationwide, it notes that:

This indicates that there is more demand for services than the public sector is able to supply.

It got that right!

Considering the revolutionary nature of the recommendations, there appears to have been very little dissent from the experts. The main recommendation — supported by all members of the council — is that a universal dental-care scheme should be a long-term goal. The report states:

The commonwealth should fund services, and the states and territories should deliver them.

The Greens plan for a denticare scheme would involve it being phased in over five years, starting with the most needy recipients — that is, low-income earners, young people, pensioners and those with chronic disease. At the end of the five years going to the dentist would be just like going to the doctor.

There are other advantages, like the investment in the public dental system and the possible reintroduction of school dental programs in Victoria. The scheme would also build the dental workforce and encourage dental health promotion. These advantages are all discussed and recommended in the report. The differences of opinion, where they exist, are about how to implement the scheme — for example, there is broad agreement that the phase-in period should focus on children, because of the short and long-term benefits dental care offers young people, and on lower income adults, because they are falling through the cracks. There are options about how these groups might be targeted.

There are also options on how the commonwealth and the states might share the responsibility. Those options fall into two broad categories. The first is to provide capped funding that may be used at a private dentist with the patient paying the difference, which has the advantage of using available resources. The second is to expand and support public dentistry, which has the advantage of cost-effectiveness in the long run.

My motion calls for significant investment to come from the 2011–12 commonwealth budget. The Greens in federal Parliament have negotiated with the government to secure \$165 million in funding for dental health, which will be allocated from money raised by the Medicare levy surcharge. Therefore we have a secure commitment to commonwealth-funded dental care.

My colleague Senator Richard di Natale describes that commitment as a solid down payment, but \$165 million over three years will not go very far. The states need to see a lot more allocated in this year's budget, especially with the winding up of a \$1 billion chronic disease dental scheme. The budget allocation must be the first step in the introduction of a universal commonwealth-funded dental-care scheme for all Australians. As the National Advisory Council on Dental Health pointed out in relation to options for the phasing in of such a scheme, while the options would be implemented gradually, it is important to understand that this would be a step on the road to full implementation and not an end point in itself.

Despite the best intentions, Victorians who are eligible for public dental care are not receiving it. Other Victorians, especially those on low incomes, use the universal health fund, Medicare, to visit their doctor, but do not see a dentist because the only option for them is to use the private dental system. The states have a limited capacity to raise money to pay for public health, but we all pay our taxes to the commonwealth. The obvious solution is to bring dental health into Medicare. This house must call on the commonwealth government to make that very thing happen.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise and speak on Ms Hartland's motion:

That this house —

- (1) notes the terrible state of dental health in Victoria;
- (2) recognises that oral health should be an integrated part of the national health system; and
- (3) calls on the federal government to —

- (a) accept the recommendations of the National Advisory Council on Dental Health and make a significant investment in state dental programs in the 2012–13 budget; and
- (b) make this the first step towards universal commonwealth-funded dental care for all Australians.

We have just heard Ms Hartland's views on the federal government and its interventions in this area, but I want to speak on what Victoria is undertaking. I acknowledge and agree with Ms Hartland on the importance of good dental and oral hygiene, especially for young people, to help prevent long-term gum disease and dental problems which, if they go untreated, can have an adverse effect for many people.

I think we would all agree that early prevention and intervention in this area is very important. There are areas of chronic disease that can be impacted and untreated dental caries can lead to things like autoimmune disease and joint pain; it can have long-term bacterial implications and a whole range of chronic disease health implications, so I agree that there is a need for as much prevention and intervention with young children as possible, and I encourage parents and schools to ensure that where possible they recommend that message.

I draw the main part of my contribution to what is happening in Victoria as things currently stand. As Ms Hartland has acknowledged, there has been some improvement over recent times. I put on the record that public dental services are provided to all children up to 12 years of age. Young people aged 13 to 17 years and adults who have a pension concession and cardholders or dependants of concession cardholders will be entitled to that public dental health service. Public dental services are also provided to all children and young people up to 18 years of age in residential care provided by the children, youth and families division of the Department of Human Services; all youth justice clients up to 18 years of age who are in custodial care; and all refugees and asylum seekers.

I think Ms Hartland made mention of those groups of people who have public dental services provided to them. Children, young people and specific population groups, including indigenous Australians, refugees and asylum seekers, do in fact have priority access to general dental care. It is my understanding that when the need arises they are offered the next available appointment for that general care. It is important to note that those groups who are at risk or vulnerable in relation to the provision of service are able to access general dental care.

In relation to the overall waiting times that Ms Hartland mentioned and the improvements, it is worth noting that the general statewide average waiting time is 11 per cent lower than under the Labor government. That shows the coalition is taking this issue seriously. In fact as at 30 June 2011 the average waiting time for both general and denture care was 17 months. This is a reduction of some months from what occurred under the previous government — in fact, I think it was 19 months for general care and 20 months for denture care as at June 2010. I can also state that denture statewide average waiting times are 15 per cent lower now than under the previous government, so we are seeing a trend of a decrease in waiting times in those two important areas. It is important that members understand that in relation to this motion.

In relation to denture care, as at June 2011 the average waiting time was 17 months, and that is a reduction from 20 months. They are not huge leaps and bounds in the time, but they are certainly improvements. I think that is encouraging for all Victorians, especially those groups I have mentioned. I am also pleased to say that the Baillieu government has increased overall dental funding by more than \$4 million compared with Labor's final budget when it was in power. The government is also investing in a range of dental programs to improve dental health capacity across Victoria, which was one of its election commitments.

We have just debated Ms Pulford's motion about the Baillieu-Ryan government using the 2012–13 budget to deliver on its election promises. We are undertaking to fulfil our election and budget commitments, and we are delivering on those, as was highlighted in the previous debate. In relation to our election commitment in this particular area, it has included \$3.3 million over four years to attract more public sector dentists. It is important that we have more people on the ground to deliver these services. There is \$4.8 million over four years to improve access to dental services in country Victoria. Often it is very hard for rural and regional patients to access dentists as there are not the same numbers of dentists in some parts of Victoria as there are in perhaps some of the metropolitan or larger regional areas. It is important that we have identified the need for improved services in those areas of country Victoria.

There is \$2.8 million over four years to promote oral hygiene and early intervention in young children. As I have previously said, that is particularly important, because if we can get to children at a younger age, we can prevent a lot of issues arising and potentially prevent a range of chronic diseases from occurring. That is a very important aspect to make mention of. The

government has been very particular on early intervention and prevention for children and young adolescents in a range of areas. I ask the house to recall that the Minister for Health has done this in a number of areas, as I said, in particular in childhood obesity, which has been a particular concern of this government. One of the things the minister did last year was put together a package for preventive health initiatives for children, which was an investment of around \$40 million. That was really looking at the obesity issue that many children in communities right across Victoria are facing, and that all goes to an overall plan of looking at what the government is doing with early intervention and preventive measures not only for children but also for adolescents, young adults and certainly those people who need to access public dental services and who come from a range of different areas.

In relation to what is occurring at a national level, there are a number of commonwealth dental programs, as Ms Hartland highlighted. She spoke about those commonwealth dental programs. The Medicare chronic disease dental scheme was introduced in November 2007. Under that scheme eligible patients can receive up to \$4250 in Medicare benefits for dental services over two consecutive calendar years. In 2010–11 there was \$170.6 million in benefits paid to Victorians, and that shows that around 1.35 million services, or 23.6 per cent of the total services, were provided in Victoria. That is putting into context the number of services in relation to this issue. Certainly more could always be done, but it is important that we understand where Victoria sits in relation to the Medicare dental scheme and those statistics I have just highlighted.

There has been some discussion about the benefits paid to dentists and specialists, and I know there has been a debate in relation to some financial aspects in recent months. Dentists need to be supported like any other health professional in relation to their services and the care they are delivering to their patients, and equally those patients who have private health insurance should be supported in their ability to pay for good health and dental care. I know that at a federal level, in relation to what is potentially going to occur in relation to the private health insurance rebate under a federal policy initiative, many Victorians and indeed many Australians have concerns about the impact that that might have on their ability to afford private health insurance. I would urge the federal colleagues of those opposite to ensure that private health insurance is an option and that the rebate is not cut in any way.

We know the commonwealth government has flagged that there will be significant changes to the Medicare safety net, and this will no doubt have an impact upon

many people who suffer from chronic disease and many people who need to access dental health services. Members should be aware that the commonwealth has significant responsibility in this regard, and any reduction in funding to these programs will have an impact on access to those dental services here in Victoria. What would that do to many people in Victoria? It would put an additional cost onto many Victorian families and potentially result in poorer dental and general health outcomes. That should be noted, and we should be preventing that where possible. The commonwealth government needs to take that on board.

The commonwealth government has also made it less affordable for people to access private health insurance, as I have said. It is extremely important for anyone who has private health insurance that the dental aspect of that private health insurance is included as part of the individual's overall health cover because, as was rightly said, dental health care is part of a person's entirety and should be looked at in that respect in relation to private health insurance. I make note again of the private health insurance rebate and the commonwealth government's decision to remove, for the first time in memory, \$2.4 billion of health resources over the next three years, which includes a \$600 million removal of resources from Victoria. It is another hit on Victoria by the commonwealth government, and members should be aware of the implications of what is happening with dental health services at a federal level.

In relation to Ms Hartland's motion, in which she talks about dental health care being part of a national health system, I reiterate that there needs to be improvement here in Victoria. I am pleased to say that there have been some improvements over time. To reiterate those, there has been some impact on waiting times here in Victoria. In the Bentleigh Bayside Community Health service area in December 2007 there was a general waiting time of 14 months. That has now been reduced to 9 months. The denture waiting time in December 2007 was 25 months. That has now been reduced to 12 months. In both those instances the reduction was measured in June 2011. Improvements can be seen in some specific areas and in the overall areas I mentioned earlier in my contribution.

I reiterate to members that I am pleased the Baillieu government is taking preventive health measures seriously. It has undertaken a number of initiatives in relation to dental health care, improving facilities and providing extra funding which will go a long way to assisting many vulnerable Victorians in being able to access dental health care. We will not be supporting Ms Hartland's motion.

Mr JENNINGS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to make some comments and to add my support to the intent of Ms Hartland's motion. She outlined a range of issues relating to the health and wellbeing of Victorian and Australian citizens in terms of the role that dental care and good oral hygiene plays in maintaining a quality of life for all citizens, and that is something of which we should never be oblivious. We should always be looking for ways to improve it through public health measures, the funding arrangements that support dental health services and the design and delivery of health services across the state and across the nation, with the laudable intention of this becoming a universally provided part of the health-care system.

I am happy to support the evidence Ms Hartland and, by and large, Ms Crozier have brought together in relation to the important role that dental health plays in maintaining a healthy citizenry, particularly for the older members of our community who often see their teeth and dental health deteriorating. That is associated with the adverse consequences of poor nutritional intake and a deterioration in their quality of life. It is a significant issue for hundreds of thousands of Australians.

Those older Victorians and Australians who are mindful of poor oral health and perhaps the lack of services that are available to them would also be mindful of the history of dental health programs and funding arrangements and the roles that political parties have played in recent times in this endeavour. I might have a slightly diverging view from the previous two speakers in relation to my interpretation of that recent history.

In terms of the importance of dental health care, it was acknowledged by the Keating government as a federal responsibility in 1994. Previously it had relied on state-based funding. The funding put in place by the Keating government only lasted two years as a priority for federal government expenditure because the incoming Howard government chose to remove payments and contributions from the commonwealth for the dental-care scheme. One of the first acts of the incoming Howard government was to take that funding away from a nationally established scheme that had been in place for two years.

We fast-track from 1996, when that occurred, to the actions of the incoming Rudd government when it assumed office 11 years later. The Labor government sought to take action in relation to the funding arrangements for national dental-care support to try to reallocate money from the health portfolio, particularly

subsidies that underpinned the private health insurance and rebate arrangements for wealthier Australians in order to reallocate that money specifically to dental care.

The Rudd government was unsuccessful in achieving that outcome because it was resisted politically by the coalition. But the sorry situation is that it was also resisted by the Greens. Ms Hartland was very generous today, and by nature she is a well-informed and generous person and has the best intentions with this motion. However, it may be that as a result of some contributions by her party at a federal level, she has been bedevilled by the same phenomenon that sometimes affects me in that every now and again my federal brothers and sisters in the Labor Party do not do things that I think are well informed or terribly coherent, because in retrospect I think the history of dental funding is not a badge of honour that the Greens would wear too proudly. But the Greens now wear it as a badge of honour, and in fact it is a major campaigning tool for them both federally and, it seems, here in Victoria — presumably for all the right reasons. However, in finding support and finding specific ways of getting money to Victorians for dental care, their history has not been that great over the last few years.

Estimates that have been provided to me on the net effect of denying the Rudd government those reforms show shortcomings in funding of the order of \$72 million. That is funding that could have been provided to Victorians from 2008–09 onwards. In effect that could have denied 258 000 patient treatments over the same period. Perhaps that is not something that any of us will be too happy about. Victorians who might have been the beneficiaries of that dental care may wish that the reform had been implemented by the Rudd government. I am certain they would hope the reforms that were introduced by the Gillard government in terms of the adjustments to the private health insurance rebate — —

Hon. D. M. Davis interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — Mr Davis is out of his depth and out of his place. He knows it, everybody in the chamber knows it, the community knows it and, by the end of this term of government, more people will know it. I have not interrupted him at all today. It is pretty clear what his priorities must be if he has come in here to listen to a debate to which he will not make a contribution. I am confident he will not make a financial contribution to deal with the substance of the motion, but he is in here to nitpick my contribution to this debate. It is a very good use of his time when he is preparing the budget.

My point is that opportunities have been consistently lost by the intervention of the Liberal Party and sometimes with the intervention of the Greens federally. If everybody supports this motion today, it might become part of a national momentum to finally get this system right, so there will be a fair dinkum and legitimate expenditure item in the commonwealth domain that accounts for the dental needs of our community. I will be as enthusiastic about that outcome as anybody. But the load and responsibility have not been shared equitably.

The consequences of the federal actions have been a significant drain on the Victorian budget over time. The history of the Bracks and Brumby governments is that despite the challenges that continue — I do not deny that the challenges continue in terms of the outcomes not being as they should be — cumulatively more than \$1.2 billion was put into dental services in Victoria. We significantly increased the number of dental health clinics during the course of our period in office. We introduced about a 20 per cent increase in the number of public dental chairs that were available during that time and, by the time we left office, 373 public dental chairs were available across Victoria.

In our last couple of years in office there was a significant reduction in waiting times for a variety of dental services across many regions of the state. Resources were allocated to those regions to reduce waiting lists for urgent dental care, which in this context included the replacement of dentures for Victorians using public dental health services. The waiting time for dentures in emergency situations was reduced to a little over a month, and whilst dentures are not an ideal oral health solution, they are sometimes urgently required and are the only option available for patients. Many older Victorians rely on their dentures to enable them to eat and maintain nutritious diets. Those investments by the former Victorian government were significant. In terms of outcomes, there were benefits to the state derived from those investment strategies.

The chronic shortfall in public health funding that came into dental services was by and large driven by the Howard federal government's desertion of dental health services as a national priority. The Rudd federal government in 2007, and then the Gillard federal government, tried to take corrective action in relation to this. One outcome of the passage of legislation through the Australian Parliament earlier this year was a readjustment of the private health insurance scheme which saw an injection of significant funds — in the order of an additional \$160-odd million — into dental care across the country. Hopefully it will be laying the foundation for a greater release of commonwealth

money allocated for dental care and an increasing priority for these services within the commonwealth government's health budget.

I would hope the Victorian government will use the time available to it — it is almost a year and a half through its elected four-year term — and acknowledge its responsibility to take a lead in this area through joint reform with the commonwealth and a strategy of co-investment and growing services. I hope it identifies what might be critical lags in dental care across Victoria and addresses them through its own resources with foundation funding that will receive additional commonwealth support, so that one jurisdiction does not desert the field at the expense of the other jurisdiction and that both the federal and state governments embark upon a strategy of co-investment, partnership and growing the availability of public dental-care services into the future. For those reasons, on balance the Labor Party will be supporting Ms Hartland's motion today.

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — I rise to speak on Ms Hartland's motion in relation to dental health in Victoria and on some of its implications. From campaigning since 2005 and working with constituencies since being elected, it has become clear to me that dental health is a major issue for our communities. Many people endure extreme pain from a sore tooth simply because they do not have ready access to services that would relieve that pain. In many cases it is the youngest children in families who are not given the opportunity to learn early on about good oral hygiene. I think all governments have a responsibility to provide that assistance.

Over the years I have doorknocked the homes of many of my constituents who live in less affluent areas, and one of the things that have saddened me is talking to people — very often the mums — who are the last in line for dental care. They cannot afford to look after everybody else, so they put themselves last in line. That seems to be the way of it for some mums. That is a great shame, and some of the suffering that they endure is not good.

There are similar situations involving older people. When I was in opposition I heard one terrible story of an older gentleman who was in a nursing home. He was suffering from Alzheimer's and was non-communicative. It was not until his daughter was checking on his welfare — dental hygiene was something she had not asked about because she thought it would have been something addressed as a matter of course — that she found out that although he had been in the nursing home for three years nobody had realised

he had dentures. There are many of those sorts of stories, and it is something we need to raise awareness about, because the discomfort that would be brought about by that sort of neglect is unimaginable.

One of the positive things I would like to say today is that since being elected the Baillieu government has increased dental funding across the system from Labor's last budget by more than \$4 million. That is a significant improvement on what we saw previously. This government is also investing in a range of dental programs to improve dental health capacity across Victoria. These were part of our election commitments, and they include \$3.3 million over four years to attract more public sector dentists, because I think the rate in dentistry is about 84 per cent in the private sector, and \$4.8 million over four years to improve access to dental services in country Victoria, which is something that I understand is greatly needed. Very often the access, particularly to public services, in country Victoria is made more difficult because of the tyranny of distance and a lack of services.

Some \$2 million has been allocated over four years to promote oral hygiene and early intervention with young children. It is money well spent if it gives young people an understanding of the importance of looking after their teeth, addressing problems and having regular check-ups at the dentist. It is not like it was when I was younger. I think I had four teeth pulled out in the chair when I was about eight years old, and I have had an uncomfortable feeling ever since when walking into a dentist's surgery, but things are much less ruthless these days. I think if we can give our kids that sort of education about looking after their teeth, then hopefully they will hang on to them for the rest of their lives.

It is important to note that children or young people in specific population groups, including indigenous Australians, refugees and asylum seekers, have priority access to general dental care and are offered next-available appointments for general care. I think this is very important in the provision of public dental services. This access is provided to all children up to 12 years of age — this is under state dental health in Victoria — people aged 13 to 17 years and adults who are health-care or pensioner concession card holders or dependants on concession cards. They are the group I was talking about earlier, who often fall through the cracks and are often the people in the most desperate need. This group includes all children and young people up to 18 years of age in residential care — I am reminded of that poor old gentleman who had been so badly neglected — provided by the children, youth and families division of the Department of Human Services,

all youth justice clients in custodial care up to 18 years of age and all refugees and asylum seekers.

We have seen a lowering of the average waiting time. The general statewide average waiting time is now 11 per cent lower than it was under Labor. As at 30 June 2011 the average waiting time for both general and denture care was 17 months, and this is a reduction of 19 months for general care and 20 months for denture care from June 2010. For dentures, statewide average waiting times are now lower by 15 per cent than they were under Labor.

Mr Barber — How many people give up?

Mrs PETROVICH — I suggest that if Mr Barber has an issue with chewing food, he probably should not give up. I think dentures can become fairly important to you.

We need to understand that the money this government has put into dental health is part of a holistic approach to preventable illness and the prevention of chronic disease. Better access to oral hygiene is part of an holistic approach to which we have committed \$40 million, which is primarily to address the issues around obesity but it is also to provide for an overall strategy for children and their parents. This is also part of a holistic approach to how we live our lives and looking at the overall health benefits of prevention rather than trying to address issues after the fact.

To address the issue around Medicare, the statistics show that 1.35 million services, or 26.3 per cent of the total national services, were provided in Victoria in 2010–11. The monetary benefit paid to dentists for specialist prosthetic services in Victoria was \$17.6 million, or 23.5 per cent of the total expenditure of \$726.4 million.

We should note that one of the consequences of cuts to the Medicare safety net would be the impact on chronic disease. The commonwealth has flagged significant changes to the Medicare safety net, and this will impact upon people who suffer from chronic disease, in particular those who need to access dental health services. We need to understand that any reduction in funding to these programs will have a significant impact on access to these dental health services in Victoria, and that is something that we are fighting against. It will impose additional costs on Victorian families and result in poorer dental and general health outcomes. This is difficult. We know that there is a downturn in the economy. We know that the commonwealth budget is probably going to be reduced, but we also have to understand in the tough economic

times that families are suffering anyway and that anything that makes it more difficult by reduction of that very necessary funding is something that we will not tolerate.

I think it is also important to note the issue of private health insurance. The commonwealth made it less affordable for people to access private health insurance where ancillaries are used or dental health is part of the cover when it abolished the private health insurance rebate, directly removing for the first time in memory \$2.4 billion of health resources over the next three years, including \$600 million from Victoria. Interestingly we have the federal Greens calling for more commonwealth investment in dental health, and the state would also welcome additional investment from the commonwealth, so that is a great point of commonality there, but we would like to see more detail from the commonwealth around what exactly it is doing.

We will not be supporting this motion today, but we are working towards a reduction in those waiting times and better provision of dental services across the state, and we will certainly be holding the federal government to account.

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to be given the opportunity to speak today on this interesting motion moved by Ms Hartland. In praise of my colleagues who have spoken before me, including Mrs Petrovich, who preceded me, their contributions have contained some salutary statements.

To put my contribution into context, I refer to federal funding and the actions of the federal Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek. She would have to be the only health minister I can think of in recent memory who has stripped \$2 billion out of the health system and put it back into consolidated revenue — \$2 billion has gone from health. Whether you agree or not with the recent private health services announcement she made, the bottom line is that \$2 billion has been taken out of health and put into consolidated revenue by the so-called ‘good feeling federal health minister’, Tanya Plibersek.

It is in that context that I will talk about the state of dentistry here. Just think about the ramifications and the flow through of that money and about how it would come back to Victoria and be redirected. The Minister for Health is in the chamber as I speak. I know for a fact that there are more and more calls on the Department of Health and the health funding dollar than there have ever been before. That is in Victoria. Exactly the same scenario would be happening in

Canberra, so it is absolutely scandalous for the federal government to be doing this in today's economic climate. Time will tell. It will be time that will show just how negligent this federal health minister has been.

It is important to look at some of the investments the Baillieu government has put into dental funding. We have increased dental funding across the system by more than \$4 million compared with Labor's last budget. We are also investing in a range of dental programs to improve dental health capacity across Victoria. That was part of our election commitments and includes \$3.3 million over four years to attract more public sector dentists; \$4.8 million over four years to improve access to dental services in country Victoria; and \$2 million over four years to promote oral hygiene and early intervention in young children.

It is this early intervention that I would like to talk about. I would like to talk about fluoride and the use of fluoride in children's dental health care. I can see Ms Hartland having a quiet chuckle about this, and myriad Greens voters email us on a regular basis telling us to scrap the fluoride out of water, that it is toxic and poisoning everybody, and recently that debate has occurred in other areas of the state.

It is interesting to look at what fluoride has done. I bring to the attention of the chamber an interesting paper headed *Water Fluoridation Helps Protect Teeth Throughout Life*. It is a combined paper that was prepared by Dental Health Services Victoria, La Trobe University, Melbourne University and the Victorian government in 2008. On page 7 under the heading 'Tooth decay experience for Australian 12-year-olds' it says:

Dental experts suggest the recent minor increases in tooth decay across Australia are due to the same factors causing increased obesity — namely, increased consumption of high-sugar foods and drinks. This points to an even greater need for water fluoridation, which has a benefit above that of other fluoride sources, providing additional fluoride to teeth through the day.

There is a graph underneath which indicates just what has been happening. We know the effects of sugar. It is a bit like the current debate out there about smoking and what we know about the issues with smoking. It has been interesting recently to see some old advertisements about smoking that talk about how it is really good, particularly for women's health, which I felt was astonishing. That was in the 1940s. These really old-fashioned advertisements were saying, 'Have the cigarette' — I think they were along the same lines as saying, 'Have a Bex and a good lie down'. They were from about that same era. It is extraordinary to see

the amount of research we have now which shows the seriously detrimental effects of smoking and the cost that imposes on the community at large.

That brings me to looking at the issue of nutrition and its effect on teeth and dental health. It is important to understand that the very same issues that are causing obesity in endemic proportions among our community are also causing huge dental issues, and that they go hand in glove. When we speak about issues such as obesity we must make certain that the dental-care element is put out there and explained.

I go back to the fluoride issue, which is extremely interesting when one looks at the huge rise of bottled water consumption in this country. You only have to walk anywhere, really, where there are walkers or people riding bicycles to see that they all have bottled water. Victoria's water, and Melbourne's water in particular, is some of the best water in the entire world, but people are running around with their plastic bottles full of water. Whether they have topped them up at the tap, I do not know, but you only have to visit any outlet to see water bottles right beside the Coca-Cola bottles.

That water does not have fluoride in it. We are starting to see, particularly amongst younger people, an increase in tooth decay, and that is one of the things that is being attributed to it. I do not have any statistics that I can prove this with, but anecdotally it is extremely interesting.

I can remember and look back to the 1970s. People in the 1960s and 1970s used to give their children a little blue pill, and the little blue pill was fluoride. Then there was a major debate and fluoride was put into the water, and there was a great increase in the lack of dental fillings and a great improvement in dental health in this state. I think there is a very real case for having fluoride in the water. We have seen other additives to various foodstuffs. We have seen various vitamins put into bread products et cetera, and we have seen the health of the population increase as a result.

There is some community information on water fluoridation in a document from the Department of Health from August 2010. It is interesting to read. It says:

Melbourne has had fluoridated water since 1977. Other parts of Australia have had fluoridated drinking water for more than 50 years.

It has just been brought to my attention that there is not one ALP member here in this chamber — not one. They obviously do not care about dental health in this state.

An honourable member interjected.

Mrs COOTE — I beg your pardon. Acting President Eideh is the one and only member of the Labor Party in the chamber at this time. It is astonishing to think that we are talking about something so important as dental care but not one member of the ALP is in here. Where are they?

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs COOTE — Hello, they arrive! They must have heard the clarion call. They must have thought they were under the pump and that they had better come back into the chamber and hear what is going on. They do not care about dental health. We saw what their federal minister is doing. Now Mr Lenders and Mr Scheffer have finally turned up as sole representatives. I ask them how are their teeth. Would they have had fluoride when they were younger?

Let me just remind them what fluoride does for you. As the community information states:

Fluoride is a naturally occurring compound found in plants, rocks and at very low levels in almost all fresh water. It occurs naturally at a beneficial level in the local water supplies of some Victorian communities ...

How fluoride works

Tooth decay occurs when acid destroys the outer surface of the tooth. The acid is produced by bacteria in the mouth from food and drinks containing sugar.

As I highlighted before with the sugar and obesity issue, sugar is another issue to be talked about in dental care. Fluoride works by helping to strengthen the mineral structure of developing teeth. Fluoride also acts like a constant repair kit by repairing the early stages of tooth decay before it becomes permanent. On the benefits of fluoride, water fluoridation helps protect teeth against decay in people of all ages, from the very young to the elderly. Water fluoridation is a fair way of delivering the benefits of fluoride to the community, regardless of individual age, education, income or motivation.

I reiterate that in discussing and debating this issue today we have to look at the federal Minister for Health, who has heartlessly ripped \$2 billion out of the federal health budget and pumped it back into consolidated revenue to make the Treasurer, Mr Swan, look better. People around this country are going to know about this, and they are not going to be bluffed. Believe me, in 2013, when it is time for them to be voting, they will be voting Julia Gillard, Mr Swan and the federal health minister, Tanya Plibersek, right out of government.

However, we have also been talking today about the importance of dental care and the issue of the relationship between dental care and obesity, which is certainly something that needs to be looked at. I have talked quite extensively about some of the benefits of fluoride. As I said at the outset, it is an important issue to speak on, and I congratulate Ms Hartland on bringing it up. I suggest everybody goes home and cleans their teeth!

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — This is one of the most unusual debates in which I have been involved in this house so far. Ms Crozier clearly understands the issues around the need for dental care, especially around chronic disease, but she did not explain why the government is not going to support the motion. She talked about the commonwealth refusing funding but does not want to ask for more. Mrs Petrovich talked about the problem, especially in country areas, so she clearly understands that there is a problem. She talked about the \$4 million the government would add to this, but that is not going to touch the sides of this problem. Again, she did not explain why the government will not support the motion. I again point out that only 14 per cent of people who are eligible to receive public dental care are accessing it. If everybody who was entitled to access it was doing so, that list would completely blow out. It cannot cope now.

Mrs Coote as usual was extremely amusing — I suggest we should definitely have a 10 per cent deposit on those water bottles so that people do not litter them — but again there was no explanation from Mrs Coote as to why the government is not going to support the motion. This is a very straightforward motion: it is about the need for a dental-care scheme. Clearly people understand that there is a major problem with dental care in this state and around the country and that we need more money put into it, so I am not quite sure why the government does not want to ask the commonwealth to allocate more money in the budget for dental care. I am a bit stumped by that. I thank everybody for their contributions.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 18

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

Noes, 20

Atkinson, Mr	Hall, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Coote, Mrs	Koch, Mr
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 (<i>Teller</i>)	Peulich, Mrs
Finn, Mr	Ramsay, Mr
Guy, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr

Pairs

Mikakos, Ms	Kronberg, Mrs
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Motion negatived.

EDUCATION: FUNDING

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — I move:

That this house —

- (1) notes that the Baillieu-Ryan government has —
 - (a) cut \$481 million from the education budget and halved the capital works budget for education;
 - (b) cut \$48 million from the Victorian certificate of applied learning;
 - (c) refused to honour their promise to make Victorian teachers the highest paid in Australia; and
 - (d) failed to replace the former Labor government's plan to rebuild, renovate or refurbish every government school by 2016–17 with any plan at all;
- (2) calls on the government to recognise that —
 - (a) the Ouyen community agreed to merge their primary and secondary schools to form a P–12 college on one campus with new buildings to support better teaching and learning in the belief that a commitment by the government of the day was something they could rely on in accordance with longstanding conventions;
 - (b) stage 1 funded by the former Labor government is due to be completed by February 2012;
 - (c) unless the second and final stage is funded the community will be left with a new campus separated by the Sunraysia Highway and a railway line from an old campus, which consists of substandard buildings riddled with white ants, leaving the principal, students and staff to travel between campuses; and
 - (d) the college council is extremely concerned that it is only a matter of time before someone is badly injured or worse and feel they have been abandoned by the government; and

- (3) urges the Baillieu-Ryan government to fund stage 2 of Ouyen P–12 College in the 2012–13 budget.

I rise to address the motion that this house notes the Baillieu-Ryan government's performance in relation to the education budget cuts of more than \$480 million, a halving of the capital works budget, cuts of \$48 million from the Victorian certificate of applied learning, the refusal to honour the election promise to make Victoria's teachers the highest paid in Australia and the failure to replace the former Labor government's plan to rebuild, renovate or refurbish every Victorian government school by 2016–17 with any plan at all.

On those points for noting I would add that the forthcoming 2012–13 budget of the Baillieu-Ryan government is an opportunity to make restitution for some of the impacts of these cuts and to reconsider the government's priorities. In earlier debates in this place today we heard a large number of excuses as to why the government is not in a position to deliver on its election promises — a large number of excuses designed to reduce expectations of the forthcoming state budget. I understand from representatives of community sector organisations in my electorate with whom I have been meeting at Parliament today that the government is going so far as to reduce expectations by informing community sector organisations that they cannot even expect to receive CPI adjustments to the funding they receive to pay staff and deliver services to some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

The cuts I have noted in the education area and the cuts the government is evidently planning to make in the community services fields are certainly not ones that government members flagged to the electorate prior to the 2010 election. It is something of a shock to a great many people in the community, particularly in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region, to experience the impacts of these cuts by the Baillieu-Ryan government in circumstances where the budget that was inherited was in surplus and for the period of the forward estimates also provided for surpluses and proper funding of education and community services.

Secondly, this motion calls on the Baillieu-Ryan government to recognise a number of matters in relation to Ouyen P–12 College in the north-west of my electorate of Northern Victoria Region. The circumstances at Ouyen P–12 College are similar to those being played out at a long list of schools across Victoria, including quite a number in my electorate. There are circumstances where school communities in good faith entered into processes during the time of the former government to reorganise themselves. It is a process which is not an easy one for schools and which

requires something of a leap of faith by school communities to believe the disruption they are going to experience, no matter how well the process is managed, is going to be worth it in terms of achieving schools which will deliver better education outcomes into the future, provide facilities that allow students and staff to perform better and, amongst other matters, to deliver the new national curriculum in a way which is going to benefit education outcomes.

To come back to the specific case of Ouyen P-12 College, this school is made up of two schools: the former Ouyen High School campus and the primary school campus. These two schools are divided by a national highway and a railway line, and when the schools agreed to enter into a process which would result in one P-12 college, their expectation and the information provided to them by the education department was that they would end up on one campus as a new school, which would allow them to support better teaching and learning.

Stage 1 was funded by the former Labor government, and it has now been completed and officially opened by representatives of the Baillieu-Ryan government. Representatives of the government were very happy to take the credit for that building program that was funded and delivered during the time of the former Labor government, and I am pleased to say from my visits to the school that it is working in exactly the way the school communities had hoped it would in terms of supporting better teaching and learning opportunities. However, the second stage of the project has not been funded, and the purpose of the motion before the house today is to urge the Baillieu-Ryan government to fund stage 2 in the 2012-13 state budget so that the school can get on with the business of completing this major regeneration of education in Ouyen and surrounding areas.

Currently, because the project is half complete, students, teachers and the principal have to travel between the two campuses many times a day. They have to go across a national highway and a railway line, and there is grave concern that this is a set of circumstances that is begging for a terrible accident to happen. There is also a significant S-bend in the highway in the middle of Ouyen, near the railway crossing. Just as heavy trucks slow down to negotiate that bend, the students, the staff and the principal can be in cars at the very same spot trying to cross the railway line and the highway. It is a very bad combination of traffic.

There are also circumstances in relation to the old buildings at the primary school campus where good

money is being thrown after bad in patching up buildings riddled with white ants and patching up a great many problems in buildings that have well and truly passed their use-by date. At a recent visit to the school I was provided with the school review faults list for both the secondary and primary campuses of Ouyen P-12 College showing the items that are required for maintenance and the hundreds of thousands of dollars that are needed to maintain these buildings to a standard which is safe for staff and students to use.

It is depressing to read this very long list of all the items of work that need to be done, ranging from basic things like paint and replacement of glass to making sure that the toilets that are being used by primary school students are safe and up to a basic standard. Needless to say, parents, staff and students are very unhappy with the situation and cannot see the sense in spending scarce government dollars in patching up old buildings, which were never meant to be used for so long because stage 2 of the secondary campus was supposed to be well under way by now.

Again I urge the government in this forthcoming state budget to get on with fixing the situation. While in opposition the coalition had a great deal to say about fixing problems. As matters stand it is simply causing further problems in Ouyen by failing to take the necessary steps to complete this program and to invest in stage 2 of the building program at Ouyen P-12 College.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to make some brief remarks on Ms Broad's motion, and I do so first of all by addressing the very first point — that is, that \$481 million cut from the education budget has halved the capital works budget for education. Earlier today I spoke about Labor's mismanagement of capital works and maintenance allocations, which has left many of our schools in a fairly parlous state. The challenge for this government is to see that the money that it commits for important purposes, such as capital works and facilities maintenance in schools, is well spent. We also need to ensure that the allocation of that money is open and transparent.

In the last budget the coalition was able to meet its election commitments. That is one of the most important transparencies. We made commitments and we are focused on delivering them. We invested the same amount again in school capital for other schools Labor had neglected for a long time. I have mentioned some of my visits to the northern and western suburbs, including one with Mr Elsbury, and the very parlous

state of some of those facilities. Phenomenal amounts of money are required for complete rebuilds.

We uncovered other massive failures in Labor's management of school assets and its shocking decision to slash funding for school maintenance by 21 per cent. We can see the result of that. We also found that many schools, which had already received their share of funding under Labor's capital works program, had bigger maintenance backlogs than the total capital funding they received under the former government. Clearly this is an area of deplorable mismanagement. The waste and mismanagement of the Building the Education Revolution funding has been a lost opportunity for Victorian schools, especially when we see how well they were administered in the Catholic school system where virtually entire schools have been rebuilt with the same allocation of money. Yet in the government system we saw a lot of waste and mismanagement, and a lot of schools left partially rebuilt with the rest in an unacceptable state. That is indicative of Labor governments not understanding how to manage capital assets.

We are trying to fix those problems. We cannot do so in a single year and we cannot reverse 11 years of neglect in such a short period. We are repairing the damage that has been caused by that neglect, mismanagement and the distraction from the important questions of education — quality of learning and teaching — by having to deal with these issues. We are doing this despite Labor spending more than the government earned for years, and growing annual spending by 8 per cent a year for a decade.

Labor was also very good at spin. It wrapped up renewal and rebuilds — and I think there was another 'R' term; I cannot recall it off the top of my head — and basically it clumped everything together: maintenance, rebuilds, partial rebuilds, complete rebuilds, anything that got a lick of paint was placed in that particular basket. It portrayed a much rosier picture than what proved to be the reality. That and Labor mismanagement will take time to repair, and we are doing this work in difficult circumstances. We will continue to clean up the mess left by Labor.

In responding to the point that we have cut \$48 million from the Victorian certificate of applied learning (VCAL), I make the point that no cuts to student funding for VCAL have been made. There are more schools offering VCAL now than was the case last year. In 2011, 87 per cent of 2010 VCAL student cohorts made a successful transition to further educational training and employment. When it was first introduced in 2003, an additional payment for

coordination was paid over and above the funding for program delivery. In *Hansard* of 4 October 2006 the then Minister for Education and Training vowed that:

We provided \$47 million for additional teachers in order to put the VCAL in place.

Clearly that funding was for the start-up of the program. The important point to make here is that there was also another report commissioned by the department, which found that many schools used VCAL coordination funding to support activities other than those that related to VCAL. Schools have global budgets and, especially under this government, they have greater autonomy to make their own decisions about school priorities, including the courses they offer and including the possibility of allocating additional resources for the coordination of, say, VCAL if it is required, just like any other program. VCAL is an established program and it is an essential part of the Victorian school offering. We want to see VCAL continue to grow, and we will provide the funding for it to do so.

In relation to another point made by Ms Broad — that is, that we have refused to honour the promise to make Victorian teachers the highest paid in Australia — negotiations with teachers on a new agreement are under way and are being conducted in good faith with the Australian Education Union (AEU). The parties are continuing to work through the respective positions in an effort to reach agreement on matters that divide the parties.

The agreed confidentiality protocols which encompass good faith bargaining preclude disclosing or discussing issues which are the subject of negotiation. The government is committed to achieving improved student outcomes in Victorian government schools whilst also recognising and rewarding excellence in the Victorian teaching profession. All I can say is that negotiations for the new agreement are captured by confidentiality protocols and encompass a lot of meetings. The government is committed to resolving those issues. The department has provided detailed advice to principals on managing industrial action. The objective of that advice is to minimise the impact on educational programs and ensure the safety and wellbeing of students.

I have faith that under the terms of the existing agreement teachers and principals still received an interim pay increase in January equal to the departmental funding model as at 1 January, and that is about 2.75 per cent. On 23 March the AEU branch sector council passed a resolution that should agreement or significant progress on the agreement not be achieved by 16 April, the AEU would make

application to Fair Work Australia for a protected action ballot of members who would be covered by the agreement. The AEU branch sector council authorised negotiators to settle the terms of the ballot provided the following forms of action be included in the ballot: statewide, regional and sub-branch stop works of 1 to 24 hours duration; bans and limitations and other protest action, amongst others.

I certainly hope it does not come to that. The government is committed to recognising the importance of teaching and learning in our schools; however, there are obviously significant constraints facing the state in the upcoming budget. Negotiations to date have been constructive, and a key constraint is the significant difference between the union's expectations for salary increases and the outcomes possible within the budget.

In relation to the point in the motion that we have somehow failed to replace the former Labor government's plan to rebuild, renovate or refurbish every government school by 2016–17 with any plan at all, I have already made comment on that and the convenient way in which the opposition has parcelled up and clustered any type of work, whether it be maintenance or rebuilding, under the same banner in order to exaggerate and put lipstick on a picture that is far from reality.

In closing, the last part of the motion relates to a specific school, Ouyen P–12 College. With the budget coming up I use the words of Senator Penny Wong and Prime Minister Julia Gillard, that obviously the budget will eventually disclose what capital works commitments we are in a position to make. I am looking forward to this budget, as well as other budgets — because we are only talking about the early part of this term — that will certainly make inroads into addressing Labor's backlog and mess. But it is not all about money; it is also about how it is spent, how it is accounted for and what results are delivered on the ground.

With those few words, the government will not be supporting the motion, but I always welcome the opportunity to debate education, and I wish there were more than 10 minutes to do so. I take the opportunity to thank all those who provide very important services to our education community, and I wish them all the very best, because they are important to the wellbeing and future of our children.

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise to speak in support of this motion. First of all, I am delighted to hear that Mrs Peulich is feeling confident and has restated the commitment of the

government to honour the promises it made during the election campaign to ensure that our teachers are the highest paid in the country. While Mrs Peulich went into some detail about the processes of enterprise bargaining, it is really not the details of the processes that we are interested in; it is the outcomes. Mrs Peulich has talked about her confidence and the government's commitment to honouring its promises, and that pleases me no end. I look forward to our teachers being the highest paid in the country.

I take up a couple of points made by Mrs Peulich. She said she and the government are concerned about capital works in schools, how the money is spent and where it is spent. I take this opportunity to assure Mrs Peulich and the government that if it was to commit to the \$4.9 million that is required to deliver the final stage of the Ouyen P–12 school development, it would be money very well spent on necessary capital works. If this money is to be spent, it may do more than just provide excellent facilities for those at the Ouyen school; it may also avert a tragedy that is hanging over everybody's heads because of the risks involved in having two separate campuses.

The Ouyen school community feels abandoned by the government. Community members feel they have done the right thing all the way along to bring about the very best educational outcomes for their students in having the staged process to bring the two campuses together on one site at a new school campus. They believe that will deliver the best educational outcomes and will also be the best environment for their children in which to learn.

I do not want to overstate the fact that a tragedy could occur here, but I do want to bring it to people's attention that this is not something that is just being bandied about because it might jerk the government into action. This is real. I have been there and seen where the campuses are situated. I have had a look at where students and teachers need to move and recognise the obstacles that they have to overcome in order to be able to attend classes. It is really quite distressing to see these kids wandering along the roads past the silos, over railway lines and across a highway.

It has to be remembered that Ouyen is a major grain delivery depot for the area with a number of grain bunkers just outside the town. Grain trucks work all year round, so they are loading and unloading grain all year round. The primary campus is situated across the road from the silos and the weighbridge, so there is a silo and a weighbridge that have to be negotiated. The Ouyen community has students and staff who are moving daily between the two campuses, and that

involves crossing the road between the weighbridge and the silos, thereby getting in the way of the trucks, negotiating a railway crossing and then crossing the Sunraysia Highway, which is a major truck route.

I have met and been in communication for some time with the principal and the school and have been told there have been two near misses recently that have involved fully loaded B-double trucks and staff cars, and people there feel it is only a matter of time before there is an injury. I think it is going to be a great opportunity for the government to ensure that the final stage of Ouyen P-12 College is put in place and finalised in the 2012-13 state budget. I urge the government to give that funding commitment as part of this budget and make the P-12 final stage actually happen.

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

Debate adjourned until next day.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That there be laid before this house a copy of the —

- (a) agreement between the state of Victoria and HRL Developments (IDGCC) Pty Ltd for Victorian government funding for the large-scale integrated drying gasification and combined cycle demonstration project; and
- (b) deed of amendment to the large-scale integrated drying gasification and combined cycle demonstration project funding agreement.

I take this course of action to address the complete failure of this government to live up to its much-vaunted principles of transparency and accountability, which it championed in opposition and abandoned almost immediately it came into government. The government failed at the first hurdle, and it has failed at every hurdle since. In May last year I requested — and the house unanimously supported my motion — to table a copy of the funding agreement associated with the HRL so-called ‘clean coal’ power proposal in eastern Victoria. I know Mr Drum is a champion of this and thinks I should be getting behind it. I ask Mr Drum why, if it is such great project, everything about it is secret?

The project is, of course, controversial, expensive and experimental, and it has been long delayed. With all that, why does it have to operate under the cloak of secrecy as well? Despite the unanimous motion of the

house, the government did not deliver a copy of the funding agreement representing \$150 million of taxpayer funds. The project was promised initially by the Howard and Bracks governments and is now being continued by the Gillard and Baillieu governments based on a highly speculative dream of clean coal, a technology whose main purpose is to allow Labor and Liberal parties to delay action on climate change. They keep telling us that clean coal is just around the next corner if we shovel enough money at it.

The government did not deliver on the house’s motion. What it did deliver was a whiny letter from the company saying, ‘No, we want to keep all this secret’, which made it very clear that the company was calling the shots over the government and that transparency was out the window. Despite that, I took on the matter separate to the chamber as an FOI request. In fairly short order the government realised it had no grounds to refuse to release the document, and I got a partial copy through the Department of Primary Industries. I brought that copy to the house and attempted to table it, but the government advised that it would oppose it being tabled.

Following that episode I pursued the matter through the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, got as far as a compulsory conference at considerable expense to my electorate office budget, and with much time wasted and no doubt many costs on the government’s side, the government piked out, folded like a cheap suit and handed over virtually the entire document just before Christmas. It had previously refused to do that in May. I am not casting any aspersions on the quality of Mr O’Donohue’s suit; it was, of course, a metaphor.

Now we know something about what this company is meant to deliver for its \$150 million of taxpayer funds that so far represent the only financial commitment towards making this project happen. There has been nothing from the big banks, and there is nothing in the terms of equity. The Chinese partner pulled out long ago. Maybe they will eventually get funding from the First Bank of Nigeria, but I doubt it. This project does not stack up economically. ‘Clean coal’ is nothing more than a euphemism for ‘very expensive coal’. There are so many cheaper options that would meet our energy needs, especially given that Victoria itself has seen no growth in its energy demand over the last five years.

Going back five years, The Nationals were demanding the construction of a new coal-fired power station in Victoria. It would be redundant if it was here today, because power stations can barely sell the power they have now.

The Premier, the Deputy Premier, Mr Ryan, and the Minister for Energy and Resources, Mr O'Brien, made fools of themselves when they suggested that closing down Hazelwood would cause the lights to go out in Victoria. We have a power grid that is 99.998 per cent reliable, and when we do have service interruptions of 0.002 per cent, the majority is made up of faults with local poles and wires, not from the generation sector. There is no need for new coal-fired power. There is an urgent need to further reduce our energy demand and bring renewables in to a greater extent.

Unfortunately we have a pattern here. When it comes to these major projects of great public interest the government refuses to provide the information. We have seen it in this instance. We have seen it in the example of smart meters. We have seen it in the example of desal, where the government promised to release the contract. Instead, it released KPMG's analysis of the contract — what the government wanted us to know about the desalination plant. We have seen this pattern in relation to the irrigation upgrades, which Mr Drum and his colleagues were apoplectic about when in opposition; now in government, they have the opportunity to release the business plan. There was no business plan, as Mr O'Donohue notes, for stage 1. There is a business plan and a risk assessment for stage 2. So far the government has refused to release it.

Last but by no means least there is the secret myki review. Like everything else to do with myki, its costs blew out. It was supposed to cost \$250 000. In the end the total cost of the review of myki totted up nearly half a million dollars but we are not allowed to read it, even though it is the document on which the government made its decision to continue with myki. Smart meters, so-called clean coal, the desalination plant, irrigation upgrades, myki — secret, secret, secret, secret, secret, gutless, gutless, gutless, gutless, gutless; that is the government living up to the principles it espoused when it was in opposition. This is wombat politics. If you hit them with a spotlight, they start burrowing furiously to go into hiding. So it is that today I am having to do what the government should have done in May last year, and that is table a full copy of the funding agreement between the state of Victoria and HRL. I would also like to know whether there has been any progress against that funding agreement.

The company has to deliver something for the \$150 million. What has it delivered? I put in an FOI request for progress reports against the funding agreement. Two hundred and eighty days after I first requested the information I got something from the government. I got progress reports that were delivered 280 days ago, except that almost the entirety of each

progress report was blacked out. For the viewers at home, I am leafing through the document and note that virtually every page has been blacked out, so I am left with merely a skeleton of the document.

In terms of progress on this project, 280 days ago there were some progress reports, and now that I see them, I see nothing, just pages and pages of black. I suppose I could do another FOI today to find out the progress of this clean coal dream, and I would be waiting 280 days to find out nothing. It is completely unsatisfactory. It is corruption of the most fundamental principle of government, which is that the public, and this Parliament standing in their shoes between elections, has to be able to scrutinise the government of the day.

If it is such a wonderful project as Mr Drum was suggesting earlier this morning, why is he not shouting it from the rooftops? Why is he not lauding the progress that has been made on this project? Because there is none. The main purpose of the \$150 million was to get Prime Minister John Howard and Premier Steve Bracks out of having to answer how they were going to reduce emissions by deferring the clean coal dream off into the future. This project is enormously controversial, and because of that the government is even less inclined to share information with the public. It is an absolute disgrace. It will not stop the public and members of this place running the government to ground on this and those other highly controversial, highly expensive, high-impact projects — the irrigation upgrades, the smart meters, the myki debacle and the desalination plant.

I am appalled that I am even having to take this step. It is a disgrace that the government did not show up with this document when it was requested by the Legislative Council, and if there is no opposition to the motion, then I will finally get to deliver what Minister O'Brien was too timid to deliver and table in the house — a copy of the agreement between the state of Victoria and HRL Ltd.

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — It was interesting listening to Mr Barber's contribution. As I noted when a similar debate took place last year on this matter, there is an inconsistency in Mr Barber's argument. On the one hand Mr Barber is saying, 'The government releases no information, the government is secretive, the government does not tell us what it is doing, and here I have a document that the government has released to me that I wish to table'. There is an inconsistency in — —

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Mr Barber may wish to describe it in whatever colourful way he chooses, but the fundamental point is that he is railing against the secrecy of the government on the one hand and seeking to have tabled in the Parliament a document that has been released to him by the government on the other. Mr Barber may be disappointed that some material is redacted, but the point is that significant material has been released to him in this specific situation.

Moreover, during this Parliament a voluminous amount of material has been released at the request of members of this place. Ms Pennicuik has led many debates about the production of documents in relation to the Australian Formula One Grand Prix. There have also been documents that Ms Pennicuik has sought and would like that have not been released to her, but the fact remains, as I previously made the point to Ms Pennicuik, that this government has released more by way of documents and material in relation to the grand prix than the previous government. We have made a significant amount of information available in relation to the grand prix and in relation to a whole range of applications for documents made through this chamber and through the FOI process. As I said, there is an inherent contradiction in the proposition Mr Barber is putting forward.

I am not quite sure why Mr Barber is choosing to table the documents he is seeking to today. As I have made the point previously in this place, Mr Barber has the opportunity to make public the documents he has in his possession via his website, via distributing photocopies or via any number of means, such as email et cetera. There is no prohibition on or inhibitor to Mr Barber making these documents public, and I assume he has done so already. As is the practice in this house, documents are generally tabled by ministers or by the clerks through the usual processes. What Mr Barber is seeking to do is a diversion from the usual practice of this house, and for that reason the government will be opposing Mr Barber's motion.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I understand the government will be opposing the motion, as Mr O'Donohue said. The opposition will be supporting this call for documents.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 18

Barber, Mr	Pakula, Mr
Broad, Ms	Pennicuik, Ms
Darveniza, Ms	Pulford, Ms
Eideh, Mr	Scheffer, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Elasmar, Mr	Somyurek, Mr
Hartland, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	Tarlamis, Mr

Leane, Mr
Lenders, Mr
Mikakos, Ms

Tee, Mr
Tierney, Ms
Viney, Mr

Noes, 20

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

Hall, Mr
Koch, Mr
Lovell, Ms
O'Brien, Mr
O'Donohue, Mr
Ondarchie, Mr
Petrovich, Mrs
Peulich, Mrs
Ramsay, Mr (*Teller*)
Rich-Phillips, Mr

Pairs

Jennings, Mr

Kronberg, Mrs

Motion negatived.

RULINGS BY THE CHAIR

Notices of motion

The PRESIDENT — Order! Following my comments in the house yesterday, 17 April, regarding a notice of motion given by Mr Ondarchie on that occasion, which I ruled out of order, I wish to take this opportunity to provide members with some guidance when framing notices of motion to ensure that they meet the practices and requirements of the house. A member may give notice of a substantive motion into almost any matter, and standing order 6.01(5) provides the Chair with the capacity to omit material not in conformity with the standing orders. However, the standing orders provide no specific guidance in the appropriateness of the subject matter. Regard must therefore be had to longstanding practices of the house and the manner in which the house should conduct itself.

Traditionally the following rules apply to notices of motion: a notice should not contain matters which are not relevant to each other; a notice must consist of a clear and succinct proposition which enables the house to arrive at a clear decision; a notice should not deal with matters that offend against the sub judice principle; a notice should not offend against the same-question rule outlined in standing order 7.06; a notice should not generally exceed 250 words in length, with limited quotations; and a notice should not contain offensive or disorderly words or other unparliamentary language.

I intend to continue to apply these principles in determining whether notices of motion are appropriate to be listed on the notice paper. However, I have also

become concerned about a recent trend towards giving notices of motion — and it is probably not entirely a recent trend; I am sure that if we go back, we will see past motions that could be described in the same way — that are frivolous, ironic or sarcastic or have been drafted to simply sit on the notice paper with no likelihood of their ever being moved and debated. That practice is not appropriate for the house. It can be demeaning to the house. It certainly brings no credit on the house in terms of the way some of those motions can be framed.

I also note that on page 399 of *May's Parliamentary Practice*, 24th edition, in the House of Commons the Speaker has directed that a notice of motion should not be printed, because it was irregular or obviously not a proper subject for debate, being tendered in the spirit of mockery or being designed merely to give annoyance. These are appropriate principals to apply in considering notices of motion in this house. I therefore ask members to bear these comments in mind when framing notices of motion for the house, as they will be assessed on the basis of their compliance with the principles outlined in this statement.

The clerks, as always, are available to provide advice to members on the content of notices of motion to ensure that they meet the Chair's standards. I also note that whilst some members provide notices of motion in advance to the clerks for clarification to make sure that they meet guidelines, not all members do so, and in my view that is sometimes where we are getting into trouble. I advise members that in respect of the remarks I have made in this ruling I intend to refer the matter to the Procedure Committee for its consideration as to whether any amendments should be made to the standing orders to give further clarification.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Budget sector: midyear financial report 2011–12

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — I rise to make some further remarks on the midyear financial report. I commenced making remarks on this report in the last sitting week when I referred to the deteriorating financial position in Victoria under the Baillieu-Ryan Liberal-Nationals coalition government, its importance in relation to declining investment and, consequentially, jobs, and the further importance of priority setting for the coming budget in the interests of investment, which will both assist in delivering services and in delivering

jobs particularly in regional Victoria given my electorate is Northern Victoria Region.

I referred specifically to Robinvale P–12 College and the need for investment in the building program at the college. The impact of the lack of commitment of funds to complete the building program includes the funding needing to be spent on the maintenance of buildings that will not be used when the building program is completed, the school community needing to raise funds for basic things like paying for security fencing around new buildings, which it is not funded for, and missed opportunities for vocational education and training in a region that is crying out for those training opportunities.

In addition to referring to Robinvale P–12 College, I would like to refer to another school just up the road. Red Cliffs Secondary College is another school in the electorate of the member for Mildura in the other place, Peter Crisp. This school is expanding at a rate of knots, so it is performing very well in terms of its capacity to attract enrolments, and it enjoys a very positive reputation across the Sunraysia community. It has recently been fortunate to receive funding from the Gillard federal Labor government for a new science centre, which is operating very well and having a very positive influence on science studies at the school. However, the fact of the matter is that the school does not have a school plan funded and it is in great need of a new arts and technology wing. Once again this is impacting on opportunities for vocational education and training in an area where there is a great need for these opportunities.

Perhaps the thing that most clearly points to the need for investment at Red Cliffs Secondary College is that despite having a natural gas pipeline very close to the school, it still relies on an old boiler room system which uses liquefied petroleum gas to heat the main school wing, and I think members might be able to imagine just how expensive that is. The reason why the school cannot switch over to natural gas is that it is facing not just the cost of the connection, which is considerable, but also the cost of having to change all the appliances over to natural gas. This is a terrible situation and a shocking waste of scarce school funds. I urge the Baillieu-Ryan government to make funding at Red Cliffs Secondary College a priority in the forthcoming budget.

Earlier today I referred to the priorities at Ouyen, and there are a long list of schools that I could refer to in relation to the need for investment. I am aware that government members have indicated that funds are scarce and that these are things which cannot be

afforded. But I think it is important to place on record the very healthy financial situation the government inherited from the former Labor government, the plans which were laid out for investment in these schools and the need for the Baillieu-Ryan government at least to develop its own plan for funding these schools.

Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry: report

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I welcome the *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry* and I support its recommendations. The report focuses on governance, but I will use my time today to focus on resourcing and the need for an independent inquiry as recommended by Justice Cummins. I am disappointed with the government for not funding a truly independent and properly resourced inquiry, and for referring the matter to a parliamentary committee. Yesterday I spoke about the lack of independence of such a committee, and I have just found out today that the inquiry will exclude people who are in state-run institutions. The lack of independence of those associated with this inquiry started from the beginning and abusers in state institutions will be protected. Surely the time has come to stop protecting those abusers and to support the victims.

I do not think the Parliament has the resources to carry out this inquiry. Parliament is scheduled to have a \$2.4 million budget cut next year; that is not going to help hire qualified staff for a committee that already has two other inquiries on the go. I do not think the Parliament has adequate power to compel witnesses to attend, as we saw during the Windsor inquiry. However, most vulnerable children in Victoria are in the care of their families. We need to address the chronic underresourcing of programs for these children and to support the 6100 children who are in out-of-home care.

Before I launch into a very distressing monologue, I express relief that another temporary, 12-month funding package has come through to provide accommodation options for families, plus \$29 million in new pilot programs for homelessness. Some of the funding will have a positive impact on vulnerable children and all of it will go where it is needed. But you have to ask yourself: why was funding ever in doubt for a program that is proven to move vulnerable children and women into safe accommodation? Why was there only temporary funding for accommodation options for families? The sad truth is that resourcing for vulnerable children is rarely secure and the system is overwhelmed by need. There is a never-ending stream of pilot

programs or full-scale programs that are so chronically underfunded that they can barely perform their job. Real recurrent expenditure on both child protection services and intensive family support has been lower in Victoria over the past five years than in any other state.

The Child FIRST program is symptomatic of what happens when a good service is part of an underresourced system. Child FIRST is meant to be an entry point for vulnerable families. The idea is to steer those families away from child protection services with activities like playgroups and parenting support for at-risk young mothers. Child FIRST was never meant to deal with the tertiary and more serious cases — it was supposed to provide early intervention to avoid a crisis — but the system is so overloaded that I am told that 80 per cent of the Child FIRST program funding is allocated to families who are already in crisis. The waiting list is so long that vulnerable children must often wait until their families experience a full-blown crisis before they can access the help they need.

The other funding issue is the pilot program syndrome. Governments love to announce new pilot programs that are cheap and satisfying because a spokesperson can talk about a range of innovative measures without shelling out for all the kids who need them. Therapeutic residential care in Victoria has had 11 pilots since 2008. The Circle Program is a therapeutic foster care pilot, and only 97 out of 1500 children in foster care received this vital service. There are 6100 children in out-of-home care at any given time, but only 4 per cent are supported by a resourced therapeutic framework. The idea of pilots is to trial a new program and evaluate it with a view to expanding the successful programs. The evaluation for therapeutic residential programs has been completed. The program works, yet it is being rolled over with the same numbers instead of expanding it. We know that therapeutic care reduces recidivism, and the program would be cost-effective from that benefit alone, let alone the other outcomes. It has got to the stage where any government not funding these programs is deliberately choosing substandard care.

Another category of children who need attention are those in kinship care. There are about 2300 children placed with kinship carers, and they are just the ones we know about. The needs of these children are just as complex as those in foster and residential care, yet kinship carers often have to do without any support whatsoever. People in their seventies are looking after preschoolers without the help and support they need to keep the children healthy and safe. Some 750 cases have been contracted out to community service providers with the vision of supervision and support.

What is being done about the thousands of children and relatives who are doing without that support?

This is an important report, and while I welcome it, I think there are a great many deficiencies in the way the government funds the programs in the report. I hope to see an improvement in the upcoming budget.

Auditor-General: Access to Public Housing

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to make a statement on the Victorian Auditor-General's *Access to Public Housing* report tabled in March 2012. It is an interesting report and yet another scathing account of the performance of the previous Labor government and its mismanagement of a very important portfolio, in this case the objective of which is to provide safe and secure housing. Those objectives are important to good health, employment, education and community wellbeing. Without access to affordable housing people face the prospect of homelessness or struggle to meet their basic living costs and needs and even the ability to access employment opportunities if they arise.

This report is scathing. The housing and community building division of the Department of Human Services is responsible for the management of public housing, which is generally government-owned and managed, and certainly is in the context of this report. As of June 2011 there were 65 352 dwellings and 127 357 tenants in public housing and 38 244 eligible households on the public housing waiting list. The Victorian Auditor-General goes on to outline some significant challenges, many of which were known to the previous government. Clearly no action was taken to address them, placing the most vulnerable in our community at significant risk.

I would like to select a couple of points that highlight this stick your head in the sand and do not do anything about it approach. Under the heading 'Conclusions' on page vii the report states:

The situation for public housing is critical. The current operating model and asset management approach places the long-term provision of this vital public service at risk.

I quote from the second paragraph on page viii, which states:

It is unclear why the division has not introduced longer term strategies to address this acute situation given that it has developed over at least a decade. Since at least 2006, other departments, including the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) and the Department of Premier and Cabinet, have also been aware of the deteriorating state of public housing, yet this has not spurred action.

That was not the only report; others were done. The Auditor-General says in paragraph 3 that:

There are no clear long-term objectives for public housing. Long-term objectives are important to guide management of an asset base with a long life span that requires substantial lead times for redevelopment or renewal.

The Auditor-General goes on to say:

Now that public housing is nearing a crisis, it will be all the more challenging to address.

It seems to me to be a really bad reflection on the performance of the then minister, Richard Wynne, the member for Richmond in the Assembly, who continues to serve in this portfolio as shadow minister. This is an absolute indictment because at the end of the day there were systemic failings, but the buck clearly does stop with the person who is administering the portfolio.

The report goes on to say in the findings, also on page viii:

The division's lack of comprehensive asset management has meant missed opportunities to more strategically position the public housing portfolio.

On page ix it says:

Over this period, the division has not articulated long-term objectives for the public housing portfolio, or undertaken long-term planning.

I would invite members to look at this very closely. I would also like to place on record that since becoming the new Minister for Housing, Wendy Lovell has commissioned an independent third-party review of the housing and community building division's finances, an independent third-party review of program expenditure and a comprehensive property condition audit of the entire portfolio. She has driven better management of vacant stock, reduced turnaround times by 10 per cent, been responsible for instigating an audit of vacant stock, with 1000 properties returned to tenancy, developed a new housing framework and commissioned an evaluation of outstanding Nation Building projects, which were 1000 behind target when the coalition came to government. There is a lot of incredible detail here. I invite members to have a look at the report for an example of how not to run a portfolio, how not to run a department and how not to deliver good public policy and services to the community.

Budget sector: midyear financial report 2011–12

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise to make a statement this afternoon on the midyear financial

report for 2011–12. The statement was issued by the Treasurer, Kim Wells, last month, and I wish to make two key points with respect to the report. It is a fact that the government is not spending sufficient money on infrastructure and that this will be the first state government in many years that will have a significant deficit. I think page 6 of the report indicates that it will be \$341 million for the six-month period ending December 2011 in the general government sector, with the state of Victoria recording an \$801 million deficit for the same period.

In recent months we have seen editorials and major news articles about the state of the Victorian economy. We have seen business leaders come out and make comments, as well as other political commentators, calling on the state government to take action. Essentially, without this government taking leadership in this area, the business community is hardly going to be imbued in playing its critical role in facilitating and providing the much-needed investment that this state needs. As we have seen in recent months and also quite clearly in the last 48 hours, we have jobs that just continue to slide through our fingers. This government seems to be engaged in a conversation with itself, because I just cannot point my finger at any other conversation it might be having, whether it be with the business sector or in the wider community.

It is this prolonged do-nothingness that is particularly worrying, and I am picking up an absolute sheer frustration, particularly in the business community, about what is going on. Members of families are particularly concerned about whether they will have a job to go to, whether they will be next or what they can do as a family to plan for their future. I have to say that I agree with the comments that were made by the state political editor of the *Age*, Josh Gordon, in an article of 15 March this year titled 'State faces crunch time'. In that article he says that whilst there are some things that are completely out of the control of any state government, this government just does not seem to want to know the role it can play in alleviating pressure and facilitating measures that can interest investors, protect jobs and support industry.

It raises the question of what it is that the government does not understand, because the state is grinding to a halt. You can see that in a figurative sense but also in a physical sense, because essentially we are living in a gridlock. The forthcoming state budget provides this government with an opportunity to seize the day, albeit two years too late, if it chooses to do so.

I am more than happy for the government to start with the electorate of Western Victoria Region, because

there are lots of projects and issues that need attention, many of which were election promises that were made by the coalition prior to the 2010 election. There are things like the Apollo Bay secondary school development; it needs to have proper funding. The Warrnambool cancer centre was an election promise, and nothing has happened. There is the 32-bed second hospital for Geelong at Waurn Ponds, about which nothing has happened.

In relation to Avalon Airport, yes, there is a study, but there needs to be the money for it. There needs to be proper and full funding for Pioneer Road at Waurn Ponds, and a trickle has just been announced. The rebuilding of Portarlington Primary School has to happen, as does Geelong High School, a new P–12 school at Bannockburn and the Horsham secondary college, not to mention the Waurn Ponds police and emergency services complex. In the area of transport, we have seen major cuts to the Transport Connections program. We need road funding as well as public transport right across the electorate, and this would be a good place to start to try to get some jobs and investment and infrastructure flowing into the electorate of Western Victoria Region.

Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry: report

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — I have a great deal of pleasure in speaking on the *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*, which is now colloquially known as the Cummins report, and I commend the Minister for Community Services, Mary Wooldridge, for commissioning it. I also commend the Honourable Philip Cummins, as chair, the eminent Professor Dorothy Scott, a panel member, and Bill Scales, a panel member. I have spoken on this report before at length, and I was interested to hear Ms Hartland's contribution on it today. It is important to understand what the Baillieu government's response to the report has been. It has been swift; it has been quick.

It is important to understand exactly what it is we have been dealing with. First of all, let me put this clearly into context. The Bracks and Brumby governments had 11 years in which to do something about protecting Victoria's vulnerable children, and they did nothing. This report is not reporting on things that have happened in the short time the Baillieu government has been here; it is talking about systemic problems that were known to the previous government for a significant time. Therefore it is doubly commendable for Minister Wooldridge, the Minister for Community

Services, to bring this report to fruition and act so swiftly on it.

I would like to remind the chamber of action in relation to protecting Victoria's vulnerable children in workforce reform. If we are to have an effective system and address some of the systemic issues there, we really need the front-line workers to be working very effectively. Minister Wooldridge has worked closely with the child protection workers to try to establish some good new working models to make quite certain that these issues and concerns have been properly addressed. For example, there will be a new operating model for child protection workers. Under this new model child protection workers will have more time with the vulnerable. There will be improved skill development opportunities, better career paths and a mentoring program for child protection workers. All of these things have been welcomed by the sector and will help make matters much better for the victims and vulnerable children who need to be protected by our state but were neglected by the former government.

The most contentious issue this week has been recommendation 48 of the report in which the chair, Philip Cummins, called for a formal investigation to be conducted into the processes by which religious organisations respond to the criminal abuse of children by religious personnel within their organisations. This has been particularly welcomed. It is an immediate reaction to the issues raised in this report. I have great faith in this Parliament and the parliamentary system, and I know that with its very clear reference the bipartisan Family and Community Development Committee, under its chair, Georgie Crozier, will address many of these issues.

Finally, in the few minutes I have left I would like to remind the chamber of exactly what else this government has done in relation to protecting vulnerable children. I remind members that the final report was tabled in the Parliament on 28 February, and the government immediately — not down the track, not in six months time, but immediately — committed to developing a vulnerable children strategy, oversight by a ministerial committee and a \$60 million down payment for three initiatives. A full, staged response will be rolled out. The really important thing to know is that \$60 million was immediately put aside for this response. It looks as though I will run out of time to mention the government's staged response tonight. I hope that in the next sitting week I will be able to speak on this important report.

In finishing I will quickly respond to Ms Hartland and her criticism of the inquiry into child abuse by religious

organisations. She said the Family and Community Development Committee will have no resources. The Premier has made it clear that he is going to put additional resources into this committee. Ms Hartland also said, and I would like to correct her, that the committee already had two other inquiries on the go. There are two other inquiries on the go; she was quite correct in suggesting that, but they will be reported on in a very short time and will not overlap with this important inquiry on child abuse. Ms Hartland will find that the committee will do both.

Auditor-General: Access to Public Housing

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak to the Auditor-General's report of March 2012 on access to public housing. More than 50 per cent of all constituent inquiries that come into my electorate office are concerned with Office of Housing applications. According to the report, at this point in time there are more than 38 000 eligible Victorians on public housing waiting lists. The continued influx of migrants and refugees has seen the housing lists extend even further than ever before. Insufficient resources are stretched to the limit, and the Auditor-General tells us that Victoria is at a critical point in its history. The need is outweighed by the reality of a homeless family being placed within two years of being on a waiting list. The Department of Human Services (DHS) cannot sustain or maintain the current level of housing stock, nor is it in a financial position to construct new dwellings to meet the ever-rising need.

Social housing as an experiment has failed. People who meet the present criteria set by the DHS policy-makers are not being selected as tenants in the public-private partnerships projects. Targets of 50-50 were agreed to — 50 per cent private renters and 50 per cent DHS housing waiting list applicants — under the previous government's social housing project. These targets are not being adhered to, nor will they ever be without a proper monitoring process. However, that is a matter for this government to pursue. Housing is a \$17.8 billion portfolio whose assets are not, according to the Auditor-General, being properly maintained. It is sloppy accounting — penny wise and pound foolish.

The Auditor-General has made several recommendations to address the problems outlined in his report. They include clear reporting mechanisms with regard to the data collection on maintenance required for properties within the housing portfolio and a strategic plan to ensure the future viability of a properly funded public housing service. There are seven recommendations in the report, and I support them all. As it stands the current operating model is

unsustainable. Housing policy criteria established in 1999 have seen a decrease in the availability of housing stock due to the priority system.

The priority system is difficult to meet. Homelessness and insecure, dangerous living conditions are just two of the criteria for eligibility for early housing placement. Segments 1 to 4 are being readily met by a larger proportion of Victorians than previously thought possible. We need a long-term alternative housing strategy to deal with the ever-growing need for public housing.

Budget sector: midyear financial report 2011–12

Mr O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — I rise to make a contribution on the report entitled *2011–12 Mid-year Financial Report — Incorporating Quarterly Financial Report No. 2* presented by the Treasurer, the Honourable Kim Wells, in March. I thank Mr Leane for putting this report on the notice paper. I wish to comment on the question of infrastructure spending, which was raised in a previous contribution by my colleague Ms Tierney, who is a member for Western Victoria, and contrast the government's approach to both the budget and infrastructure funding with the approach of the previous government and particularly that of the present federal government.

It is not correct to say that this state government is not investing in infrastructure. Rather, this government's priority is to maintain financial responsibility in investment and maintain a healthy budget so that it can fix the problems and build the future. That requires a responsible delivery of budget finances, both in estimates and in actual performance and delivery by government departments and public sector bodies, so that there is an expectation in the investment community that there can be financial security going a long way forward — most importantly reflected in the need to maintain the state's AAA rating.

This has been emphasised in the comments outlined and decisions taken in relation to the Treasurer's 2012 budget update, including the tough decisions that this government is prepared to make to focus on what is important in times of difficult economic challenges.

Turning to infrastructure, rather than looking at page 6 of the report referred to by Ms Tierney, it is better to turn to page 8. Under the heading 'Infrastructure investment' it says:

Chart 1.1 shows the trend in net infrastructure investment by the state of Victoria and the general government sector since 1995. Excluding commonwealth fiscal stimulus funding,

2011–12 is estimated to be the largest infrastructure investment program delivered by the general government sector.

The totals given on page 9 are for a revised budget estimate of a \$6.5 billion investment program. This contrasts with the approach of the previous government, which was to look for big-item spin projects. The previous government's two flagship projects, the desalination project and the north–south pipeline, were projects it had promised it would not deliver going into the 2006 election. Some would say that makes the rhetoric in relation to broken promises inconsistent, and others might say it is hypocritical, but that will be a matter for the electorate to determine. Whilst the opposition sometimes criticises the current government for not delivering our projects 'yet', in financial terms in the first budget we have delivered about 90 per cent of the financial election commitments we made, including as of last week, in the list of items around the Geelong area mentioned by Ms Tierney, the Torquay secondary school, something Labor failed to do during its 11 years in office. We have delivered the sites for two schools.

The capable Minister for Planning, in contrast to what Ms Tierney suggested, has fast-tracked planning approval for the construction of the Epworth teaching hospital on land at the Waurin Ponds campus of Deakin University, which will create hundreds of new jobs. We do these things partly to fix the problems left to us by the previous government, but they are also part of our approach to making prudent, responsible and sound long-term investment decisions to build the future.

The opposition can criticise us for not having delivered all our promises in our first year's budget. However, we never said we would — and nor should we — but we will deliver on our election commitments over the four-year term. Contrast that to an approach whereby not only did Labor not deliver what it said it would but also did things it said it would not. Labor said it would not build a desalination plant because it was a hoax, and it would not take water from country areas and pipe it to the cities. It broke its election promises with both of those projects, and it kept the public in the dark while the projects were financially put together. That white elephant pipeline has cost the state's water users and will continue to cost them around \$750 million. Opposition members talk about a pipeline of projects. They have a \$750 million pipeline sitting in the ground that is full of nothing. It is full of all their failed ideas and grand schemes. That result is multiplied at the federal level where we have the dangerous combination of Labor and the Greens; that is where you get an exponential result.

We have a secure pipeline, if you like, of \$6.9 billion of infrastructure projects. We will continue to deliver them in a financially responsible way. We will take the tough decisions necessary to ensure that this state recovers from the mess of 11 years of the failed Labor government.

**Auditor-General: *State Trustees Limited* —
*Management of Represented Persons***

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — It is an honour to speak on the 2012 Auditor-General's report entitled *State Trustees Limited — Management of Represented Persons*. The report on the State Trustees from the independent Auditor-General of our state is shocking in several important aspects. I most sincerely hope the current government considers it very carefully and consults with the opposition to ensure that remedial action is taken. Given the role of this state organisation and the often fragile nature of its clients, this report is not one that we can leave on the shelf until we find some spare time in the next decade or so. State Trustees administers the affairs of more than 10 000 persons in this state, under the authority of the Guardianship and Administration Act 1986.

The role of the audit was to investigate whether State Trustees managed the financial and legal affairs of its clients to the best interests of those clients. The audit's findings were undeniably negative, and they accord with various complaints that I have received, as I am certain have others. The summary of the report says:

... this does not demonstrate the quality or effectiveness of the management of represented persons' affairs and it does not have the robust governance, monitoring and reporting mechanisms needed to do so. There is also inadequate quality assurance and review of the services provided to represented persons.

State Trustees' direct engagement with represented persons is not sufficient for it to be assured that their needs and wishes are properly understood. In addition, poor information management and high case manager turnover means that decisions about their affairs are not always based on complete or accurate information.

As I read through the report I was stunned at how negative it was, given the large number of lawyers and financial experts who make up the State Trustees. In every area there were serious negatives, serious concerns, serious failings and issues that cannot be excused and which must not be ignored. Yet I wonder if there was a follow-up investigation by the Ombudsman or another body or if we spoke with care agencies, we might learn even more about where State Trustees is seriously failing to protect the best interests of their aged and infirm clients.

I have been made aware that there are agencies who have little faith in the State Trustees. As I stated earlier, I too have received negative reports about it. In one case that I was advised about State Trustees took over the administration of an estate of an elderly gentleman after a dispute within the family. State Trustees attempted to sell his home, despite it clearly being a formal part of the inheritance of one of his heirs, as outlined in his will. They even harassed him to make them lawyers for the estate, and when he did not the executors and their appointed lawyers proved difficult to deal with. They failed to take any care of that home, so much so that when the heir eventually took ownership he incurred significant expense to repair neglect by State Trustees. Items that were removed from the property were either lost or damaged by agents of State Trustees.

To return to the report itself, I found it amazing, and again I quote:

State Trustees does not adequately analyse complaints data ...

Is this an example of an ostrich putting its head in the sand so it will not see the obvious? The report refers to State Trustees staff only visiting 5 per cent of their clients. Is that because they have a greater concern for the wealth of their clients than for their health and welfare? Based upon this report, it most certainly would appear to be so.

I am concerned with the statement in paragraph 2.2 'Conclusion' which refers to a number of internal and external reviews being conducted over the years and yet nothing being done. I am also doubtful of paragraph 2.3.3 'Risk Management' regarding fraud. Given the poor controls across a range of areas, I would be open to a further investigation to examine fraud and incompetence more specifically. After all, we are talking about the management by State Trustees of well over \$800 million. That alone demands far greater scrutiny of State Trustees and, I would respectfully argue, ongoing observation by the Auditor-General on our behalf.

State Trustees is appointed to ensure the best interests of those who cannot look after their own interests. This report proves that it has failed to do so. Let us, all of us, now not fail to heed this report.

**Review of Climate Change Act 2010:
government response**

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My statement is on the Victorian government's response to the review of the Climate Change Act 2010, which because of the carbon tax is particularly pertinent given Ms Pulford's

motion this morning in relation to the cost of jobs. At the outset I will say that the government has supported — in principle, in part and in whole — the 16 recommendations of this review. I am also pleased to say from the outset that we have been and remain committed to taking action on climate change.

Further, the scope and nature of that action has now been redefined. The independent review of the Climate Change Act found that a national carbon price changes the policy role of the state government in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions to a complementary one that allows the national price to operate effectively and efficiently. In fact even Mr Barber said of the 20 per cent emissions reduction target:

It didn't actually do anything. It was a PR stunt.

He was quoted in the *Australian* of 27 March as having made that statement.

The report of the review of the Climate Change Act 2010 strongly supported a single national approach as the key driver to reducing emissions. The review also found no compelling case to maintain the Victorian target when a national scheme was in place and cited evidence that a state-based target would in fact add cost to businesses and individuals within the state of Victoria. It would also distort a national scheme and lead to Victoria effectively cross-subsidising emissions abatement in other states. It was therefore determined that the commonwealth government has the primary responsibility for reducing greenhouse gas emissions nationally.

The review also acknowledged the problems of federal Labor's carbon tax, saying a carbon price is likely to create some challenges for Australia's competitiveness during this period of global economic uncertainty. That is certainly something that I have raised concerns about in this house before and in previous roles. Many of our competitors in the export field do not have carbon taxes or prices associated with their greenhouse gas emissions; and this creates an unlevel playing field. Tim Piper from the Australian Industry Group has expressed his concerns for industry, saying:

You simply can't have a different requirement in one part of the country, different emissions targets in different states, for industry working across state lines ...

Even Ross Garnaut, the commonwealth's climate adviser, admitted that the introduction of a carbon pollution reduction scheme means there is no longer any value in state and territory governments setting their own binding targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It seems everyone is in agreement that we

should repeal the 20 per cent state target, and I fully support that.

As I said, the Victorian government accepts the majority of recommendations to the review process. However, the role of the Victorian government will be to promote energy efficiency through effective programs such as the coalition's gas heater and white goods rebates for concession card holders. There is also the Sustainable Schools initiative to help schools to reduce their energy and water consumption as well as waste production. We are rolling out natural gas in rural and regional Victoria through the Regional Growth Fund. We are not walking away from renewable energy; we have invested a lot of money in large-scale solar, bioWAVE technology, geothermal, hydroelectricity and, dare I say it, wind farming. The second clear role for the state is to ensure that we have an adaptation plan to deal with the effects of climate change.

Even in opposition Labor seemed to be in disarray about where to go with the state response to climate change and changed its position almost daily. The Victorian government will now get on with the job of supporting energy efficiency measures, innovation and climate change adaptation planning, and amend the Climate Change Act in due course to reflect this direction.

In summary and closing, an independent review has taken place. The Victorian government has supported in principle all the recommendations. We are moving to a national approach, and here in Victoria we are providing support for both the impacts of the carbon tax to be introduced on 1 July and projects and support mechanisms to reduce the impacts of climate change on the Victorian community.

Budget sector: midyear financial report 2011–12

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise to speak on the midyear financial report 2011–12. In my contribution I want to focus on the insufficient money being directed by the government towards the creation of jobs and towards health and education. I will focus on those three areas.

The government appears to have no commitment to the creation of jobs in Victoria, particularly in regional Victoria. Many jobs have disappeared right across the state. Particularly in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region we have seen a number of very important manufacturing operations close or downsize, and that has resulted in job losses. As I said, the government

appears to have no commitment to ensuring that we keep jobs in Victoria or create jobs in Victoria. If government members had a commitment to it, by now they would have developed a jobs plan for the state that included rural and regional Victoria.

It was very disappointing to hear the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development, Mr Drum, on the radio saying that he believes there is no need for a jobs plan in rural and regional Victoria. He is very much alone in his thinking there, because if you travelled anywhere in rural and regional Victoria, you would be hearing from many sectors — not only businesses but also educational institutions as well as the population more generally — that jobs are very important. The one thing you can give somebody is a job and job security that is going to ensure that they are able to live a good life and that they are going to be able to pay their bills and buy groceries and not have huge anxieties about where their next pay cheque is going to come from.

I am really pleased that Victorian Labor has announced the first stage of a plan to keep jobs in Victoria and to keep people working. The first stage of that plan involves going out and talking to communities and to business groups and asking them about what their needs might be. Labor has written to more than 240 organisations, including business groups, local councils and unions, seeking their views on how to shape our plan. I think a jobs plan would be a good idea for the government. It is disappointing that there is no commitment to it, but it is an issue that Labor is taking up.

I want to mention health. It is clear that rural and regional Victoria is characterised by a number of health issues when you compare it with other sectors of the community. It has a higher than state average aged population. The principal causes of illness and mortality are relatively similar to the rest of the state except in the areas of obesity and diabetes, which we heard the Minister for Health talk about today in question time, smoking rates and mental illness. Yet we do not have a commitment to provide our health providers with the infrastructure they need to ensure they are able to provide the best possible quality health care.

There is a significantly higher presentation rate to emergency departments per 1000 people in rural and regional areas compared with urban areas, and there is a higher stay rate in acute beds, which may well be due to the fact that there is a higher proportion of the aged in the population. There is a large number of farm and traffic accidents and an increasing demand for health and mental health services of all kinds as a result of ageing and a relatively low socioeconomic rural and

regional profile. We know that as far as road accidents and road trauma go we see more of that in rural and regional Victoria.

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the house do now adjourn.

Timber industry: road funding

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — The matter I raise on the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, Peter Walsh. On the Friday after the Parliament last met I attended the annual general meeting (AGM) of Timber Towns Victoria, which was held in K Room of Parliament House. The Timber Towns Victoria AGM is often marketed as being hosted by The Nationals. I was there for the duration. Gary Blackwood, the member for Narracan in the Assembly, was there for a while, but there were no members of The Nationals present, which is very interesting given that the president of the association felt obliged to thank The Nationals for the use of their room — the K Room — and for letting them use the building.

Leaving that all aside, Timber Towns Victoria is a group of municipalities that all have a large timber industry in their electorate, so they get together to discuss common interests. There were a few speakers from government departments and the like at the AGM talking about the issues facing the timber industry. However, the main issue I raise this evening for the attention of the minister is the timber industry road evaluation study (TIRES), which was done by Timber Towns Victoria and which identified a series of needed improvements to roads to assist timber communities.

There was a commitment by the coalition at the last election to have a separate fund to provide money for these timber roads. Terry Mulder, the Minister for Roads, was at the Timber Towns Victoria AGM last year along with the Deputy Premier, Peter Ryan, and Minister Mulder spoke effusively about their great relationship. But that of course was before the budget. The president in his report said the group would like the government to honour its election commitment to have a separate fund for roads, and there was concern among those attending the AGM that this be delivered. The

response from the government in the timber strategy, however, was that a further evaluation be done. I think it is fair to say that the view at the Timber Towns Victoria AGM was that there was no need to do a further evaluation because the work has already been done by the municipalities and Timber Towns Victoria in the timber industry roads evaluation study. A copy of the study was given to the Deputy Premier and to the Minister for Roads last year.

The action I seek from the minister responsible for forests, Peter Walsh, is firstly, that he deliver on the government's election commitment for a separate fund for timber roads, and secondly, that he talk sense to his colleagues so that they do not do yet another evaluation but instead work on the material provided by Timber Towns Victoria and the municipalities that care about jobs in their areas. I ask that the minister act on it rather than stall them with yet another study that this government does not seem interested in implementing.

Public transport: maintenance program

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads, Mr Mulder. First of all I want to commend Minister Mulder on the extensive maintenance program that he is undertaking on the public transport system in Victoria to try to make amends for the disastrous state of affairs left behind by the former Labor government. I also want to remind this chamber that the coalition government is investing \$353 million in addressing the maintenance backlog of our transport system. That is an enormous amount of money in anybody's terms. However, it only begins to address what are now systemic maintenance problems caused by the lack of maintenance under the previous government.

Mr Mulder recently said that he was going use Easter as a time to get a lot of this maintenance done — and I know he did use Easter for that purpose. The important point about using Easter was to show the Victorian community and give it confidence that the coalition government does have a plan to address the issue of systemic maintenance. What happened? It took the opportunity that Easter provided to be able to undertake some significant maintenance work. People were given a lot of advance warning. The people who were going back to work after Easter experienced some inconvenience due to using buses, but they knew exactly what they had to do. In my electorate significant work was done along St Kilda Road, and the buses did an admirable job. The work was completed on time and has made a significant difference to the tram tracks in particular.

It is interesting to note that with this funding of \$350 million for the metropolitan area the coalition government will replace more than 132 000 rail sleepers, replace more than 32 kilometres of track, replace 27 kilometres of overhead wiring, upgrade 60 signals and 80 track circuits, replace 19 point machines and repaint 12 stations across the network. This is quite significant. Yarra Trams will renew more than 11 kilometres of tram track, renew 15 junctions, upgrade more than 300 overhead poles, renew more than 16 kilometres of trolley wire and replace 5 sets of automatic points.

The action I seek from the minister tonight is that he give me a progress report on the significant maintenance work in Southern Metropolitan Region.

Parker–Whitehall streets, Footscray: safety

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is also for the Minister for Roads, Mr Mulder, but unfortunately the situation in the west is slightly different to that in the south. I would like to talk about the most dangerous intersection in the western suburbs for cyclists, which is the intersection of Parker and Whitehall streets in Footscray. Parker Street is a major bicycle route, and Whitehall Street is a major trucking route. The two routes intersect with no traffic signals. When you add pedestrians and cars to the mix you have an extremely dangerous intersection. Two people have already been killed at this intersection, and more have been seriously injured in crashes, as has been reported in the local Fairfax newspaper. Near misses are common at the intersection. You only have to go there of a morning to see what I would describe as absolutely nerve-racking experiences.

Users of the intersection, cyclists, local businesses, Maribyrnong City Council and VicRoads have all identified the intersection as a problem that must be fixed. It is now the government's responsibility to fund the fixing of this intersection. More than 1500 people have visited my Bike West website and viewed the film of this intersection in action. I have delivered over 150 letters and cards to the minister from users of the intersection. All these personally signed cards call on the minister to fix the intersection by funding the VicRoads proposed intersection upgrade. I trust that the minister will respond promptly to these letters from community members. VicRoads has designed and costed a traffic signal solution and submitted it for funding in the upcoming May budget.

The action I seek from the minister is that funding be allocated in the upcoming May budget to fix this

intersection before another person is seriously injured or even killed.

Rail: Warragul station

Mr VINEY (Eastern Victoria) — The matter I raise tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport, who is also the Minister for Roads, and it concerns the Warragul train station upgrade promised to the community by the minister and the member for Narracan in the other place, Gary Blackwood.

During the last election campaign the Liberal Party and Mr Blackwood committed \$17 million to redevelop the Warragul train station and car park and to construct an underpass. At the time Mr Blackwood said the Baw Baw Shire Council had developed extensive plans for the car park and that the location and design of the underpass had been finalised. In fact Mr Blackwood indicated in his media release, which is still on his website, that the project was completely shovel ready and could be commenced as soon as funding was available. However, it would appear that in the last state budget the government allocated about \$1 million to VicRoads and the Department of Transport for the design of this car park, so it is interesting that a shovel-ready project should still require design work.

I ask Minister Mulder to explain to the residents of Warragul why the only money they have seen so far is a fraction of what is estimated to be the cost and why it is for design work for a completely shovel-ready project. I also seek Minister Mulder's explanation as to why he stood by Mr Blackwood, who appears to have misled the community about this project being completely shovel ready. I call on the minister to honour the Liberal Party's election commitment to this shovel-ready project and ensure that it is fully funded in this year's budget.

I point out that this is a project of great concern to the local community, and it is a project for which the former Labor government had already undertaken considerable design work. During our term of government we saw a substantial increase of 40 per cent in the patronage of people using that rail line. There is a shortage of car parking in the area. It is a much-needed project, and given that the Liberal Party said it was completely shovel ready and continues to say it is completely shovel ready, I expect it would not be difficult for the government to meet that commitment in this year's budget.

Tourism: Werribee signage

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — The matter I raise is for the attention of the Minister for Tourism and Major Events. I start by thanking the minister for visiting the Werribee tourism precinct recently. I was pleased to note that she was impressed, as I thought she would be, by what she saw. It has to be emphasised that local tourism operators, the Wyndham City Council and other stakeholders were delighted to be able to speak to the minister and to show her firsthand what the Werribee tourism precinct has to offer. There is a need to promote the joys of this area, because we in the west are very proud of them.

One of the big issues always surrounding tourism is that of signage, and in this instance I refer to signage on the Princes Freeway to attract passing motorists. It is vitally important that passing traffic be made aware of what is in the Werribee tourism precinct lest people miss out on the delights and joys of what it has to offer.

I understand that we have come some way towards solving the issue in and around the Werribee tourism precinct, but I ask the minister for an assurance that the plans for the signage are carried through and put up as soon as possible. This would very much be a part of lifting the Werribee tourism precinct profile overall in the wider community, not just in Melbourne but in Victoria. I know the minister will ensure that Tourism Victoria celebrates not only in this state but also interstate the magnificence of the Werribee Open Range Zoo — one of my favourites — the Victoria State Rose Garden, the Werribee Park National Equestrian Centre, the Shadowfax Winery and Vineyard and the Mansion Hotel and Spa at Werribee Park.

As I have pointed out to this house on a number of occasions, there is much to recommend the Werribee tourism precinct. As a result of the minister's visit a few weeks ago, I hope what we have to offer in Werribee will be trumpeted across the length and breadth of Victoria and we will see a significant increase in visitation and, as a result, a significant increase in the tourism spend, with growth in employment in the local area as a further result. I ask the minister to provide an assurance that the signage issues will be resolved as soon as possible.

Police: shire of Moira

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — The matter I raise is for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. The action I seek is that the minister intervene to ensure that residents of Moira

shire do not suffer cuts to policing in their shire. Recently I had the benefit of a briefing from Moira Shire Council. At that briefing the case was put to me that given the emphasis placed on policing by the Liberal Party and The Nationals prior to the 2010 Victorian election, the expectation was that the shire would not face cuts to policing. Residents estimate that prior to the 2010 election there were some 40 police positions across Moira shire, and since the election police officers in Katamatite and St James have been removed. Residents are concerned at this reduction in policing in their shire.

There have been recent shootings in the shire in remote locations, and the residents want an assurance that, at the very least, they can look forward to maintaining police numbers in their shire and not suffering from cuts to police numbers. In addition, they think it is reasonable to expect that somewhere in the shire there be a 24-hour police presence that can be called upon in circumstances that warrant a police presence. The situation they are currently in is such that events can occur at times when it is very well known that there is no police presence in the shire.

On behalf of the residents of the shire of Moira, I request that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services take action in relation to these matters. Residents of the shire are well aware of the lines between ministerial responsibility and operational responsibility, but they believe it is reasonable, given the emphasis placed on policing by the Liberal and Nationals parties prior to the 2010 election, that they should not have to suffer cuts to policing across their shire.

Victorian certificate of applied learning: funding

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Peter Hall. The matter I wish to raise concerns the fallout from the unfair cut that this government has imposed on VCAL (Victorian certificate of applied learning) funding. VCAL has allowed students who would not have stayed at school to continue a study path outside the VCE (Victorian certificate of education) mould.

Feedback from principals, teachers, students and families across Victoria indicates that the \$12 million per year cut to VCAL, which equates to \$48 million over four years, is having a huge impact on their schools. All government schools offering VCAL in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region have been impacted by this funding cut. As a result, some schools

have had to cut important programs like music, abolish teacher aides, increase class sizes and go into debt in order to continue to deliver the VCAL program. Examples in my electorate include schools in Wangaratta, Mooroopna, Alexandra, Cobram, Corryong, Donald and Mildura. Students and staff at these schools continue to talk about the effect this cut is having on their schools. Other areas have had to be cut into in order to deliver programs — for example, the VCAL coordinator can no longer visit students in workplaces; the principal has to teach this year so that the VCE class can go ahead; they have allocated funding from other areas to maintain the VCAL program; and class sizes have increased. It is projected that impacts will also be felt in early years.

My request to the minister is that he see the VCAL program reinstated, along with funding for coordinators, at all schools throughout Victoria, including in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region. VCAL was introduced by the Labor government in 2002 and has been a huge success story. Last year around 20 000 students and over 400 schools, TAFEs and learning centres were involved in VCAL. Without VCAL, many of these students would be lost to education.

Law Reform Committee: access by donor-conceived people to information about donors

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, Mr Clark, and it is in regard to the recommendations of the Law Reform Committee's inquiry and report into access by donor-conceived people to information about donors. This report was tabled in this place on 28 March, and I said at the time that it was a very welcome report. I had not had a chance to read it at that time, but obviously I have had a chance to read through it since then. It is fair to say it is a comprehensive report, and it could be described as groundbreaking.

I thank the Law Reform Committee, which is chaired by the member for Prahran in the other place, Clem Newton-Brown. Mrs Petrovich from this place is a member of that committee. I also thank the staff of that committee for the work they put in to produce this report.

The committee found that, amongst other things, some donor-conceived people suffer substantial distress when they are unable to obtain information about their donor or if they are told of their donor-conceived status later in life. Current arrangements for access to information by people conceived from gametes donated prior to

1988 are confusing, inconsistent and applied in a haphazard manner. Outcomes differ depending on the treating clinic and/or the physician from whom a person's parents received treatment.

This report came about from a motion that I moved on 23 June 2010 and that was carried by the house to refer to the Law Reform Committee the matter of the access of people conceived by gametes donated before 1988 and their lack of information about their genetic history. The motion was carried by the house, and an interim report was tabled by Mr Scheffer, who was chair of that committee, in September 2010, recommending that the following Parliament reinstate the reference for the new Law Reform Committee. That has brought us to this groundbreaking report. There are 30 recommendations in it.

I do not go through that history with a sense of hubris but instead to put on record the time scale. It is now three and a half years since we debated the Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008. The previous government said it would do something about this issue. After 18 months it had not, hence the motion was moved by me. It is now three and a half years later. My request to the Attorney-General is that he act with urgency and without delay to implement the recommendations of the report, particularly recommendations 1 to 5, which go to the legislative changes that are required to redress the wrong that was done years ago and has resulted in the anguish of the people who were conceived from gametes prior to 1988.

Schools: body image resource

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My matter this evening is for the Minister for Education. On a previous occasion I referred to the 2011 Mission Australia survey of young people, which found that body image is one of the top issues of concern to young people, in particular young women. Until now I have been proud that Victoria has led Australia in investing in a prevention approach to body image issues amongst young people, but I am greatly concerned at the lack of investment in this area by the Baillieu government. There are a number of existing resources available to promote a positive body image amongst young people, and I am seeking a commitment from the Baillieu government that it will fund the promotion and distribution of these resources in our public schools.

In 2010 the Queen Victoria Women's Centre (QVWC), in partnership with the former Brumby government, developed the SeeMe Media Literacy and Body Image Project. Central to this project was the development of

'SeeMe — the media, my world and me', an interactive web-based resource with five teaching and learning modules aligned with the Victorian English curriculum. It was developed in collaboration with year 8 students and teachers at Melbourne Girls College, Doncaster Secondary College and East Preston Islamic College.

The website was piloted across four diverse Victorian classrooms in term 4 last year and recently evaluated by the Foundation for Young Australians. The results showed that after participating in the program, the majority of students, both male and female, felt significantly happier about their body and were less inclined to think that what they see in the media is representative of real women's bodies.

The Queen Victoria Women's Centre intends to conduct statewide orientation sessions with new SeeMe students and teachers to support the rollout of this resource across Victorian schools, and I understand that the minister will soon be launching this material. I certainly hope that that opportunity will convince him of the need to promote this material more widely.

In addition, Eating Disorders Victoria (EDV) has a range of resources for staff and students to tackle the issues associated with body image and eating disorders. Funding is required for this project to ensure equitable access for our state-funded schools and a coordinated implementation plan.

I call on the Minister for Education to commit funding in this year's state budget to support the work of organisations like the QVWC and EDV to promote the distribution of these written and web-based materials amongst all Victorian schools.

Police: Forest Hill station

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. It relates to an election commitment made by the then opposition during the election campaign when it pledged a new \$12 million, 24-hour police station for Forest Hill. On 28 November the then candidate, now member, for Forest Hill, Mr Angus, told the *Age* newspaper:

People are concerned about everything ranging from vandalism, cars being damaged, graffiti and hooning, right up to assaults ...

Unfortunately it appears that the government and indeed the member for Forest Hill, since he was elected, have forgotten about this pledge. He was asked about it on 18 January 2011 and was reported in the *Melbourne Weekly* as saying:

I'm waiting on a call back from the Treasurer's office to find out the time line based on forward estimates. I can't give any definitive answers yet. But it's definitely happening.

As I said, that quote was attributed to the member for Forest Hill on 18 January 2011, but since then the community has heard nothing. There has been no progress on this issue, and it seems the concern the community has is that this promise was nothing more than a cynical attempt to get votes in the lead-up to the election. The concerns Mr Angus raised about vandalism, about cars being damaged, about graffiti and hooning and offences going right up to assaults do not appear to be a priority for either this government or the member.

I am asking that after 18 months the minister make this a priority and do no more and no less than honour the election commitment made to the people of Forest Hill.

Ms Broad — President, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Tip Top Poultry: future

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, the Honourable Peter Walsh. By way of background I would like to provide the following information.

Tip Top Poultry is a family poultry processing business which operates out of Thomastown. It has been in business for over 27 years and employs about 150 staff. In addition there are numerous persons and small businesses, including seven farms, also affiliated to Tip Top Poultry that are affected by their recent troubles with PrimeSafe, the regulatory state body which superseded the Victorian Meat Inspection Authority and is answerable to the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security. The Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) is the other inspectorate body also responsible for the processing of livestock in Victoria.

In November last year the processing plant was visited by Nathan Howard, a PrimeSafe inspector, who took pictures of the plant and then issued a shutdown notice. The plant had been inspected by AQIS the month before and given the all clear. In 27 years this company had never once been guilty of any offence under the act. Tip Top Poultry moved to Thomastown from Richmond and is located directly across the road from poultry competitor Turi Foods, known as La Ionica.

I am informed that this company, Tip Top Poultry, went into receivership just prior to Easter due to the

poorly handled investigation by PrimeSafe. Two hundred jobs have been lost. I ask Minister Walsh to investigate the circumstances of PrimeSafe's investigation and intervention, which has directly caused Tip Top Poultry in my electorate to go into receivership. I seek an explanation as to why PrimeSafe has contributed to the demise of this company, including giving the excess poultry to La Ionica, its direct competitor, and putting 200 jobs at risk.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I request that Mr Elasmr rework that last part. I have concerns about the statement he has made — that PrimeSafe has put that company into receivership. I would prefer him to phrase it as 'whether or not PrimeSafe's actions have contributed to the company going into receivership'. In other words, the member should not make that direct allegation, because there could well be other factors. However, I accept that there may well have been contributions to the problem that Mr Elasmr wishes to obtain some information on. I ask him to reframe that last part.

Mr ELASMAR — I seek an explanation as to why PrimeSafe has made that decision.

Responses

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I have a number of adjournment matters, which I will refer to the relevant ministers. I will refer Mr Lenders's matter in relation to timber communities and road funding to the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security, Peter Walsh.

I will refer Mrs Coote's matter in relation to maintenance for the road network in Southern Metropolitan Region to the Minister for Roads, Terry Mulder.

I will refer Ms Hartland's matter in relation to the intersection of Parker and Whitehall streets in Footscray to the Minister for Roads, Terry Mulder.

Mr Viney's matter was in relation to the Warragul railway station upgrade which was committed to. That matter is also for the Minister for Public Transport, Terry Mulder.

I will refer Mr Finn's adjournment issue in relation to Werribee and some signage issues in relation to tourism potential in Werribee to Minister Asher, the Minister for Tourism and Major Events.

I will refer Ms Broad's matter in relation to policing issues in the Moira shire to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister Ryan.

I will refer Ms Darveniza's matter in relation to Victorian certificate of applied learning funding to the Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Peter Hall.

Ms Pennicuik's matter was for the Attorney-General, Robert Clark, and was in relation to the Law Reform Committee and some recommendations she wants implemented. I will get the Attorney-General to give her an update.

I will refer Ms Mikakos's matter in relation to the promotion and distribution of a body image campaign to the Minister for Education, Minister Dixon.

Mr Tee's matter was directed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Peter Ryan, and was in relation to the Forest Hill police station.

The last adjournment matter, which we have just heard, was from Mr Elasmarr and was in relation to PrimeSafe. It was directed to Mr Walsh, the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security.

I have written responses to Mr Somyurek on 13 October 2011, Mrs Coote on 9 February 2012 and Mr Eideh on 1 March 2012.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7.03 p.m.

