

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 6 February 2013

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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.

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FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Wednesday, 6 February 2013

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

The PRESIDENT — Order! I inform the house that I have been advised that the Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee will be meeting this day following the conclusion of the sitting of the Council.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Auditor-General's Report on Addressing Homelessness: Partnerships and Plans, February 2013.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Education: funding

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — As we begin another year it is worth noting that some things never change. By that I mean the Baillieu government's continuation of savage funding cuts. Whilst there have been so many, today I want to focus on education and school crossing coordinators.

Recently the Frankston City Council was informed that funding would be cut for 13 of its 72 school crossing supervisors due to further cuts by the Baillieu government. These cuts follow the many attacks on education by the government, which has become one of its themes. The willingness of the Baillieu government to destroy the future of Victorians knows no bounds.

The effects of these savage cuts to TAFE have become even more apparent with increased fees, courses being closed and alternative pathways being severely limited. The education maintenance allowance cuts are hurting students and schools, as are the cuts to the Victorian certificate of applied learning coordinators, which are stunting their opportunities. But now the Baillieu government has opened up a new war on Victoria's children in relation to their safety.

The Frankston City Council is quite rightly shocked at such a situation. The Baillieu government has reduced funding for the program from 28 per cent to 22 per cent. School after school — —

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, President, I am sure the member is aware that the substance of his contribution is in error. My concern is that he may be inadvertently misleading the house when in fact the VicRoads formula for the funding of school crossing supervisors has not changed.

The PRESIDENT — Order! As Mrs Peulich would well know with her experience, that is not a point of order. She has taken an opportunity to try to contradict the member and put some other information on the record. Mrs Peulich has other opportunities to debate or contradict the member's contribution today, but his contribution from the Chair's point of view is in order. If members feel there are errors in what is being said, they can take it up through the other processes of the house.

Mr TARLAMIS — School after school will be left in the lurch. One hundred and nineteen students use the crossing in Summit Road, Frankston, each school day. I am not sure what expectations the government has as a result of these cuts, but I expect that the safety of these students is not its highest priority. Making cuts in areas where children's safety is involved is disgraceful, and decisions should not be based on petty number crunching to save money.

Where is the local member of Parliament, Geoff Shaw, the member for Frankston in the Assembly, on this matter? When it comes to claiming credit for something he is the first to be heard, but when it comes to taking responsibility for his or his government's actions he is nowhere to be seen.

Banksia Gardens Community Centre: soccer competition

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — During the break I had the pleasure of meeting some inspiring young people in Broadmeadows while officially opening the A Sporting Chance soccer competition. The tournament is running at Banksia Gardens Community Centre until June and is sure to be popular. The players I met during my visit were very enthusiastic about their sport of choice.

A Sporting Chance is a wonderful opportunity for young people from the local housing estate to get more involved in their community. The aim is to create a friendly, safe, enjoyable environment for the many young people and their families from the Banksia Gardens estate. That is especially important on an estate where almost half the residents are aged under 18. Too often young people feel disconnected from their community, and sport is an effective way of encouraging teamwork and a feeling of mutual goals.

This tournament has the added bonus of connecting young people to the broader opportunities offered at the Banksia Gardens Community Centre. Among the programs they can get involved in are the homework

club, computer courses and the community garden. These sorts of connections can benefit not only the young people involved but also their community as a whole. I thank everyone for their hospitality during my visit to Banksia Gardens Community Centre. The wide range of ages and cultures represented shows that this community centre is reaching out effectively to its local community. I especially thank Majur Magok, Mastafa Houssain and Mortada Houssain, whose soccer skills were on show as we launched this wonderful initiative.

Wind farms: Dundonnell

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — In the same week that the Baillieu government declared war on red tape and noted that urban planning and tree clearing controls had to go to encourage development, the Minister for Planning ordered a full environment effects statement (EES) on the Dundonnell wind farm on the basis of a record of the yellow-bellied sheath-tailed bat. Who knew that deep down the Minister for Planning was greener than David Attenborough? More worrying is that in his reasons for that decision he is now requiring the Dundonnell wind farm to make its assessment on the basis of the impact of every other wind farm that is to be built in Victoria. In the meantime he has managed to roll through without an EES a whole series of major road projects and a number of projects that are based solely on fossil fuels.

The Minister for Planning is not loopy; he is ambitious. That is why he is pandering to the loopy backbench with its radical anti-wind farm agenda, and in the process he is putting at risk clean power and jobs for regional Victoria.

Australia Day: City of Moreland

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak about a special event that I attended at the Moreland City Council offices on Australia Day 2013. The Australia Day celebrations and citizenship ceremony included mayoral and police leadership awards and also incorporated Cr Angela Barker's Moreland ambassadorial speech, which was truly inspirational.

I am always extremely proud to attend these celebrations as a people's representative in Northern Metropolitan Region. In particular I would like to thank the mayor, Oscar Yildiz, councillors and the officers involved for making Australia Day 2013 a memorable occasion.

Bushfires: preparedness

Mr ELASMAR — On another matter, the recent January bushfires in Victoria have touched us all once again. I thank the State Emergency Services for their gallant efforts in ensuring that all necessary precautions were taken to minimise property damage to the bushfire-ravaged areas.

I also want to mention the Northern Hospital. Its disaster evacuation plan was in place and ready to implement. Fortunately the hospital's magnificent staff and fire crews managed to stave off the encroaching flames.

Egypt: revolution anniversary

Mr ELASMAR — On another matter, on 25 January I attended a reception held by the Consul General of Egypt, His Excellency Khaled Youssri Rizk, to commemorate the second anniversary of the 25 January 2011 revolution. It was a well-attended and joyful occasion.

Diwali festival

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — It was with great pleasure that I represented the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, the Honourable Nick Kotsiras, at Diwali, the Festival of Lights, in Geelong on 16 December. I would like to congratulate Amitabh Singh and the organising committee of the Australian Association for Indian Culture and Education for hosting an event that showcased the traditional food, dance and music of their Indian homeland to the Geelong community. I also congratulate the stallholders, who provided support services to these very important members of the multicultural Geelong community. I look forward to attending the next festival, which will be bigger and better, with better support and encouragement from the local council.

Australia Day: Western Victoria Region

Mr RAMSAY — As well as celebrating Indian culture in Geelong prior to Christmas, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate all those who received acknowledgement in the Australia Day awards for having selflessly given their time and devotion to their community. Many have committed to helping our emergency services. This includes what occurred recently within my electorate of Western Victoria Region at Snake Valley, where the community worked tirelessly to fight fires threatening their community, and across to the other side of the state where many

volunteers are doing the same in Gippsland. These are quiet achievers — some have been recognised and some not, but all are equally worthy.

Sam Kekovich

Mr RAMSAY — A not-so-quiet achiever who was seen and heard on Australia Day was Sam Kekovich, the face of the Australian lamb industry. He spearheads the Meat and Livestock Australia promotion, which last year produced an increase in lamb sales of 32 per cent or \$18 522 911. This year's sales are expected to create a record. I think Sam deserves a gong for services to the lamb industry despite his having challenged the boundaries of political correctness.

Water safety: St Leonards boating accident

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — During summer we all get many water safety messages, particularly along the coast. They are a good reminder for visitors, but the message is there for all of us: we cannot take water safety for granted, even the most experienced water users.

This morning I would like to praise the actions of Glenn Smith, Stephen Dawes and Jim Barrow, who rescued a very experienced sailor, Brett Thomas. No-one could have predicted the accident that forced Mr Thomas into the water with serious injuries. These three men were on the scene within minutes and were able to get the seriously injured man out of the water. The police, the ambulance staff and air ambulance personnel who took Mr Thomas to the Royal Melbourne Hospital are to be congratulated on their professionalism and coordination. The St Leonards yacht club safety system came through with flying colours. We had a timely recovery by members on the bay, but we also had quick action in the clubhouse. The bravery that was demonstrated on the day was enormous, and I am pleased that the club has seen fit to recognise this by presenting bravery recognition awards to Glenn Smith, Stephen Dawes and Jim Barrow.

Australia Day: Western Victoria Region

Ms TIERNEY — On another note, I would like to congratulate Torquay's Tom Harding and Anglesea's Diana Patterson, who were both presented with Order of Australia medals in ceremonies on Australia Day. Mr Harding was recognised for his services to the community through historical and service organisations, and Ms Patterson received her Order of Australia medal for services to conservation and the environment. Well done. Western Victoria is very proud.

Regional rail link: construction

Mr ELSBURY (Western Metropolitan) — I rise this morning to congratulate the consortia that is involved in the construction of the regional rail link. This major project will provide a huge number of new public transport options for the people of Western Metropolitan Region, as well as improving efficiency on existing train lines.

I have been out on several occasions now to inspect the works at the Sunshine train station and the Maribyrnong River to see how the project is progressing. Certainly on a daily basis, when I drive home to Tarneit, I can see the progress being made across the paddocks north of where I live, and at the train station at Tarneit.

It is just an absolute shame that another member for Western Metropolitan Region, Ms Hartland, continues carping about what she perceives as negative aspects of this project. She is using a scare campaign to try to push her own political agenda on the people of the western suburbs.

Liston Tennis Club

Mr ELSBURY — On another matter, I congratulate the Liston Tennis Club of Williamstown, which won the inaugural Asia-Pacific Tennis League title. Not only did the club beat the Kooyong Lawn Tennis Club once but it beat it twice after another team had to pull out. That just shows how the west is progressing — and good on us for taking out Kooyong.

Croydon Memorial Pool: 50th anniversary

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I join in celebrating the recent 50th anniversary of the Croydon Memorial Pool. That might not sound too startling, but this pool's existence has been under threat for a number of years. Thankfully it is now in a secure position and can continue to facilitate great water sports in the Maroondah area. This pool is a memorial to past military men from around the Croydon area who served in wars. As I said, in 2006 and 2007 there was a huge community campaign to save the outdoor Croydon Memorial Pool. Many thousands of residents became part of a grassroots campaign, with rallies, petitions and a number of media events. In 2007 the Labor government committed to deliver \$250 000 to save the ageing pool and refurbish it, and this has guaranteed the continuation of a vital community facility so that many generations can enjoy what is a great outdoor pool.

Bushfires: response

Mr O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — Firstly, I would also like to pay tribute to the work of the Victorian emergency services during the 2012–13 fire season, which is still continuing. Fires have flared in all parts of the state, including western Victoria in places like Drik Drik, Dartmoor, Snake Valley, Carngham, Creswick and Mount Duneed. While loss of life was thankfully minimised, we should not forget that once again hundreds of Victorians have lost treasured possessions and have had to rebuild from scratch. Country Fire Authority volunteers have worked tirelessly to defend lives and property, and I thank them for their work, which continues in the east of the state. We are still in a dangerous period for bushfires. That danger exists until the end of the fire season, so as a community we must remain vigilant, especially as we near the tragic anniversaries of Black Saturday and the 30th anniversary of the Ash Wednesday bushfires.

Western Victoria Region: recreation facilities

Mr O'BRIEN — On another matter, last week I was pleased to represent both the Deputy Premier, Peter Ryan, and the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Hugh Delahunty, at a function in Linton to mark the completion of important recreation facilities in the towns of Linton, Rokewood and Teesdale. Our government has contributed approximately \$360 000 towards these facilities, which means these communities, particularly young people living in the communities, do not have to travel to access quality sporting infrastructure. In Linton the works comprised a revitalised rail trail featuring shelter and barbecue areas, railway platforms, historical storyboards, a rotunda and BMX facilities. Rokewood and Teesdale also gained their own BMX tracks.

I congratulate Golden Plains Shire Council on identifying the needs of the communities and on contributing \$160 000 towards these projects. I also congratulate the communities of Linton, Rokewood, and Teesdale on providing a combined \$10 800 towards the construction of BMX tracks. Safe BMXing to everyone in those communities.

EDUCATION: FUNDING

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house notes the Baillieu government's cuts to Victoria's education system, including —

- (1) its refusal to improve facilities for early childhood education and abandonment of occasional child care;

- (2) the devastating impact of the \$555 million pulled from the education budget, including cuts to vital programs like —
 - (a) the School Start bonus;
 - (b) Free Fruit Friday;
 - (c) the conveyance allowance;
 - (d) the education maintenance allowance; and
 - (e) the School Focused Youth Service;
- (3) the \$290 million TAFE cuts, which have forced the closure of campuses making it harder for Victorians to access vocational education;
- (4) the abandonment of the infrastructure renewal of Labor's Victorian schools plan;

and calls on the Premier to guarantee that he will not make further cuts to education and skills in Victoria.

In moving the motion I note there has been some confusion as to the exact wording because the motion as it appears on the notice paper is slightly different from what I submitted yesterday. The change is in the first two paragraphs.

It gives me no pleasure — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Can I just confirm with Mr Lenders that the party leaders were made aware of this change?

Mr LENDERS — Yes.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I understand that the problem was with administration in terms of lodging the correct version of this motion, but party leaders were advised of the change by Mr Lenders prior to the debate.

Mr LENDERS — To be succinct, in case members have read the motion on the notice paper and not the current motion, the only difference is that this motion includes occasional child care and removes one statistic from the motion; otherwise it is essentially the same motion.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, President, I did not hear that last bit. I ask you to ask Mr Lenders to repeat that.

Mr LENDERS — I am happy to. The only differences are that there is a figure of 90 per cent in the motion on the notice paper — that figure has been removed — and the motion includes a reference to occasional child care, which is not referred to in the motion on the notice paper that was circulated.

Mrs Peulich — So, (f)?

Mr LENDERS — The only material difference is in the first two paragraphs, which I am happy to re-read if that is of assistance. Only the introduction and paragraph (1) have been changed.

It gives me no joy to move this motion, particularly as a former Minister for Education, because what we see from this government is a series of cuts to the education budget. As is the case so often with this government, there is a pretence that more money is being spent when in actual terms there has been a cut. We can debate accounting terms and figures till the cows come home, but materially what the motion lists from (a) to (e) are five programs that unequivocally have been cut. The motion also lists the TAFE cuts and the abandonment of the Victorian schools plan — or certainly 60 per cent of that plan.

What we see is a decision by the government to cut services. Governments make choices, and if the government comes forward and says it is cutting \$558 million out of the education budget, for whatever reasons, we should still argue that — then we will have a legitimate public debate about priorities — but what this government does is use the eternal spin to say it is doing more when it is doing less.

Yesterday in this house I heard an interjection from a member of the government saying that the education budget has gone up by 3.8 per cent, and no doubt that claim would be on the cheat sheet that government members will use in speaking today. What I would say to any government member who wishes to use that statistic is that they should think about what they are saying. Inflation in this state is of the order of 2.5 per cent, as is forecast in the budget. Population growth is of the order of 1.7 per cent to 1.8 per cent, as is stated in the budget. It beggars belief to say 3.8 per cent is an increase — and I am saying this as a courtesy so that government members can think about what they will say — when it actually means that to provide the same service per student, per school in Victoria there will be a decrease.

That goes to what much of what this government does. It uses numbers and spin to pretend it is doing more when it is actually doing less. If it wants to have an honest debate about its priorities and choices, bring it on, but it should not hide behind this figure. In a time of population and inflation growth, any government can argue that its budget is the biggest ever, but in real terms the budget has been cut, and as evidence of this a series of programs that have been cut. The cuts to programs reflect choices made by the government.

Government is about choice. No matter how difficult the economic circumstances a government faces, it makes choices within the envelope it has, and the choices are reflections of the government.

In debating the education budget, a good start is to look at the annual appropriation bill and at how much is allocated to education. I am aware that this is only part of the picture, because there is own-service revenue and various other things that happen. It is fascinating to look at the annual appropriation bill, particularly expenditure in the 2011–12 bill on additions to the net asset base — there is a figure of \$56 million. In the 2012–13 bill the estimate is zero. It would be simplistic to say there are no additions to the net asset base, because there are other accounting measures through which it can be measured, so I will not pretend otherwise, but using a set of figures as an illustration is interesting. There is no appropriation at all in the appropriation bill for additions to the net asset base. That is extreme, because there are some appropriations through other measures. But when you look at the budget paper it is interesting symbolism that this government has moved in that particular direction.

Now I will focus on the motion. In preparing the motion for debate today, obviously opposition members decided it would be prudent to double-check my facts and figures and get some information on a few areas, so I thought I would look up exactly how the department of education describes the School Start bonus. There is a wonderful thing on 'Victoria Online', on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) website. It states that from 2013 the education maintenance allowance (EMA) payments to parents will be 'increased', while the School Start bonus has been 'discontinued'.

Let us look at that Orwellian language for a second. The website states that the School Start bonus has been 'discontinued', but the amazing thing about that is the education maintenance allowance paid to parents will be increased. Technically that is correct, but of course it hides the fact that half of the education maintenance allowance that goes to schools has been completely, absolutely and unequivocally discontinued, so the spin we see on the website is even greater. It is truly like something out of an Orwellian statement — 'More is less' or 'Less is more'. What we are seeing in effect is that the EMA has been cut in half for those schools which rely upon their component of it — it has been cut in half! — to fund equity programs that are critical for the most disadvantaged kids in the state. That funding has gone, but what is the government spin saying? It is saying that funding for those programs has been 'increased'. That is what you are led to believe if you

look at the DEECD information on the 'Victoria Online' website.

Let us go chronologically through the motion in front of us. The government has refused to improve facilities for early childhood education and has abandoned occasional child care. I will leave it to my colleague Ms Mikakos to speak on that subject with great authority and in more detail than I can. That will also ensure the interests of time, because a lot of members wish to speak on this motion.

There is the impact of \$555 million being pulled from the education budget, including cuts to vital programs — a cut of \$555 million to the education budget. I challenge government speakers to try to blame that on the Gillard government — members of the coalition government seem to blame everything else on the Gillard government — because the education budget in Victoria is generally 90 per cent funded by the state of Victoria, and Victoria's component has been cut by \$555 million. When we look at the annual appropriation bill, we are talking of a figure in excess of \$9 billion, so there is a big cut to the Victorian system.

Governments can hide these figures by talking about funding ratios for individual schools. They can talk about the student resource payments that go to individual schools and where it all works. They can try how they like to describe this, but what we are seeing here is that the School Start bonus has gone. For all those families who last week sent their children to prep or to year 7, the state allowance has gone. Talk about cost shifting! At the time when the federal government is bringing in an allowance, the state government pulls out its allowance. Talk about doing the reverse of the argument that this government uses all the time. The federal government has decided that there is a greater need for students, so it has put in this allowance, yet the state government has taken the money out.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr LENDERS — From Mr Ramsay's interjection, it is quite clear that yet again we are going to hear the spin that it is all the fault of someone else — it is the fault of the previous government, the federal government or a past government. There is always someone else to blame, and it beggars belief that if the standard response of a government is that its job is to blame someone else, why bother even running for office, and why spend 26 months trying to blame other people? Surely in government there is an agenda of programs to deliver to make Victoria a better place, not spin as to why everything else is wrong. If your sole agenda is to spend 26 months driving around in white

cars blaming someone else, you might as well go and do something else.

The first thing is that the School Start bonus is gone — completely gone. The second thing that has gone is Free Fruit Friday. We hear the Minister for Health talking in this place about health and disease prevention; we hear all this rhetoric. Yet here is a low-cost item that allows schools to provide fruit to students on a Friday. It is a practical measure to encourage health and better eating patterns.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr LENDERS — And it has gone, Mr Ramsay. This government has chosen to get rid of Free Fruit Friday.

We then move on to the conveyance allowance. Again, this is an amazing cut coming from a government that claims to be the voice of the 36 to 37 per cent of Victorian families that send their children to non-government schools. The ability of parents to send their children to a school of their choice with their transport subsidised by an education conveyance allowance has been cut by this government. The Minister for Education, Mr Dixon, did a bit of verbal gymnastics in trying to say it was not a cut, but the government has made a choice. Colleagues of mine in the Assembly have raised a number of cases where kids will now have to spend 1 or 2 hours getting to school. The allowance is gone — a choice the government made.

I touched on the education maintenance allowance in my introductory remarks. Again, this is financial assistance in the form of a means-tested allowance to assist families to give their kids an opportunity. The half of the education maintenance allowance that goes to schools to help with all those things that are of assistance is gone. Whether it be for excursions, extra school programs, welfare services or a range of other things that were extended to kids, that assistance is gone, and the schools are suddenly told, as they are with everything else, 'You've got to do more with less'. With the funding for the Victorian certificate of applied learning cut and the coordinators gone, the schools are told, 'You've got a global budget. Do it!'. The education maintenance allowance has gone — 'You've got a global budget. Do it!'. Free Fruit Friday has gone — 'You've got a global budget. Do it!'. In all of these areas the schools keep getting the same message, which is 'do more with less', not the same with less but more with less because the government keeps putting more expectations onto schools.

What we see here is a callous decision to make cuts which hurt the most vulnerable. I use that term deliberately. It is a conscious and callous decision to make these cuts where it hurts most, because the government can make different choices. In a budget of almost \$10 billion in education it can choose where it makes cuts. It can make choices just like it did with its very first decision — executive action no. 1 of this government, literally — to increase the cabinet by 10 per cent. That was a choice, and here it is a choice to make savings by cutting the education maintenance allowance that will hurt the most vulnerable.

Then we move on to School Focused Youth Service. Again, this was a program introduced by the Kennett government as part of an anti-suicide strategy. It was maintained by that government and by subsequent Labor governments. It is a focused program which deals with preventing youth suicide, and it will be cut from 30 June. I remind government members why the last paragraph of this motion calls on the Premier to guarantee that he will not make further cuts to education and skills in Victoria. It is because these cuts are being targeted in all the wrong areas.

I am delighted to see the Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Mr Hall, is in the chamber. We go on to the \$290 million TAFE cuts. I will not spend much time on that because I have spoken at length about the cuts in this chamber before, but I will again make the observation that when a government says it is struggling to balance the budget it needs to make choices. That is not the issue. The issue we have is that the cuts in the further education skills sector were disproportionately made in the public TAFE system. If the government's issue is managing the growth of the non-TAFE sector, then why have the cuts been so severely and disproportionately made to the public TAFE system. It is a choice of government.

I should mention that the final point of the motion, referring again to the spin by this government, is the timing of the announcement regarding education welfare officers. The welfare officers have just been announced by the government. I am sure —

Mr Ondarchie — A good initiative.

Mr LENDERS — Indeed, Mr Ondarchie, it is a good initiative. The government has not yet met the numbers it promised in its election commitment, but it still has two budgets to do so. It is a good initiative that continues programs started under Labor. It is an election commitment that was made and has been delivered in part. I give the government credit for that.

What baffles me is that this is a good program but it has been announced as part of the normal spin during return-to-school week. Any school in my electorate — and I am sure in Mr Ondarchie's electorate — that gets a student welfare officer, or pupil welfare officer, would like to be told that it has the money in October, November or December so it can engage the officer at the start of the school year and the officer can do some good in the school and be of assistance to families who could use their services. But, no, the Premier's press release has come during return-to-school week. This is either a money-saving device or a cynical gesture at the start of the school year. It does not give schools the opportunity to actually employ people.

The last thing I will touch on is an issue near and dear to my heart, which is the abandonment of Labor's Victorian schools plan. I find it fascinating that many times in adjournments during the last Parliament members of the then opposition would take the opportunity to get up in this house and demand that the then government prioritise the rebuilding of schools in their electorates. When budgets were being discussed in this house, members would get up day after day, mention individual schools and say the Victorian schools plan was not going fast enough. This commitment was to rebuild or modernise every single government school in Victoria over 10 years, towards which there was a \$500 million per year capital commitment before the federal stimulus money started coming in. Those opposite would demand more Building the Education Revolution schools for their areas and more Victorian schools plan funding for their areas because they said the work was not happening fast enough and their areas were missing out.

The then opposition went into the last election committing to spend 40 per cent of the school capital money that Labor had committed. I will not criticise the concept that it said it would spend 40 per cent of Labor's commitment — \$200 million rather than \$500 million. That was its commitment. However, what I find amazing is all those heroes and lions who in opposition were demanding money for their schools have suddenly become very meek lambs in government — because 40 per cent does not deliver what 100 per cent would. The now government went to the election saying it would spend \$300 million a year less in school capital. That is what it committed to, and it was elected. I find it amazing that the individual members of the opposition who were heroically fighting for all these schools when they were in opposition are mute now they are in government. I find that interesting. I am not criticising Mr Ondarchie, because he was not here. However, his colleagues in the chamber, bar Ms Crozier, were all here and at various

times all of them were making those courageous calls for more money to be spent on schools. That has been abandoned.

The Victorian schools plan, as a concept of rebuilding or modernising every government school in Victoria over a 10-year period, was being delivered ahead of schedule. More was spent than planned, partly as a result of the state's choices and partly from the commonwealth stimulus money that came in. The rebuilding or modernising of every school in the state was being delivered ahead of schedule. The new government does not have that commitment to state education. We see that not just in the capital program being abandoned but also in recurrent funding and in the budget papers, which show the government taking \$555 million out of the education system. These are the cuts, but the government will continually pretend it is doing more.

In closing, I will discuss how service delivery is measured. I advise the members opposite to read the words of Mr Peter Kavanagh from the last Parliament. He would often admonish me if as Treasurer I talked of dollar figures. Mr Kavanagh's words were wise, 'Don't just talk about dollars; talk about what you deliver with those dollars'. With the budget cuts brought in by the Baillieu government five specific program areas, four of them equity focused — the School Start bonus, Free Fruit Friday, the education maintenance allowance and School Focused Youth Service — are all being cut. No matter what nonsensical narrative government members wish to put up in defence, these programs have all been cut, thus the opportunities for young Victorians in our education system have been diminished, and that is a concern for the future of the state of Victoria.

I urge the house to support this motion. Most importantly I call on all government members to stand up in their cabinet and party rooms and oppose the cuts to education so that the next generation of Victorians has a better chance.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — That was probably not the best contribution Mr Lenders has made; it was very much a 'have your cake and eat it too' example.

Mr Barber — There is a degree of difficulty with Mr Lenders.

Mrs PEULICH — There is a degree of difficulty, even a number of them. I predicate my comments by saying it is a bit difficult to know exactly on which motion I am speaking, notwithstanding the clarification before us. Members like to prepare their material. The

central premise of the original motion, which involved cuts, has now been withdrawn. I will not speculate about the manner in which this occurred, but I note that it is the first time in my 16 years of parliamentary service that I am speaking to a motion that is not on the notice paper in precise terms. It is unprecedented.

A central point in the motion printed on the notice paper has been changed; it has actually been withdrawn. In its place Mr Lenders mentions another program, the occasional child-care program. Regrettably we have seen this program's demise because it was a federal government program. The federal government was responsible for this program, funding 70 per cent of it.

Those opposite scurried around and tried to find another program to add to the motion, one that might have suffered some ill fate as a result of the vindictive attitude of the federal government, in order to fill the gap of pulling the central premise of the original motion, which was that there has been a funding cut. There has not been a funding cut. Under this government there has been a consistent increase in allocations to private and state education. That is my first point.

In the next breath Mr Lenders said, 'It's not just about the inputs; it's about the outputs'. That is the first time I have heard a Labor MP use that rationale, and I have been around the block a few times.

Mr Drum — Mr Kavanagh was targeting him!

Mrs PEULICH — Yes, that is right. Mr Kavanagh was targeting Mr Lenders, who was education minister for barely nine months; it was probably not the most illustrious time of his career. Those opposite have immediately lost the argument by conceding that it is not just about the inputs and that there are no funding cuts. Any funding cuts that we have had to endure have been necessitated by Labor's gross financial mismanagement, as well as mismanagement within the education sector itself. Those debacles include the ultranet, Building the Education Revolution (BER) and a failure to deliver an orderly program of capital works.

I had the opportunity of visiting with Mr Elsbury a number of schools in the western suburbs which were literally falling over. Those schools had been represented by wall-to-wall Labor members. After Labor's 11 years in government these schools were falling over. That is an absolute disgrace about which we heard nothing.

Mr Lenders says it is not just about the inputs — that argument has been lost; he immediately conceded

that — it is about outputs. Yet since being elected to Parliament, firstly to the Legislative Assembly, in 1992, I have seen every accountability measure, innovation and reform that has tried to increase accountability and improve performance measures in education opposed by Labor and by the Australian Education Union (AEU). You cannot have it both ways.

I also believe it is not just about the inputs. I believe the outputs and outcomes are absolutely critical. The Labor Party has a track record of opposing absolutely everything that will reap rewards from the money that Victorians set aside and dedicate to that very important area, education.

I am passionate about education. I taught in the public education system for 15 years, and I was educated in the public education system as an immigrant child. Having come to Australia that was all my parents could afford. If we calculate how much money is spent on each Victorian child, we see that they ought to be getting the very best education possible. This is what this government is about. It is not just about injecting dollars — although we have done that, and I will address the individual points in a moment — it is about making sure that the money is used effectively. It is about the quality of teaching.

The Labor Party and the AEU have opposed every measure to lift the performance of the Victorian state education system, of Victorian schools and also of individual students, who deserve the very best education. The most deplorable example — and I heard not a word from Mr Lenders or any other Labor MP about it — was the Australian Education Union advising its members to withhold comments on student reports. I think that is morally bankrupt, and we heard not a word from Labor members and not a peep out of their AEU counterparts about it. It was a crime, it was a ransom note and the union should have been condemned, but we heard not a word. Every family has the right to know how their child has progressed, and it should not have been used as a bargaining tool in an industrial dispute. They should hang their heads in shame.

More specifically on the matters that have been raised by this motion, first of all, Mr Lenders talked about cuts. The cuts that first come to my mind are those that have been imposed upon us by the Gillard federal government, which seems to take a punitive attitude towards Victorians because they had the audacity to vote in a coalition government. Along every step of the way the federal government has tried to impose that financial pain. It is deplorable because it is the beneficiaries of those services that suffer.

Mr Lenders talks about the cuts, for example, to TAFE, notwithstanding the fact that Labor left gaping black holes throughout an uncapped, unfunded system. Labor's TAFE system did not deliver improvements in the number of people becoming skilled in the areas of skills shortages, which are listed nationally and are a basis on which we can improve people's chances of being able to migrate to this country. Labor was happy to have an open chequebook, forecasting an expenditure of something like \$800 million, which we saw rise to \$1.3 billion. Labor left a ticking time bomb and then had the audacity to criticise a necessary policy reform, which was, firstly, to financially manage the system and make it sustainable and, secondly, to make sure that important funds provided by Victorians and the Victorian government are directed towards the highest priorities. National skill shortages are a high priority.

However, from the federal Labor government we saw financial cuts to programs for skills and vocational education with a series of cuts to apprenticeship programs. This is from the party that supposedly represents the workers of Victoria. The series of cuts that directly targeted apprenticeships included \$380 million in net funding reductions for the Skills in Need program, including cutting extra incentives for employing mature apprentices.

Labor members have the audacity to stand on their soapbox and talk about funding cuts. Not a word do we hear about what their federal counterparts have done. No doubt this motion is intended to act as a platform so that state Labor MPs can fan out and take Gillard's message into their electorates, basically continuing what they did for 11 years, which is spin the truth. We heard that from Mr Lenders. One would think the message Victorians gave Labor MPs after 11 years of spinning and weaving stories would have taught them a lesson, but this motion shows that they learnt nothing.

There has been a \$380 million reduction by the Gillard Labor government in net funding for the Skills in Need program, a \$150 million cut to funding for the trade training centre programs for schools over the forward estimates, an \$11 million cut to the Australian Apprenticeships Access program that provides prevocational training, and a \$54.1 million cut to the Australian Apprenticeships Incentive program, which provides incentives to employers to take on apprentices. That is something that the party supposedly representing the workers is totally silent on.

The coalition has increased spending in schools by 3 per cent this year, despite facing the worst set of economic conditions for 20 years. It is very important

that this state has retained its AAA rating because at the end of the day those who are coming out of the school system will have a better chance of having jobs to go to. I am very proud that this government is hanging onto this rating and creating a legacy for Victorians. Our first budget included an additional \$1 billion for education, despite federal Labor cutting over \$4.1 billion from Victoria's bottom line prior to that budget. The budget included the single biggest capital investment in special and autistic schools in over a decade. Since coming to power we have invested in additional primary welfare officers; that announcement was made on 5 February.

I wish all of those who are starting the school year — students, teachers and families alike — the very best for a successful 2013. I regret that the AEU has been obstinate and has not been prepared to resolve the industrial dispute and come to a compromise that will see its members served well and the education system progress and become even stronger. The additional primary welfare officers are a wonderful opportunity to make sure we provide assistance and support when it is needed — in those early days. We are investing in maths and science specialists. Given the international statistics, I think that is a very wise investment. We are also investing in alternative settings education and school maintenance backlogs.

When the coalition was elected to government in 1992 there was a huge maintenance backlog of \$600 million left by the former Labor government. Labor may have lots of school plans, but at the end of the day it is about what funding is delivered for maintenance and capital works. That is where it counts, and Labor continually fails. Labor dissolved the physical resources management system — known as PRMS — and repackaged it so that schools had a greater discretion in the use of previously dedicated maintenance money. Some schools do a very good job, but regrettably some schools can fritter that funding away. As a result the backlog in maintenance has now accumulated to, I believe, about \$300 million, which is a conservative estimate.

We have the utility of the Building the Education Revolution (BER) buildings, videoconferencing and language clusters. I had the great privilege yesterday of welcoming our new Victorian language assistants, who will support the very strong foreign language program and policy that we have made a commitment to so that each Victorian child will have the opportunities that come with learning a foreign language. There is also new school construction, and land acquisition, especially in growth corridors, and there are many other critical areas of education.

The federal Labor government has saddled Victorians with huge BER overruns, which the state has had to pick up. That has thrown uncertainty over other capital works and maintenance programs that are needed. There was \$66 million per annum in funding for maintenance and replacement programs for another failed federal Labor revolution: the Digital Education Revolution program. I think the Victorian community is sick and tired of revolutions and would like to have sensible evolutions and the problems fixed.

I now come to some of the points that have been specifically mentioned in the motion. There is the School Start bonus. That was already ceasing under Labor but we extended it by one year for families on the education maintenance allowance (EMA). The School Start bonus and the EMA have now been combined, with every eligible family receiving more EMA funding. Families receiving EMA funding for students entering prep and year 7 will receive additional EMA funding in recognition of the increased cost of preparing for school in those years. I think that will be welcomed by eligible families. It is very commendable and a sensible evolution of state policy.

Free Fruit Friday was a lapsing program when this government came to office. The coalition government extended the program for a year — not wanting to make policy on the run — while developing a whole-of-government healthy eating lifestyle program to replace it. It has now done that by rolling out a \$40 million program to improve health outcomes for all Victorians. That is much more sensible, because we know that healthy eating and lifestyle patterns come out of the family home. I have seen some wonderful initiatives in our schools where the target is not just the children but the families, and is about teaching them how to buy and prepare nutritious food. These are things that many Victorians may take for granted, but we cannot take them for granted because we are a multicultural community and draw our population from so many countries around the world. Often these are people who may have spent years living in a refugee camp without the experience of handling money and purchasing food, let alone preparing nutritious meals and encouraging healthy lifestyles.

I think this is taking the policy to another level, one that is more effective and lasting. There are many schools that have continued Free Fruit Friday out of their own funds, and there is the capacity for them to do that. In addition I am aware that some schools have been the beneficiaries of funds made available by local organisations in order that the program can continue.

Mr Lenders motion also mentions the conveyance allowance, which was designed to assist non-metropolitan students to get to school and operated according to metropolitan boundaries. I know that those boundaries have not changed for a very long period of time — since 1983 — including in major metropolitan areas in the south-east and west, where there has obviously been substantial growth. The coalition government has made the allowance sustainable by redrawing those boundaries to reflect the urban growth boundary (UGB), and ensuring that the program is adjusted over time.

However, the allowance will be grandfathered for all those who currently access the allowance, and I think this is really important. It will be grandfathered for up to six years to assist in the transition to the new arrangements. I am sure that is a godsend and a great relief. It is a great evolution of policy; some changes needed to occur, but we also had to recognise that a transition period needed to be factored in. I am glad to see this compromise reached. Families within the UGB that are unable to access public transport will continue to receive the allowance. Students attending special schools are of course not affected by these changes.

The coalition government has increased the education maintenance allowance for every family receiving the EMA, including additional funding for students in prep and year 7. The schools component of the EMA has been discontinued and replaced with an additional \$61 million of funding provided to schools as part of an equity component of the student resource package (SRP). These changes mean that the most needy schools in Victoria are receiving additional funding to support disadvantaged students.

Another point in the motion relates to the School Focused Youth Service (SFYS). There have been absolutely no cuts to the School Focused Youth Service, a program initiated under the former coalition government in response to a report on youth suicide. It was designed to help coordinate community sector services for young people. Youth suicide can be a very disturbing experience for a community, many of whom want to come together in times of need. Mr Battin, the member for Gembrook in the other place, and I have recently been involved in some of these local efforts, and this is the way to go. Since its introduction, the programs under the SFYS have changed and now cover a range of different youth service needs, which were considered as part of the recent Cummins protecting Victoria's vulnerable children inquiry. I know that the government is taking a whole-of-government approach to the report of the inquiry, and I commend in particular Ms Wooldridge, the Minister for Community Services,

for some of the leading-edge work she is doing in this area to make sure the government's response is an effective one.

The government is developing a whole-of-government response to the recommendations of that report, and the review of SFYS is being done in that context to ensure that our service delivery aligns with the government's response to the report entitled *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*. Again, it is taking a professional, methodical approach to evolving and improving state policy to deliver better outcomes for Victorians. It is not making policy on the run. It is not resorting to spin, deception and manipulation, as the previous government did.

In relation to the part of the motion about the abandonment of the infrastructure renewal of Labor's Victorian schools plan, yes, we know that it was a schools plan; it was a concept. Mr Lenders himself admitted it was a concept, and the definition of a concept is an idea that is not implemented. Labor was able to gain some traction in some communities where it merged the building, the upgrade and the maintenance of schools into an entire concept, so a lick of paint in a school could be classified as being part of delivering new facilities to Victorian schools.

Mr Drum — A new bike shed.

Mrs PEULICH — A new bike shed, yes. Anything a school received was part of Labor's concept. However, after a decade of the Victorian Labor government, early estimates from our maintenance audit suggest that there is at least a \$300 million maintenance backlog in Victorian schools, and that does not take into account some of the very significant capital works needs that were ignored by Labor over that time. There are schools which today have a bigger maintenance backlog than the total amount spent on them under the Victorian schools plan because of Labor's smoke-and-mirrors, spin-over-substance approach to management of capital works, education and the maintenance of schools.

When we came to power, more than 200 schools had been left by the former state Labor government with promises of funding, but Labor had not set aside one dollar to deliver on that — not one dollar! There were promises to 200 schools but not a single dollar set aside. That is what Mr Lenders means when he talks about Labor's Victorian schools plan. It is a concept. Regrettably, many concepts fail to materialise.

The coalition has increased maintenance funding by 40 per cent to over \$100 million. It has committed to

fixing Labor's flawed model through a full maintenance audit, and we needed to do that, especially given the unexpected hits to the bottom line from the mismanagement of the federal government program. You can contrast the outcomes achieved by the independent-schools sector, which was able to manage its allocations, with the way things were managed in the state school system. Many independent schools were able to pretty much rebuild their entire school with their allocations, whereas in the state system we regrettably saw a lot of waste and a lot of inflated prices. The primary reason for that is the short time lines the federal government demanded as part of the deal at the time. The coalition government has committed to fixing Labor's flawed model through this full maintenance audit and a new project pipeline that will achieve better outcomes, hopefully at a lower cost, for all Victorian schools.

The motion also talks about \$290 million in TAFE cuts, which have forced the closure of campuses and made it harder for Victorians to access vocational education and training. Remarkably I had an opportunity to move a motion about how enrolments in TAFE had actually increased, and I look forward to the next update of those figures. Clearly that part of Mr Lenders's motion does not stack up. Many TAFEs are reporting to me privately in my capacity as a member of Parliament and Parliamentary Secretary for Education. They are telling me that the reforms have forced them to review how they do business but that they will come out stronger and better and will be delivering high-quality education to their school communities and their students. The same message was received when we recently visited Ballarat as part of a site visit — that is, that they will become stronger and better as a result of it, notwithstanding the discomfort of having to adjust to funding changes.

In 2012 the coalition provided budget funding for training delivery at the highest level ever, with \$1.2 billion per year on training subsidies alone. This is an extra \$1 billion over the next four years that will ensure that funding in the training system is at a sustainable level. Therefore more money is being provided for training in Victoria than in any other state or territory, so we should not listen to Labor spin. We had 11 years of Labor spin. Look at the facts — that is, that Victoria provides more money for training than any other state or territory and more subsidised training is taking place here than anywhere else.

Over the next four years we will be spending around \$5 billion on training subsidies to help Victorians get skills that will provide stable and rewarding employment. This is the largest public investment in

training in Victoria's history. It is important that we focus on the skill shortage areas because if we do not address those as a nation, the cost of construction in particular and the cost of services in those skill shortage areas will end up growing astronomically. Those tabs are picked up by Victorian families, Australian families, agencies, the Victorian taxpayer and so forth. You cannot continue sticking your head in the sand. The former Labor government set \$855 million aside for that training in 2011–12, and it has cost us over \$1.3 billion. That is an example and a reflection of Labor's financial management and accounting. That is a blow-out of more than \$400 million.

I will not recap the whole story of the market-driven system that was introduced by Labor in 2008. Labor did none of the hard work which is required to ensure that we have an effective and efficient system. It failed to make those necessary changes to subsidies or fees. Its policies drove thousands of students into highly subsidised, low-fee, cheap and quick courses that gave them no sustainable job outcomes. That is Labor's education story. I will just repeat that: it drove thousands of students into highly subsidised, low-fee, cheap and quick courses that gave them no sustainable job outcomes. That is what Labor wants. It wants to take away the increased funding in courses that deliver in skill shortage areas, and it wants to return to the past. That is what Labor wants. That is what this motion is partially about.

We want to see Victorians young and old take up training that leads to real jobs which support them and their families. We want to see Victorians gain skills that return an economic benefit to the state and to the nation. That is the reason we had to bite the bullet. That is the reason we have been exposed to some real pain. The government's reforms coincided with the local government elections, and every left-wing councillor or council candidate jumped on the issue because they believed it could give them a bit of traction. The reforms also coincided with various industrial campaigns, but at the end of the day when Victorians understand the basis for the government's reforms and have a look at the results they will understand that it is not just about the inputs; it is also about the outputs. We are addressing both the inputs and the outputs, unlike Labor.

That is why we have changed the way we fund training to make sure that it is better targeted and that it is a reliable pathway to real jobs. Under the new subsidy levels ranging from \$2 to over \$10 per hour of training, the courses of greatest public value will receive the highest level of government investment, while the courses of lowest public value will receive the least.

That does not mean that people cannot still find or deliver those courses that they want that perhaps do not receive high levels of subsidy. However, that is the policy decision and the hard work that had to be done, and the state and the nation will be better for it.

All apprenticeship training and areas of skill shortages will be better supported by an increase in training subsidies paid to the provider, notwithstanding the Gillard government's cuts to apprenticeship funding. Other key training areas, such as aged care, health care, nursing, disability, information technology, telecommunications and renewable energy have increased funding. That is in recognition of the employment needs in Victoria.

This is an area that I could talk about ad infinitum, but I need to spread myself across the various dot points. I would like to come to the next point, which talks about infrastructure renewal under Labor. I would like to focus first of all on the capital funding of early childhood services and what the facts are in relation to this issue. The total Baillieu government investment in children's facilities capital programs since December 2010 has been \$85 million. This is an amazing story of this government. Those funds are a combination of state funds and funds prioritised through the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education.

These grant rounds have leveraged an additional \$138 million from local government, private and community-based organisations. It brings the total state-supported investment in children's projects to \$223 million since the Baillieu government took office. Every eligible capital grant application that has been received under both of the Baillieu government grant rounds has been funded. The Baillieu government has allocated more funding to children's services infrastructure in two years than the former Labor government managed to allocate in its last five budgets. So which is the party that protects the interests of education in real terms, on the ground, in terms of the inputs and outputs? It is the coalition and not Labor.

The Baillieu government has delivered on its election commitments, and it will continue working with early childhood services to provide the next generation of children's centres and kindergarten facilities. I would like to touch on some of those examples. I will just look at my region, where we have seen a phenomenal allocation of funds through the capital grants funding program under the terms of this government. In the city of Casey, St Clare's Early Learning Centre, Rivercrest Early Learning Centre and Tender Loving Childcare Centre received some very substantial capital grants. In the city of Greater Dandenong, grants were provided to

Dandenong North Preschool, Dandenong South New Early Years Facility, Dandenong West Kindergarten, Darren Reserve Kindergarten, Heatherhill Kindergarten, Heritage Preschool, Keysborough Kindergarten and Springvale South Kindergarten. In the Frankston City Council area, a grant was allocated to Banyan Fields Child and Family Centre. In Kingston City Council area grants were allocated to Bonbeach Preschool, Clayton South Children and Family Centre — which I recently announced in the local paper — Edithvale Integrated Children's Centre, Eversham Road Preschool, Kids Time Early Learning Centre and Parkdale Integrated Children's Hub. That particular commitment is nearly \$7 million; it is a huge commitment.

This government floated the idea of the co-location of services back in 1994 following an inquiry. I participated in that inquiry as a member of the joint all-party Community Development Committee. Kindergartens, early primary schools, secondary schools and other allied services are being encouraged to co-locate to share and make more efficient their administration, maintenance and so on. Only now are we beginning to more readily unroll that. It is a good idea that has been long in the making. There is also Patterson Lakes Kindergarten, Balcombe Preschool and Baxter Preschool; it is a huge list.

This is a great story, and I would like to commend Wendy Lovell, the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, on what she is doing to deliver better capital funding for early childhood services. I would also like pay tribute to Wendy Lovell for lobbying the federal government for more child-care places following the demise of the occasional care program after federal Labor ceased providing funding for it. Ms Lovell was up-front and said that if federal Labor reinstated its funding, Victoria would bring funds to the table. Since then we have had additional places created through another funding round — that is, one round has been funded. I note that in the first funding round, the City of Kingston did not receive federal funding for occasional child care. Apparently there will be future funding rounds, but clearly funding will be provided in a different form. I hope more is made available by the federal Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare, Kate Ellis, although I am not sure whether she is still the federal minister at the moment, given the change of personnel in the federal government. I would certainly like to commend Wendy Lovell for the work she has done in at least getting some movement on that front.

This is another one of Labor's attempts to grandstand on an issue for which it has a terrible record. It is good

at carping and whingeing as it tries to play to its audience and prop up a federal government, which is in its dying days — it has lost the house and is now trying to save the furniture. It thinks education is part of its story, but if we have a look at the facts, we see that the inputs, outputs, reforms, the evolution — not the revolution — and the fixing up of the messes left behind has typically always been done by a coalition government. It is a coalition government again this time around.

What members need to keep in mind is the story and narrative coming out of the federal scene. It is a very poor story. The Prime Minister is possibly genuinely interested in seeing some improvements — I have to give her some credit. She introduced My School and the national assessment program — literacy and numeracy reporting. That was an attempt to bring greater accountability and transparency to a system, but that was pretty much it. Every other initiative has buckled, and important opportunities to improve outcomes were squandered. A lot of the international data for Australia shows that we have to do it better. Everyone who is a stakeholder in the story has to do it better — the Australian Education Union, our schools and communities, parents and governments at all levels. They are important opportunities. We are talking about people's lives, and we have to get the story right.

If members look at the Gonski funding debacle, they will see federal legislation has been passed. It is just grandstanding; it means nothing. There is no substance, just motherhood statements. There was initially no money for the recommendations made in the Gonski report — though it is not just about inputs.

Mr Barber — That is why we need the mining tax.

Mrs PEULICH — We will let voters decide on what taxes they want to pay. It is about how you raise money and its impact, but it is also about how you utilise money. I would not be looking to the Greens to provide much leadership on how to utilise and spend money.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — Mr Barber is in the wrong party. His reputation is being maligned by the party to which he belongs. He should reconsider with whom he wishes to be associated with. He is better than that; he is a standout. If he wants nomination for federal Parliament, I will sign his nomination forms.

Back to the issue of Gonski funding, initially there was an anticipated cost of \$5 million. Now it is \$6.5 million. There is no detail. Everyone is nervous about how it is

going to impact on them. How is it going to impact on schools, especially independent schools which take their fundraising very seriously? We have heard assurances that no school will be worse off, but we have not seen any of the details. There has been a failure to exercise leadership on the national front, notwithstanding the very serious issues that we can see from international data and international trends.

This government is punching above its weight. We had a legacy we have had to address. We have to try to fix Labor's problems but at the same time try to take education forward. I commend the government. This motion is a nonsense. If members have a look at the arguments being waged by Mr Lenders, they will see he defeats his own arguments. No wonder he was the Victorian Labor education minister for only nine months. I have great pleasure in encouraging members who have any common sense to vote this motion down.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I am pleased to join the debate on the motion from Mr Lenders, which essentially calls on government MPs in this house to stand up for public education in Victoria and stop the relentless assault of budget cuts that has been the defining feature of this government for over two years.

The motion from Mr Lenders notes that some \$550 million has been pulled from the education budget, and yet Mrs Peulich spoke at some length about spending and investment. She had the audacity to say, among other things, that spending on skills and TAFEs is higher than it was under Labor. That is completely impossible to reconcile with the experience of TAFE students and TAFE teachers across Victoria. It is complete bunkum. It is a courageous defence from the government, but it completely lacks credibility. If TAFEs are having a whole lot of extra dough injected into them, why are courses and campuses being closed? Why are there leaked summary documents of transition plans foreshadowing further cuts and closures? It is beyond belief. Even children in the early years of their education experience would know that it does not make sense. It just does not stand up.

Conservative party MPs are not committed to public education, unlike Labor MPs. As a member of the Bracks and Brumby governments, I was proud to stand in this place and say, as we did from time to time, that education was our government's no. 1 priority. There are few things more important than investing in the future of Victoria and the education of our young people. It breaks our hearts to watch this government rip funding support out from under public education, out from under the students in those schools, because

what we know from travelling within our electorates and from the conversations we are having with people across Victoria is that these cuts are disproportionately affecting those who have the least ability to go out in the marketplace to another education system.

The motion from Mr Lenders details a number of ways in which this assault on Victoria's young people and their future is occurring. Consider the School Start bonus. First, the government means-tested — and limited it to the people who were most deserving and in need of it. Then the government took the bonus away in the next budget. The School Start bonus was a modest program which recognised that families with prep and year 7 students faced significant expenses at the start of a school year. School returned last week in Victoria.

As a regional MP, when I am in Parliament my conversations with my children about their day at school are through brief phone calls here and there. But I spoke to my daughter yesterday evening, and I asked her, 'How was your day?', and she replied, 'It was fantastic!'. I thought, 'Wow, this grade 6 thing is going okay'. When I asked her what was so fantastic about her day, she said, 'My buddy didn't run away today'. At our house we are living the prep experience again vicariously. There is this gorgeous little preppy, whose photo has been on my fridge all summer, who is my daughter's buddy. For whatever strange stroke of fortune this little person who is starting primary school has had my daughter appointed as his mentor. My conversation with my daughter immediately returned me to seven years earlier — that anxiety about a child become a prep student or about being a prep student.

I am sure other members have five-year-olds and six-year-olds in their lives, whether they be family friends or relations, who are going through this. This is an incredibly exciting moment for a family. Last Wednesday or Thursday you just needed to go to any coffee shop near any primary school anywhere in the state to find mums and dads who had just dropped off their preppy for day one of the school year dabbing their cheeks with a tissue and having a coffee to recover from the trauma of that massive moment of cutting the apron strings. Those people ought to have confidence that the government is supporting their kids' education to the fullest extent possible.

Mr Ramsay — What is going to happen when they cannot go on the 14th because all the teachers have gone on strike — no school to go to?

Ms PULFORD — The last time I saw the teachers on strike they were out the front of Mr Ramsay's office, and he came out and said some reassuring things to

them about how he would take their case up with the government and about how he supported teachers and public education.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ondarchie) — Order! Mr Ramsay!

Ms PULFORD — The families of prep students — and seven years later year 7 students — taking that massive step into their new schools used to get more support from government than they do now. This is an expensive time of year for people with schoolkids. Schoolbooks, new shoes and school uniforms all need to be provided. Significant expenses are incurred, and the School Start bonus sought to provide assistance at that critical moment in the lives of families to ease the pressure in what is a period of transition in any family. This government means tested it and then it took it away.

Mr Lenders's motion talks about Free Fruit Friday, and Mrs Peulich talked about a vastly expanded scheme around child nutrition. Any additional information we can give young people about nutrition is of course a good thing. Mrs Peulich said that in some schools others are providing the fruit. Some schools in my electorate have been able to continue the Free Fruit Friday program or run various equivalent programs with the assistance of the local greengrocer or fruit and vegetable store. But I think what Mrs Peulich was indicating when she talked about that was the conservative parties' view about the role of government — that is, that the role of government is to facilitate the private sector doing things like looking after the nutritional needs of schoolkids. That is just something we will have to disagree on.

Mr Lenders's motion talks about the education conveyance allowance. I spoke with some families in my electorate who are affected by this. Their children attend a non-government school at a comparatively lower cost than a private school, where the fee range is of the order of \$3000 a year to \$7000 a year. The increased costs caused by the redefining of the criteria for the conveyance allowance mean an increase in the cost of education from \$3000 to \$4500. Multiply that by a few kids, and suddenly this has blown beyond the reach of the budgets of those families. I spoke to the principal of that school, who was incredibly concerned about the impact this would have on enrolments and therefore on class sizes and so on.

The School Focused Youth Service is the latest on the government's hit list, the latest area for 'savings' —

and I stress the inverted commas. It provides assistance to children and young people between the age of 10 years and 18 years who are at risk. 'At risk', means at risk of harmful relationships, drug and alcohol use, self-harm or suicide.

In my electorate the people in schools I have spoken to about this are deeply concerned about how they will provide the same type of support to those young people. They do not feel equipped to do it; they think it is a specialised skill that is provided by appropriately qualified individuals in organisations that do this kind of work. These are counsellors who understand the region, understand the issues and are appropriately qualified to assist young people at risk to a greater degree than the school support staff I have been talking to in schools. People who believe this responsibility will fall to them feel that they are about to deal with such difficult issues involving kids in crisis or at risk of being in crisis.

Mr Lenders' motion also refers to the abandonment of infrastructure renewal in the Victorian schools plan. As members will know — even though government members will try to rewrite the history books on this — Labor had a 10-year plan to revitalise school infrastructure across the state. This plan was already five years in and more than halfway completed, and there was a very real expectation from schools that were progressing through the steps of the plan and whose infrastructure renewal had not yet commenced that this was plan would not be put at risk with a change of government.

The then opposition leader and now Premier, Ted Baillieu, did not tell the Victorian public before the election that the Victorian schools plan would be jettisoned. In fact he gave Victorians exactly the opposite impression about what would happen in schools, with his promises about teachers remuneration and support for education. Many school infrastructure projects in Victoria — some 500 — that were yet to be completed in the second half of the Victorian schools plan are still needed. Some of these schools are in pretty good nick, but some are in an appalling condition.

I will take a moment to explain the shemozzle this has created in Horsham. The Horsham community has a fabulous education precinct, with several schools located together on a parcel of land: a special school, a primary school and a secondary school, the latter of which is the most significant state secondary school in the region. The member for Lowan, who is the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Mr Delahunty, gave those school communities every expectation that a coalition government, if elected, would support school rebuilding

in those communities. During the 2010 election Labor announced that it would fund the rebuilding of the special school and in doing so indicated that we understood that this needed to occur in conjunction with the rebuilding of the secondary school, because they are on the same campus and it is just about impossible to do one without doing the other because of the way the site works.

After a time the government was shamed into funding the special school, and the rebuilding work has been under way for a little while now and is much welcomed by the community — it was a desperately needed school revitalisation project — but the consequences this has had for Horsham College, the secondary school, have been catastrophic. Students attend school on what is basically a building site. To move from one classroom to another between sessions at times involves navigating a 10 or 15-minute walk around the construction site in the middle of the school. This school needs to be rebuilt. It does a fantastic job of providing education for kids in Horsham, but this is a project the government gave every expectation it would support, and the community needs the government to support it. The community needs the rebuilding to occur.

The government talks a really good game about needing to promote country Victoria so that people from Melbourne will move to regional Victoria. Population attraction is an important part of regional development strategies, and what people in Horsham tell me is that when they go to sell their community as a place in which to live, work and invest, as is done by other regional communities, the first thing people want to know before relocating their families and businesses and making a big investment seeking to employ a whole lot of people is, 'What are the services like? Tell us about the hospital. What does the school look like?'. At that point that community is at a disadvantage in terms of attracting people. I urge the government to get on with this and to put this matter high on the list in its budget deliberations. I certainly hope funds will be found by this government in the May budget to complete the education precinct at Horsham and enable the Horsham College rebuild to occur.

At the other end of the electorate, and still on the subject of school infrastructure, is the community of Bannockburn. I will give a different example. James Merlino, Deputy Leader of the Labor Party, shadow Minister for Education and member for Monbulk in the Assembly, and I went to the school in Bannockburn late last year. What is clear to anyone who visits that school is that it is bursting at the seams. The school is doing a fabulous job in difficult circumstances. Bannockburn is

a rapidly growing community, and the school is just not big enough anymore. The other problem in Bannockburn is that there is no secondary school.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Ms PULFORD — In the entire shire of Golden Plains there is no secondary school. Mr Ramsay talks about the investment in early years infrastructure in the Golden Plains shire. There has been recognition by this government and by the previous government of the need for additional places in child care in Bannockburn and other parts of the shire.

However, the rapid population growth means that the new infrastructure that was commenced by the Labor government and has been completed since is now full, and there are waiting lists in all early years services in the Golden Plains shire. The council there planned for the future and for population growth and has a good strategy around meeting the needs of the early years. However, I was talking about the other end of the spectrum.

When kids in Bannockburn get to the age of 12 or 13, when people head off to year 7, they get on a bus and roll out of town. That has obvious consequences of much longer school days. There are consequences for the community with things like sporting clubs and disconnection from the community. They have much longer days. A lot of the parents of those kids work in Geelong, so they are hanging out in Geelong rather than in Bannockburn until mum and dad have finished work. You can see the impact of stripping out 1200 to 1300 kids each day from a town that size.

Land has been acquired for an expanded school at Bannockburn so that the primary school can relocate to the new site and can grow, over the years, to a P–12 school. Again this is something that the government needs to address.

Mr O'Brien — That is something this government did — buy the land.

Ms PULFORD — I think Mr O'Brien might want to check his calendar on that. The land has been acquired, but it is a little hard to teach year 11 English in a field. The time has come for this community to have a secondary school. The population will continue to grow. I do not think those members opposite from western Victoria would deny that there is a need for a secondary school in Bannockburn, and I hope behind the scenes they are furiously lobbying the ministers in their government so that this funding will be in the budget in May. These are just a couple of examples of

meritorious school infrastructure projects, and they need to be delivered.

We are still determined that education will be Labor's no. 1 priority. This is a very exciting time of year for young people across Victoria. It is an exciting time for their parents as they watch them trip out the door, happily going to learn all the things they need to learn from when they are little in the early years services and kindergartens right through their education experience. For some that will mean going on to year 12 and university. For others it will be training at TAFE or undertaking an apprenticeship. These things are critically important. We are deeply concerned that this government is not committed to public education. Today we call on government members to stand up in the party room, to hold the line around the table in the cabinet room and to stop the cuts in education so that Victoria's children can have the kind of start to their education that they deserve. I commend Mr Lenders's motion to the house.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — It gives me great pleasure to speak in response to the motion moved by Mr Lenders. Having listened to Ms Pulford's contribution, I truly believe that Ms Pulford has in her heart a strong commitment to good education for all those attending school. That was clarified to me by the fact that she came to my office with her children and a small congregation of teachers who wanted to pursue with the government the ongoing enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations — and that is good. I welcomed that delegation into my office and gave them a cup of tea. In fact they did not want a cup of tea, but they wanted some discussion, and I facilitated that. I note that we do engage; the opposition did not offer that facility when in government. In fact it closed the schools to the then opposition members so that they could not inspect and discuss with providers the issues around school education.

I listened to the rhetoric and I truly do not think Ms Pulford believes what she says. I suspect it was a faction sheet — from the left or right; I am still not clear where she sits — with different dot points they have told her to make. In the two years I have been representing the Ballarat region there has been an extraordinary amount of investment from preschool level right through to secondary education in that region. I will spend some time going through that.

In relation to the conveyance allowance, it is easy to see that Ms Pulford has rarely escaped the city limits in relation to conveyance and/or provision for both primary and secondary schools. I can vaguely remember when I was a primary school student at the

Birregurra Primary School. I might add that that is one school that desperately needs upgrading. It was a provisional temporary school right through Labor's 11 years of reign, and not one cent towards a full upgrade was given to that school. My hope is that at some point it will be given priority. That aside, we spent an hour travelling to school, back and forth. I remember distinctly the little glass milk bottles we had — a third of a pint — and the cream used to curdle every Monday morning because it was left out in the sun. It was a good decision not to provide the curdled milk on those occasions, and I suspect the fruit issue is one of a similar nature in that the government has looked at better ways to provide proper nutrition for students, whether they be at primary or secondary school.

I also congratulate the Minister for Education, Mr Dixon, who altered the requirements around access to the conveyance allowance, and from the discussions I have had with many of the schools around the western region it is clear that they are very happy with the new conveyance allowance arrangements.

In relation to funding in the Ballarat region I will identify some significant investments. I note that since December 2010 the Baillieu government has invested over \$85 million into the children's facilities program, through a combination of state funds and funds prioritised through the national partnership agreement on the national quality agenda for early childhood education and care. The Baillieu government also managed to leverage \$138 million from local governments and private and community-based organisations.

I congratulate the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Ms Lovell, who through her portfolio has been instrumental in providing significant funds to upgrade and replace old facilities with new child-care facilities right across the western region, and I might take a moment to identify a few of those. The city of Ballarat, where Ms Pulford lives, has been very supportive of the investments the Baillieu government has made in the Ballarat region and likewise the government has been pleased with the work undertaken by the Ballarat City Council in accessing those grants through Minister Lovell's office.

The Ballarat Specialist School kindergarten received \$531 750 in the recent grants announcement. John Burt, who manages that specialist school, is also the new mayor of the Ballarat City Council and has been very supportive of our investment in education in Ballarat. Brown Hill Kindergarten, which I attended with Minister Lovell last year to announce the government's

\$40 million statewide investment into child-care and learning facilities, was the recipient of \$300 000 to upgrade its multipurpose room. Buninyong Preschool, which I also attended, was the recipient of \$300 000 for a \$524 000 project to upgrade its early learning facility.

Goodstart Early Learning Delacombe was the recipient of \$279 000 to upgrade its early learning facility. Linda Brown Pre School Centre, where I actually sat cross-legged with a number of four and five-year-olds, was also very pleased to receive \$300 000.

Mrs Petrovich — Did they get up quicker than you?

Mr RAMSAY — I have to say I could not walk for a while, Mrs Petrovich.

Ms Crozier — Little chairs.

Mr RAMSAY — Yes, Ms Crozier, little chairs are very easy to sit down on but very hard to get out of, but nevertheless the children are now going to have an enlarged multipurpose room. Midlands Kindergarten received \$600 000 for an upgrade to its new early learning facility; Miners Rest early learning facility received \$600 000 towards its \$800 000 new early learning facility; Mount Clear Community Kindergarten received \$300 000 towards its \$429 000 upgrade; Sebastopol West Kindergarten received \$300 000 for its \$427 000 upgrade; and the University of Ballarat child-care centre at Mount Helen received \$484 000 to build a new early learning facility with a total project cost of \$645 000.

Wendouree Children Services, where I made the announcement, received \$300 000 out of \$736 000. Bannockburn Kindergarten — which Ms Pulford conveniently forgot to mention in her contribution — received \$300 000 of the \$571 560 investment as part of an ongoing investment in Bannockburn education facilities. I might add it was the Baillieu government which purchased the land and provided the planning provisions for the proposed Bannockburn secondary school site. Obviously, we Western Victoria Region members are strongly advocating for a new school to be delivered in that town when we can prioritise that investment in the budget.

I was at Meredith Kindergarten a few weeks ago where I announced \$600 000 for a new early learning facility to complement the ongoing investment the government made to the school and to the community house precinct. I can assure members that the Meredith community is absolutely thrilled to receive \$600 000 from the Baillieu government for an \$800 000 project. That is a significant investment in that small rural town.

Rokewood Kindergarten, which I also visited, received \$228 000 for an early learning facility upgrade, and that is a totally funded project from the Baillieu government. Horsham North Kindergarten received funding for an upgrade, and I note that Ms Pulford mentioned Horsham but conveniently forgot to mention the \$276 298 of a \$306 000 project which was invested into that kindergarten upgrade.

I will refer to some significant announcements I have made in the western region on behalf of the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development before I move on to the other issues that Mr Lenders raised in his motion. In Melton a significant investment of \$1.5 million has gone to the Botanica Springs Children's and Community Centre as part of a \$5.1 million project. I congratulate the Melton City Council on its work in the preparation of the grant application and also for the investment that it is making to that significant children's and community centre.

I also mention the Avoca Children's and Family Centre, where I personally spent a lot of time, and I know my colleagues David O'Brien and David Koch, as members of Western Victoria Region, have spent a lot of time with the Pyrenees Shire Council to make sure that the grant application for this centre was successful. I was at the opening and had great pleasure in making that significant announcement for the Avoca community. It was pleasing on that day to meet a parent who had in fact been a student of that old kindergarten and a mother of a child who had also been a student, and was now a teacher and will be part of the new infrastructure that will be opened very shortly.

I will also mention that Yuille Park Children's Centre at Wendouree got a grant for \$300 000 as part of a \$550 000 project to accommodate long day care and early childhood training.

The message I am giving this morning is that there have been significant investments in child care and community centres not only in the Ballarat region but also within the western region. I cannot take at face value or accept that Ms Pulford was serious when she talked in her contribution about the government neglecting or not investing appropriately in the western region. I suspect she was just working off a sheet that had been provided to her.

Mrs Petrovich — A cheat sheet.

Mr RAMSAY — I was being a bit kind — maybe not a cheat sheet. In relation to primary and secondary, Ms Pulford again forgot to mention — and I am not even sure she is aware — that we are putting

\$18 million into the Phoenix P-12 College. This is one of the largest and most significant investments in the Ballarat region for over 100 years, and it will culminate in a significant new facility. It was previously known as Sebastapol College and will now be known as Phoenix P-12 College. We have committed \$10 million in the 2012-13 budget and another \$8 million from future budgets. That is a huge investment, an investment that Ballarat has not seen for many years.

I will also mention the government's commitment of \$21 million to build the Manufacturing Technology Training Centre at the University of Ballarat. This industry skills centre is a response to our reforms to the vocational education and training (VET) sector and TAFE funding. Ms Pulford also talked about TAFE cuts, as did Mr Lenders in his motion. However, all the TAFEs in my region — in particular the Gordon, South West TAFE in Warrnambool and the University of Ballarat — have told me that they understand the need for reform and that there is going to be some rationalisation of service delivery and programs but, at the end of the day, they are willing to partner with government on how they can best deliver programs that meet the needs of the job market. I particularly congratulate the University of Ballarat and its vice-chancellor, David Battersby. He has been working tirelessly to provide programs that students can participate in and that will give them the appropriate skills to go straight into the job market. This is the focus of the government's reform in the VET sector. We are providing specialised skills programs that meet job market and industry needs.

I congratulate the universities, the TAFEs and the independent private service operators on the work that is being done. They are working together to find a way to best utilise the dollars available with their service delivery. In that respect I congratulate the University of Ballarat on the Manufacturing Technology Training Centre, which is part of that process. The Minister for Major Projects, Denis Napthine, the Minister for Technology, Gordon Rich-Phillips, and I attended an event at the university where the announcement was made about the new IBM Asia-Pacific centre of excellence for software testing at Ballarat. This will provide not only job opportunities but also opportunities for students doing programs to get on-the-job skills at IBM. That is a great model: the university, students and private enterprise working together to provide upskill training and potential job opportunities in the marketplace.

I am not sure what else I can add. Mrs Peulich covered many of the specific issues in relation to Mr Lenders's motion. I am not clear what Mr Lenders hopes to

achieve by bringing this motion to the house. It is very ambiguous. It is not clear whether the motion is just another opportunity for him to have a rant and rave and fill up Wednesday morning's opposition business. We are happy to oblige, and I am sure the next speakers from the government side will take that opportunity, but it would have been much more productive if the opposition had brought to the council opportunities to discuss ways of improving the system so it can help and support the government, such as getting the teachers back to work and stopping this potential strike. Ms Pulford cried crocodile tears earlier when she said her children love prep and love going to school. They will not be able to go to school on 14 February, unless there is a ruling against the strike. No teachers will be at the school. I hope Ms Pulford takes some credit for our children not being able to attend school, even if they want to. My two daughters are both schoolteachers and want to work. They are in the system, and regrettably they will not have the opportunity to work if the Australian Education Union decides to go ahead with its planned industrial action.

In a nutshell, the government has made the hard decisions. It had some budgetary constraints, and much of that has already been publicly identified. Every time there is a reform for whatever reason the opposition goes into overdrive to try to push back, but the reality is that the VET sector needed serious reform. It was acknowledged by all education providers and leaders in the industry that it was an unsustainable model we took on as a new government. It was bleeding the coffers dry, and in relation to their delivery of programs many of the TAFEs were not meeting what industry needed and the job market wanted. I congratulate the Baillieu government on making the hard decision to push those reforms through.

I see there has been a significant uptake, both in the private providers and TAFE systems, of students wanting to attend courses that have the specific purpose of meeting job needs. That clearly demonstrates that the decisions we made were the right ones in identifying those courses that meet job industry needs. I congratulate the TAFEs, private providers and universities — including the University of Ballarat, the Gordon, South West TAFE and Deakin University — that have knuckled down and provided those courses for which we are seeing a good uptake, with a huge increase in enrolments. I congratulate the University of Ballarat on providing a technical skills training centre particularly relating to apprenticeships and trades training. There is a significant need in the jobs market for these specialised skills, and each of those providers is embracing this opportunity.

I mentioned that we have made alterations to the conveyance allowance. I congratulate the Minister for Education, Martin Dixon, on that. Schools have contacted me to say that they are happy we have responded to their concerns about the allowance.

In closing I will read from Mr Lenders's motion:

That this house notes the Baillieu government's cuts to Victoria's education system ...

I say to Mr Lenders that I have noted it, but I do not know what it means. It has no relationship or bearing on what is happening out there in the real education system. I oppose the motion because all it does is note, so I note the rhetoric and lack of credibility in the motion.

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — I rise to speak in support of Mr Lenders's comprehensive motion to the Parliament. After listening to the contributions that have been made by members of the government and noting the coverage in the media and the response across the community, I find it quite difficult to assess which portfolio has proven to be the biggest disaster of all those engulfing the Baillieu government. But the education portfolio, presided over by the Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Mr Hall, and the Minister for Education, Mr Dixon, must be in the top two or three.

The government is clearly reeling from the massive community reaction to its \$555 million cut to the education budget because individuals and families are materially and directly affected by these measures. The education maintenance allowance, for example, especially affects families, which rely on it to pay for children's books, equipment and clothing. In many cases schools are out of pocket because they are supporting parents by covering these instalments for them.

Over January we read that some schools could be pressured to pass on costs to parents because they are finding that they simply do not have the money to do what they always funded as a matter of course. An example of that is internet access, something you would expect every school to be able to provide.

We know that schools have had to draw down on their own funds to pay for Reading Recovery programs that have been cut by the government. It is fine for Mrs Peulich to say that schools have the resources to do this. As Mr Lenders and Ms Pulford said, schools have a global budget. Everything has to be drawn down from that increasingly diminished and meagre budget. But of course it does not work like that.

The examples of Reading Recovery and internet access in schools affect every school in this state and every family with school-aged children. The direct experience of the impact of those cuts has resulted in the massive reaction against the government that I mentioned. What is not experienced quite so directly by families — but which is still not lost on them — is the massive sacking of public servants. This includes men and women who work in the education department and the regional offices and who deliver important services to school communities. The education budget cuts have also impacted disproportionately on the most vulnerable students — those from low-income families, for example — and sometimes this cuts in at the level impacting on the viability of the Free Fruit Friday program and School Focused Youth Service.

There is no better example, though, of the way these budget cuts affect the most vulnerable than the Victorian certificate of applied learning (VCAL). Kurnai College school council president, Steve Van Rooy, said last month that he did not want the state system reduced to a safety net for children from lower socioeconomic groups. Mr Van Rooy quite rightly pointed to the positive momentum and pride in educational achievement that was developing in Gippsland schools. He believed that that would be lost if support and resources were pulled out.

Very interestingly Russell Northe, the member for Morwell in the other place —

Mr Drum — A great member.

Mr SCHEFFER — He is a good member of Parliament; that is true. One of the reasons he is good is because of his pledge to bring these community concerns over the budget cuts to VCAL and the education maintenance allowance to the minister as he feared that the impact of the cuts would fall disproportionately on regional schools.

There is Mr Northe, the member for Morwell, basically agreeing with community sentiment that the cuts this government was enacting in his electorate were falling disproportionately on those schools. Russell Northe went on to say that the impact of the budget cuts on disadvantaged students is not understood well enough. He does not say who did not understand it well enough, so I can only conclude that he is referring to the coalition government, the government that he supports in the Legislative Assembly.

The list of programs negatively affected by this government's reckless attack on the education budget over its two years in office is long — including the

cutting of the School Start bonus and the conveyance allowance for transport assistance — and all directly affect families, which feel the pain. They are now turning their backs on the government they elected just two years ago.

Of course the issue of the moment is the rising anger of Victoria's school teachers, who have spent the last two years in fruitless efforts to strike a wages and conditions deal with this government. The incontrovertible fact is that this coalition government when in opposition as part of its election campaign promised that Victorian teachers would be the highest paid in the country — no ifs and no buts. It is this single betrayal and the consequent failure to negotiate a wages and conditions deal for over two years now that last year led to the largest teachers' strike in Victorian history and to a campaign of rolling stop-work actions, a ban on providing written comments on term 4 student reports and bans on coalition MPs entering schools. Now Victorian teachers, with their backs against the wall, have little option but to implement a 38-hour work-to-rule, restrict their engagement in school camps and step up their campaign into 2013.

Yesterday's media reported that the Baillieu government is seeking an injunction in the Federal Court of Australia against the teachers' industrial action that is set for 14 February and against the work bans affecting school camps, excursions, school fetes and sporting activities. True to form, this dismal, shifty government went to court in the middle of negotiations without even having the guts to directly and officially tell the unions, which learnt about it from a written statement released by the Attorney-General, Robert Clark.

What is puzzling is why the government is doing this. Maybe it believes public support for the coalition will increase if it attacks the unions, but that is a very risky strategy because the downside is that schools, their students and the families of those students are inconvenienced by the teachers' campaign and, unlike the government, teachers and school staff have direct and personal access to members of the school community and can explain right across this state why they are forced to campaign for better wages and conditions. There is a point where members of the public no longer give governments points for being tough on unions, because they do not see the unions backing down and they start to understand what the unions are on about and the reasons behind the action. I think that is the point we have reached with this particular campaign.

However, the biggest disaster in the education portfolio is without a doubt the \$290 million that will be ripped out of TAFE budgets from this year. As we know, \$170 million of that \$290 million is money which paid for the community service obligations that include student services and facilities, and roughly \$130 million is the result of the reduction in government payments for the delivery of accredited courses. Our understanding is that around 2000 staff are expected to be made redundant as a result of the cuts, and around 600 of those are in regional Victoria, including 70 from GippsTAFE, 32 from Advance TAFE and 220 from Chisholm Institute of TAFE in Eastern Victoria Region.

In dollar terms GippsTAFE will lose around \$10 million, Chisholm around \$30 million and Advance TAFE around \$5 million, totalling roughly \$40 million cut from Eastern Victoria Region alone. Advance TAFE is expected to phase out 36 of its 215 courses, including hospitality, business and business administration, retail, cosmetic services, aquaculture, equine studies, furniture design, tourism, cleaning operations, sports and recreation, and visual arts, and to close eight facilities. GippsTAFE is expected to shed 20 courses, and Chisholm will be unable to run courses in business administration, legal services, sport and fitness, food and meat processing, marketing, liberal arts, ceramics, areas of hospitality and events.

I mention these details because I want to demonstrate the actuality of these budget cuts for campuses and for courses that real people were undertaking to better their skills and to give them a better chance to get a job and undertake further education. These cuts have affected thousands of men and women returning to education and training and thousands of young people. Many of these people did not do all that well at school and after a few years working or raising a family are ready to give training and continued learning another shot. The cuts to TAFE have devastated their plans and aspirations. Thousands of people and their families are involved. It comes as no surprise at all that their disappointment and anger is being vented through involvement in many local campaigns that have delivered such powerful messages to the government, especially to the Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Mr Hall, who has badly let down those who look to him to defend educational opportunities in Victoria.

It is true that the TAFE system faced a situation where some adjustments needed to be made, but it is the bluntness and insensitivity of the way the government has delivered those cuts that has shocked Victorians. At one community meeting I attended a senior TAFE administrator said that if Labor had been in power and

the budget had had to be reduced, he was confident that we would have undertaken detailed analysis and consultation with the sector to manage the transition and that we would never have chopped off courses before students had completed them, and he is right.

The contrast with the approach Labor took to education over the 11 years we were in office is marked. Education was and is a key priority for Labor. We need go no further than to remember the massive number of teachers who were employed to rebuild the teaching service after the slash and burn of the Kennett government years. Let us not forget the Victorian schools plan, Labor's \$1.9 billion program that was on schedule to rebuild or renovate every school in the state. It should not be lost on members that the Victorian schools plan was a historic commitment that Labor was honouring and planned to complete by 2016.

The Victorian schools plan was so good and so well supported that the coalition when in opposition in the run up to the 2010 state election committed to keeping it in place. That was a very clear commitment, but no sooner had the coalition been elected than in January 2011 — about eight weeks after the election — the Minister for Education, Martin Dixon, stepped out to tell Victorians that the plan might not be delivered by 2016 as promised, because of uncertainty over the number of schools that had been properly upgraded and how much money would be left in the budget for those schools still on the waiting list. Basically the whole thing was scrapped.

Schools are now funded, renovated and rebuilt on the basis of an ad hoc system that suits the government's political interests. Martin Dixon, the Minister for Education, said at the time that the Baillieu government would honour the commitment, but he could not guarantee how much it would be spending each year and when it would finish the job. I must say that that is a Clayton's promise if ever I heard one. Martin Dixon, on behalf of the Baillieu government, committed to the generality but not to the details of the program.

In winding up I note Mr Lenders's motion covers a very broad range of weaknesses in the government's wholesale attack on Victorian education. I support the call on the Premier to guarantee that he will not make further cuts to education and skills in Victoria, because the community and the state cannot afford it.

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — I rise to oppose the motion before us today and I see things differently than perhaps the previous speakers do, including Mr Scheffer. I see the motion before us today as a stark reminder of where Labor is at and where it

has been. In the words of Martin Foley, the member for Albert Park in the other place, the ALP is a bit like being caught in an endless loop of the *Twilight Zone*. Labor's vampire diaries highlight the need for renewal and rethinking and this motion clearly demonstrates where Labor is at, not only today with this motion but as an organisation.

If you compare 11 years of Labor historically and you look at where it has been and the money that it has wasted, and if you look, for example, at the cost of the Wonthaggi desalination plant at \$1 million a day over the next 27 years, you cannot help but wonder how education in Victoria could have benefited from that sort of money. From looking at schools and their maintenance programs around the state over the last 11 years, I have to say that much of that money could have been put into maintenance. There are many schools in my electorate that are in stark need of funding, not always of huge amounts of money. They have been allowed to run down and were neglected on the basis of Victoria's school plan that was developed under Labor and was largely unfunded.

Mr Lenders, who has moved this motion today, was Treasurer for most of that time and also served for nine months as the Minister for Education. Perhaps he could have spent his time today explaining that largely speculative plan for Victorian education — the rebuild that was to service Victorian schools.

Mr Koch interjected.

Mrs PETROVICH — It was an unbudgeted plan, Mr Koch. It was a largely speculative plan, which was unfunded and has misled many communities around the state. That is very sad. They were misled not only about their hope for a new school project — and many of these schools certainly need a rebuild — but also from a fiscal point of view. Many of these schools forwent federal Building the Education Revolution (BER) funding because they thought there was going to be a rebuild of their schools. Many of these schools also sent back money they got under that federal funding because they were to be included in the rebuilding program. That was a pipedream that had no money and no resources.

As we have seen today, nothing has changed for Labor. The vampire diaries prevail. We have a sense of déjà vu when we see these motions on a Wednesday that do nothing except serve to highlight Labor's mismanagement and how it has become stuck in a groove. Quite frankly, Mr Lenders had his go; he had 11 years to fix education in Victoria. He had 11 long, miserable years to fix education in Victoria, and what

happened? It was an unfunded pipedream. This motion today represents nothing but hypocrisy from the man who was Minister for Education for nine months and Treasurer for a large part of that 11 years. It beggars belief that we have this motion before us today, which talks about what this government has done in education largely to mislead the Victorian community, when we have been in government for just two short years.

I will move on. As I go through this motion I will highlight where we are at with some of our initiatives. I am glad Ms Mikakos has just come into the chamber. She has been largely silent for quite a few weeks now on early childhood education. The Take a Break program saga was just another sad episode of the blame game being perpetuated by state Labor.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs PETROVICH — There was a lack of advocacy by Ms Mikakos and others for funding for what was a federal program, which was never going to survive under the Labor state government. Again, it was a bandaid operation. The federal Labor government has subsequently acknowledged its responsibility for the funding of occasional child care, and following Victoria's lobbying — Ms Lovell is to be commended on her portfolio work and her lobbying of Kate Ellis, the federal Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare — we have now agreed to additional funding for occasional care providers through an application process. The carping that was done in this chamber by Ms Mikakos did nothing but confuse the Victorian public about whose responsibility that was.

There is now another round of applications for funding for occasional care, and I suggest that those services apply to the federal government to get what they deserve and to get the money they need to continue their programs. However, the spin perpetuated by the former state government did not assist communities then; it just added to the layers of confusion under Labor. I have to say that perhaps Mr Lenders could have saved some time today — maybe he will do so in his summation; I am hoping so — by explaining to the house Labor's neglect of Victorian state school infrastructure. It would be very good if he could explain Labor's education plan, which was largely unfunded. Despite the resources the previous government had, its education plan was a very clear example of Labor blowing taxpayer money on white elephants like the desal plant.

The other day I heard a very fitting description of Mr Lenders: that maybe he would have been better suited to being the Minister for Environment and

Climate Change, not the Treasurer, because he could have hosted the largest white elephant sanctuary in living memory here in Victoria with some of the projects that were overseen by his government. The desal plant at Wonthaggi is one great example. We had 11 years of wasted opportunity, and it is a little bit rich to see this motion in the house.

Just to do a little bit of an add-up, in my region of northern Victoria there were 26 grants in early childhood development, equalling \$7 568 152. Ms Mikakos is not listening to that, but that is a pretty significant amount of money for northern Victoria. There are the highest rates of attendance by young people in kindergartens — —

Ms Mikakos — No thanks to your government!

Mrs PETROVICH — In fact it is, Ms Mikakos. It is very disappointing that we will be forced to endure another Wednesday of negativity when in fact there are very many good programs across the state. We will perhaps need to expand on that when the debate continues after lunch.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Building industry: consumer protection

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. Can the minister confirm that building practitioners who have restraining orders brought against them by consumers or who have criminal records for drug offences, armed robbery and the like have been registered by the building and plumbing commissions?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — They certainly may have been under Mr Tee's regime, which is why we are reforming the Building Commission and establishing the Victorian Building Authority, which I note Mr Tee has opposed. However, I will take the substantive point on notice.

Supplementary question

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I appreciate the minister's response. It is an important matter because often builders enter the homes of Victorian families, including some very vulnerable families. Unfortunately in the past when we have taken matters on notice the minister has not come back to Parliament on those matters. Will the minister provide an undertaking that he will provide to Parliament a response to the questions I have raised?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am a little bit concerned because the supplementary question was more an editorial than it was a question, but I will allow the minister to answer on the basis that Mr Tee is seeking a response back to Parliament.

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — They are important issues; in fact the whole issue of the structure of the Building Commission and the associated committee entities is an important issue. That is why this government is reforming it. That is why this government has gone through and engaged a proper process to establish the construction services authority or look at a new model. Again I note that the only people who criticise that are from the opposition. Mr Tee is right; some of the matters he has raised and made reference to are of great concern. The question is: why did Labor members do nothing about it for 11 years? Now the vulture-eyed vampires on the other side roll into Parliament and say, 'It's your fault. Fix our mess' — after a decade! Mr Tee and the vampires such as Daniel Andrews, the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, caused the problem. We will fix it, and, yes, I will come back to Parliament.

Housing: homelessness strategy

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My question this afternoon is to the Minister for Housing, the Honourable Wendy Lovell. I ask the minister if she can provide details of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report addressing homelessness, partnerships and plans, following the tabling of that report.

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — I thank the member for his question and his ongoing interest in social housing issues. The report that was tabled this morning is a story of two governments. It is a report card on two governments and two separate homelessness programs that have been implemented, one under the Victorian coalition and one under the former government.

Firstly, it talks about the Victorian homelessness action plan (VHAP) that was launched in October 2011 by the Baillieu government. This morning the Victorian Auditor-General endorsed the VHAP for its strong evidence base and for trialling fresh models of service delivery to complex groups of clients. This endorsement has also been echoed by the homelessness sector. When we set up the \$76.7 million Victorian homelessness action plan we ensured that it was underpinned by a strong governance framework, a ministerial advisory council so that we have access to external expertise from the homelessness sector, an interdepartmental committee (IDC) to ensure

coordination and accountability across government, a clear evaluation process for the innovation action projects so that we can make evidence-based decisions about funding allocations and a comprehensive mapping of all homelessness programs as part of the VHAP system reform process.

The other program the Auditor-General reports on is the national partnership agreement on homelessness (NPAH), which was implemented by the former Labor government. The Auditor-General has criticised Labor for the lack of governance and accountability processes surrounding NPAH. The Auditor-General criticised the lack of comprehensive evaluation processes, poor implementation and monitoring and also a lack of financial rigour, including in 2009–10, when the former government relied on verbal performance reporting from agencies.

Following the tabling of the report this morning we have taken immediate action. NPAH is now overseen by the IDC, which we set up to oversee VHAP. That decision was taken some time ago. We have already commissioned an independent evaluation into the remaining NPAH initiatives, and these will be completed by June this year. Today I have written to the secretary of the department asking for all the recommendations relevant to the Department of Human Services to be actioned as a matter of urgency, and for her assurances that no governance, administration or accountability gaps exist.

It is important to note that in addition to this criticism the Auditor-General has confirmed that Victoria has not only met its obligations under NPAH but also exceeded its targets. The government is delivering for homeless people in Victoria. What we know is that Labor had no plan to deal with homelessness in Victoria. It put together a strategy that the sector rejected. It failed to have any robust governance and accountability around its administration of programs. Labor's track record on housing in this state was appalling. This is the second report of the Victorian Auditor-General to confirm that. Last year the Auditor-General completed an inquiry into the asset management of housing which exposed failures in policy and management under the former Labor government. The bottom line is that once again the coalition government is left to fix the mess left by Labor.

I was shocked, surprised and disappointed by this report, which was tabled this morning. I will ensure that the Department of Human Services addresses all the recommendations of the Auditor-General.

Housing: high-rise towers

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Housing, Ms Lovell. Yesterday in response to a question I put to her the minister referred to a federal-state funding agreement that she said Mr Wynne, the former Minister for Housing and current member for Richmond in the Assembly, had signed in relation to the proposed development. Is she willing to make a copy of that agreement available to us?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — I will take that on notice and get back to the member.

Supplementary question

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — Is it not the case that that agreement contained a set of parameters, such as the yield required, the amount of money that is available to be spent and the public-private mix? If the minister has now made a commitment to consult residents, but the rules for the development have already been written and we will not know what those rules are, is that not a rather hollow form of consultation?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — The agreement may contain broad parameters. I am not sure that it contains specific parameters. I did not say yesterday that it was signed by Mr Wynne. I said it was agreed to by the former government. It is actually an agreement between the director of housing and the federal government, but it is what the former government agreed to in order to get \$175 million of funding from the Housing Affordability Fund. As I said, I will take that on notice and get back to the member.

HIV/AIDS: rapid testing

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Health, Mr Davis. I ask: can the minister update the house on any new developments to Victoria's response to HIV prevention?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I am pleased to respond to Ms Crozier's question about the very important matter of HIV prevention. The Victorian government is working with various communities to ensure that there is a strong response to the ongoing level of HIV infection. More than 6000 Victorians are HIV positive and are therefore living with HIV. Each year more than 260 people are diagnosed with HIV-positive status. It is clear that technology has moved in a way that will assist in detecting, treating and

thereby preventing the spread of HIV. We know that rapid testing is available throughout most of the rest of the world. It is an important tool that is available, and Victoria will avail itself of that tool.

Since August last year we have been working with the Burnet Institute and other groups to ensure that a trial of a community-based rapid-testing centre is put in place so that rapid testing is available and easily accessible. To explain the current arrangements for HIV testing, blood is taken and sent away for testing, and it takes some weeks before a formal response is received. Rapid testing is available throughout the United States, and the turnaround time is between 15 and 20 minutes. Recently in the United States I saw a number of centres where that testing was being employed. Prior to the election, in a formal response to a number of organisations, I indicated that the Baillieu government was prepared to look at rapid testing and seek an early response on that. I am very pleased to indicate that we will ensure that a community-based rapid-testing centre is set up in forthcoming months.

That option will mean that rapid testing will be available. It will mean accessibility at a community level. It will mean earlier detection of HIV-positive status, which will enable treatment to begin at an earlier point, which is an advantage for an individual who has HIV-positive status. It will also help prevent the spread of the disease because it will enable earlier treatment. It is now very clear from the evidence internationally that when treatment is begun early the spread of the disease is less likely to occur.

Treatment as prevention is a very clear message that the community has understood, and I was very proud to make that announcement. I know that a number of people from the electorate I share with Ms Crozier and Mrs Coote are very welcoming of this initiative. I know that the initiative is supported very strongly by relevant groups across the community. I thank the opposition for its support on this matter. It is important that this area of policy is bipartisan at every opportunity.

The importance of this issue and Victorian leadership in this area is well understood. The AIDS 2014 conference will be held in Melbourne in July 2014. That will be an extremely large conference of advocates, researchers and clinicians from around the world. It is important that Victoria leads in this area. We will be the first state to have a community-based rapid-testing approach, and that will be an extremely important step in a public health sense for early detection, detection leading to treatment and ultimately greater prevention efforts.

Building industry: audit and inspection contract

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. I refer to the three-year, \$10 million contract awarded to Casey Inspection Services by the Plumbing Industry Commission to provide plumbing audits and inspections. I ask: is the minister aware that Casey Inspection Services failed an independent financial evaluation that was obtained as part of the tender selection process?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I thank Mr Tee for his question. I did not award any contracts to Casey Inspection Services. As members would be aware, the Building Commission goes through a process, and my department has a look at that. The commissioner we put in place for a 12-month period finishes, I believe, on Sunday, and it is worthwhile putting that into context. What Mr Kefford inherited was a broken system from Mr Tee's administration. It is interesting that Mr Tee is now questioning the operation of the Building Commission. I heard no questioning over the past 10 years about the boxes at the football, or indeed about the Building Commission spending money going to the races, or spending thousands of dollars at marquees or on tickets to the tennis. It is interesting that the Labor Party asks questions today about the Building Commission when it has been vacant in this space for 10 years.

Some months ago we put in place a process to establish a new authority to replace the Building Commission. When John Lenders asked before, 'What has been done for 24 months?', the simple answer is that we now have in place a structure that will be resolved in this calendar year for a new authority to replace the waste, replace the mess and replace the misgovernance that Labor presided over for a decade, and which the Baillieu government is going to clean up.

Supplementary question

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer, but I note that essentially what he is saying is that he is not taking any responsibility because this is a matter for the Plumbing Industry Commission. Ultimately the minister is the responsible minister and there have been issues raised about the probity of this process and Casey —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Tee to continue, but without assistance from the choir on my right.

Mr TEE — There have been serious allegations about the probity of the process. Casey failed the evaluation process and so my question is: can the minister give any assurance to the community that Casey Inspection Services will fulfil all its contractual obligations?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — Where has the Labor Party been? Has it not seen the Ombudsman's report into the commission that it presided over for 10 years? Labor Party members are asking me about a contract issued by the commission — an independent statutory authority — in the last 12 months, yet in this chamber the shadow planning minister accused me of meddling in statutory authorities and now says, 'You are responsible for all their contracts'. Where was Labor when the previous commission, under its administration, spent millions of dollars at boxes at the races, spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on corporate entertainment and spent thousands of dollars at restaurants entertaining big builders when it was meant to be the commission's regulator. Where has Labor been? Its head has been in the sand, but we are going to clean up its mess.

Vocational education and training: enrolment data

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Higher Education and Skills, the Honourable Peter Hall. Can the minister update the house on Victoria's training activity in 2012?

Hon. P. R. HALL (Minister for Higher Education and Skills) — I thank my colleague Mrs Coote for her question and for her very keen interest in this area, one which I am sure all members have. Members who are interested in training activity would be keen observers of some of the publications on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website. One that I think is particularly helpful is the *Victorian Training Market Quarterly Report*. Once a full set of data is collected and analysed from training providers across the state, it is compiled into a quarterly report. If members go to the website, they can see the report for the third quarter of 2012. Quarter 4, which will encompass therefore the whole of VET (vocational education and training) activity for 2012, will be published in March once the formal analysis of that data is done. It is important that as early as possible members get a heads-up as to what sorts of trends are showing in vocational education and training activity across the state.

I am pleased to advise members that if they look at a number of indicators in terms of 2012 VET activity, they will see they were all positive for the amount of training activity, the direction in which the training activity has taken place and the industry areas. Between 2011 and 2012 enrolments in government-funded training activities increased by 22 per cent. This period is important because it encompassed the period between 1 July and 31 December of last year, a period in which the refocusing of vocational training measures announced in last year's budget were applied.

Despite some people predicting the demise of training in Victoria, enrolments have in fact increased by 22 per cent; students undertaking those courses increased by 18 per cent; the number of funded hours for training increased by 28 per cent; and those studying at a certificate III level or above increased by 23 per cent. Importantly foundation studies increased by 120 per cent. They are the very basic studies which enable people to get back into education, and I am pleased to support that increase. In areas of higher needs learning we have seen training activities for people from an Indigenous background increase by 11 per cent; people with a disability by 18 per cent; and people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background by 30 per cent. Overall that is a great outcome.

If one looks at TAFE in particular, one can see the enrolment growth over that period time — between 2011 and 2012 — has been 7 per cent. Some TAFEs have grown their activities more than others. For example, William Angliss Institute increased its enrolments by 44 per cent, Sunraysia TAFE by 39 per cent, GOTAFE by 37 per cent and Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE by 30 per cent, and they are just some of those which have experienced significant growth.

Another important fact is that domestic fee-for-service growth in our TAFE institutes has increased by 22 per cent and now comprises 31 per cent of TAFE activity. Why is that important? It is an example of our TAFE institutes contracting directly with industry to deliver tailor-made training for that industry. For example, Advance TAFE in Gippsland East won a contract with OneHarvest to deliver training in food production areas to the company's 800 employees on a national basis. Wodonga Institute of TAFE won an almost \$10 million contract with the Australian Defence Force to deliver training in health-related areas. These are good-news stories. I encourage members to look at *Victorian Training Market Quarterly Report*, quarter 4, which we will publish on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's website in March.

Building industry: audit and inspection contract

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. I again refer to the contract awarded to Casey Inspection Services, and I ask: is the minister aware that since the company has been awarded that contract it has not had met its contractual obligations, including obligations to meet Environment Protection Authority guidelines to inspect each recycled water facility installed in a new house and to provide weekly reports to the relevant water authorities on the outcomes of those inspections?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — Maybe Mr Tee would like to have a meeting with the Building Commission to put his concerns to it. He comes into this chamber, as I have said before, criticising the government for its role in statutory authorities, and now he comes in and asks if I am aware of a contract awarded by a statutory authority to a company for work that may have been done in the past. I simply say again: Mr Tee was an adviser to the former planning minister, Mr Hulls, when the Building Commission was going mad setting up boxes at the football and hospitality at the races. There was a L'Oreal marquee, a Myer marquee and a Building Commission marquee at the races. I ask Mr Tee: did he go to any of those boxes? One of his former ministers certainly did; I have not been. Did Mr Tee go to the football? Did he go to any of the sporting entertainment provided by the previous commission?

I will simply say that the Ombudsman, who investigated the Building Commission, found serious deficiencies in its structural set-up. That is why this government is taking the bull by the horns and is in the process of reforming the Building Commission from the ground up. We will scrap that organisation and start again. That is the right thing to do. That is important in the current context and necessary to get back confidence in the building industry — a \$23 billion industry in terms of investment in this state. That is why this government has released a working paper to guide the introduction of a new authority later this year to preside over the building industry in Victoria. It is much needed because the building industry's watchdog was left in tatters by a minister for whom Mr Tee worked and indeed by a government of which Mr Lenders was the Treasurer. He should have known of the rorts that were happening there that we are now in the process of cleaning up.

Supplementary question

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — The minister's refusal to answer the question and his deflection of the issues do not help the 100 families a day who are having recycled water facilities installed, who will now have to have their walls opened up in order to ensure that their water is not contaminated by sewage. What assurance will the minister give those families that he will look at this issue, investigate and assure them that their drinking water is safe and that it has not been contaminated by sewage because this company is not doing its job?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — What an extraordinary set of assumptions! How can Labor members walk into this Parliament and scare hundreds of families by saying their drinking water is somehow not safe? This is quite astounding.

Mr Tee interjected.

Hon. M. J. GUY — Have you got something to say now, Mr Tee? I notice you did not have anything to say about the paper of Martin Foley, the member for Albert Park in the Assembly.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister, without assistance.

Hon. M. J. GUY — What an extraordinary assumption — to destroy the reputation of a company, to scare people about their drinking water being unsafe. We are talking about the role of the Building Commission, which is there to preside over this kind of security. It will do its job. I have trust in the Building Commission because I believe the commissioner we appointed is focusing on his job as he goes to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and goes through inspection orders at 4 o'clock in the morning, as opposed to the commissioner Labor presided over, who was going to the races.

Planning: development contributions

Mr ELSBURY (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning, the Honourable Matthew Guy. Can the minister inform the house of what action he has taken to reform development contributions across Victoria?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I thank Mr Elsbury for his question and Mr Foley, the member for Albert Park in the Assembly, for part of my answer. Development contributions are an essential part of the

planning system in this state. They are important because they set a level of certainty about what can be built and where in certain areas. What this government inherited from the previous government — which members can imagine, having heard the previous questions I have been asked — was indeed a mess. It was a development contributions regime that provided no certainty for places like the Forrest Hill precinct in Stonnington. We had developers who were offering development contributions regimes to councils, councils that had to go through years of process simply to establish a regime to achieve local community infrastructure that should have been in place through the state regime from the start.

That level of uncertainty was presided over by a number of Labor ministers and indeed exaggerated by the previous Minister for Planning — and I am sure when he had development contributions regimes put to him he had limited idea as to what they actually meant. What this government has done is reform the system of development contributions.

I was very pleased to receive the first stage paper back from my ministerial advisory committee in terms of reforming development contributions for a range of areas. The new system will give clarity to growth areas, so we will not see exorbitant development contributions. The previous government had a development contributions regime that saw bocce courts being seen as essential infrastructure — not a railway station, not a police station, not roads, not sewerage, but a bocce court.

This government has priorities that focus on the real issues, the issues that matter for people in outer suburban Melbourne. Development contributions regimes will be there to fund local roads, focus on footpaths, stormwater services, open space and community facilities such as football grounds, for example, things that matter to people who want to live in a livable area of Melbourne. It will be a development contributions regime that expands into existing urban areas, places like the Forrest Hill precinct in Stonnington, where councillors were happy to have an off-the-shelf model to be able to choose a regime that suits their area so that they can achieve a level of local infrastructure at a time when it matters — that is, when it is being built — and a development contributions regime for places of urban renewal. This is going to be so important in a place like Fishermans Bend. For all the talk of contributions that need to be put in place for the time of urban renewal being built, this government is going to achieve it through this strategy.

We all know that when the Cain government began the Southbank urban renewal process there was no development contributions regime in place. There was only a limited regime for Docklands. The Fishermans Bend project will have a full level of development contributions that will see a proper level of community infrastructure going in place at the time of development, which is so important.

I conclude with one other point that this will cover — that is, rural and regional Victoria. It is so important in our regional cities that regional councils do not have to go through a planning process of two or three years to simply put in place a development contributions regime that sees co-contribution from state and local governments and from a developer to put in place community infrastructure for growing areas to the north of Bendigo, to the west of Ballarat, Armstrong Creek, throughout the Latrobe Valley and a regime for smaller councils in country towns. That is what is important. That kind of reform is important, and that is why the Baillieu government is getting on and doing it.

Building industry: audit and inspection contract

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is for the Minister for Planning. This tender process has been a complete debacle. Mr Kefford, as the planning commissioner, has had a long association with Casey Inspection Services. He has got a conflict of interest, he refused to accept the recommendation of the selection panel, he appointed a company that was in voluntary liquidation two years ago, he appointed a company that failed to pass the financial evaluation which was set up as the tender process and he appointed a company that has failed to meet its key performance indicators, so I ask: what action will the minister take to restore confidence, and will that include not extending Mr Kefford's appointment when it expires on Sunday?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I am glad Mr Tee read the article in the *Age*. It seems that he has repeated to me an article in the *Age* as opposed to anything he has researched himself, and he is taking it all as fact.

The key points Mr Tee has raised again are about confidence, and I am not going to repeat myself for the chamber for the fourth time. If Mr Tee wants to talk about confidence in the building industry and confidence in the regulator, I think I have covered that in relation to what Labor left behind and what Mr Kefford is going to put in place. I am not going to go through it again.

In terms of Mr Kefford's appointment, I have simply said in the answer to Mr Tee's first question that Mr Kefford's term expires on Sunday. Okay? I am not sure why Mr Tee has asked me on his fourth supplementary for an answer to a question which I gave him an answer to, if he had listened, when he asked his first question.

I conclude by saying the regime we are putting in place — that the Baillieu government is putting in place — is one that is a lot more transparent and a lot more focused on the industry and not on going to corporate events than was the regime we inherited.

Supplementary question

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I suppose my question was about what the minister would do to restore confidence in view of the flaws around the probity process, which means that people cannot be confident that the water they are drinking has not been compromised because of the failure of this company to do its job. Will the minister at least ensure that there is an independent investigation into the appointment of this company, its ability to do the job and a review that will ensure that the drinking water is safe for those families? Will the minister provide, at least for these families, an assurance — an inquiry — to make sure there is an independent review of the circumstances of this contract?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I am struggling to work out what is different between this supplementary and the second question. If Mr Tee had listened to the first answer I gave him — I think it was in the answer to his first supplementary question — he would have heard that my department is going to have a look at it. I said that in answer to a question.

Mr Tee interjected.

Hon. M. J. GUY — The department is not independent and the statutory authority is not independent. Mr Tee made an assumption about the company and made an assumption about Mr Kefford. Does Mr Tee have any evidence for anything, apart from the fact he has read the *Age*? Does he have any evidence which he is bringing to these questions?

Mr Tee — Yes, I do.

Hon. M. J. GUY — He has run out of questions to put. I think if he had the evidence he might have put it. The simple point is that he does not; he is making assumptions. You can smile all you like, mate, but your question time is over, and I put it to you that you have

got no evidence. You have got a gawky smile and no evidence, and that is not enough to convict someone.

Aviation industry: Benalla

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — My question is to Mr Rich-Phillips, the Minister responsible for the Aviation Industry. Can the minister inform the house of how the assistance being provided through the Baillieu government's Regional Aviation Fund is supporting tourism in Benalla?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Minister responsible for the Aviation Industry) — I thank Mrs Petrovich for her question and for her interest in the Regional Aviation Fund and its contribution to Benalla.

In 2011 the Victorian government committed \$5 million annually to funding the Regional Aviation Fund, because it recognised the role that the Victorian government has in working with local government and in working with committees of management to assist them to upgrade their regional aviation infrastructure. This infrastructure is important for regional connectivity, both intrastate and interstate. It is important for regional commerce hubs and to facilitate regional commerce. It is important for emergency services. On days like today we see, particularly in regional Victoria, the very important role that regional airports play, both in fire suppression and fire detection, as well as connectivity for air ambulance. It is important for recreational purposes, and it is also important to drive tourism outcomes.

Earlier this year, in early January, I was very pleased to visit Benalla regional airport to open the national gliding championships, which take place on a regular basis in Benalla. This is an important event for the Benalla economy and the Benalla community. It attracts competitors from across Australia and New Zealand, and indeed this year competitors from as far afield as Germany. Each competitor has a support team, and those support teams require accommodation in Benalla and make a major contribution to economic activity in the Benalla community.

As part of that visit in early January, I was delighted to announce that the Victorian government, through the Regional Aviation Fund, would contribute \$210 000 to the Benalla Rural City Council for upgrades to the Benalla regional airport. These upgrades cover areas such as drainage improvements to the airport, electrical upgrades and apron upgrades to improve the usability of that facility for economic purposes and also for the gliding competition.

I am delighted to inform the house that, as a consequence of the Victorian government's support for that facility, along with Benalla city's support, the Gliding Federation of Australia has now nominated Benalla as the Australian bid partner for the 34th World Gliding Championships, to take place in 2016. This is an event which will bring competitors from around the world. It is a very significant event. Around 100 competitors and 100 teams from around the world will compete in those global championships. Its potential for Benalla's economic benefit is very significant in terms of the number of people on the ground at Benalla and indeed more broadly throughout Victoria in 2016. The Baillieu government is proud to be working with Benalla city to support its bid for that event and is proud to be using the Regional Aviation Fund to underpin the growth of tourism in the Benalla community.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I have answers to the following questions on notice: 8557, 8559, 8561, 8563–73, 8714, 8738–43, 8972, 8973, 8977–81, 9004–12, 9014, 9017, 9234, 9235.

EDUCATION: FUNDING

Debate resumed.

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — Before question time I was highlighting the change to a motion listed on today's notice paper, which I think is unprecedented. Mrs Peulich said she had not seen a motion that had not been accurately portrayed on the notice paper in something like 16 years.

One of the issues that was raised by Mr Lenders today was the Take a Break child-care funding, and, as we have said all along, that is a federal issue. The federal Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare, Kate Ellis, is responsible for the funding of child care and that includes occasional child care. In 2010 the federal Labor government withdrew funding from the Take a Break occasional care program, which made the program unsustainable. What we saw from that time on was state Labor assuming that it should be funded by the Baillieu government when in fact it was only partially funded for a six-month period by the previous Labor government.

The program ended in 2011 when the federal government refused to reinvest the money it had withdrawn to co-fund the program. Subsequently the

federal Labor government has acknowledged it was responsible for the funding of the occasional care programs, but I do not hear too many apologies to those people who were misled or to the state minister who was put through rigorous questioning about why she was not funding it when it was not in fact her responsibility. Labor is silent on its error. The lobbying by Victorian Labor members to Kate Ellis to reinstate the funding for Victoria was nothing but deafening silence.

I believe that an application round for additional funding for occasional care opened in 2011 through the federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and that a number of recipients were identified in 2012. The Baillieu government encourages all occasional care providers to advocate and apply for support, and I will be working very hard to make sure that those organisations are aware and understand that they were misled and that this is the responsibility of the federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and directly under the purview of the federal minister, Kate Ellis.

In relation to early childhood funding, I am happy to say that the total investments made on children's facilities and capital programs from the time we have been in government since December 2010 is \$85 million. Those funds have been a combination of state funds and funds prioritised through the national partnership of early childhood education.

Debate interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! I welcome to the gallery a former member of this Parliament, Mr George Seitz.

EDUCATION: FUNDING

Debate resumed.

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — I also welcome Mr Seitz. In total, these grants have leveraged an additional \$138 million from local government and private community-based organisations, and that brings the total state support investment in children's capital projects to \$223 million since we were elected just two and a bit years ago. Every eligible capital application received under the Baillieu government grant rounds has been funded. We have allocated more to children's services and infrastructure in two years than the former Labor government managed in its last five budgets. That is a pretty significant point when we hear today

that the government is cutting funding and not providing services for young people for education and for early childhood development. The Baillieu government has delivered on its election commitments and will continue to work towards achieving them all.

Early childhood services really set our kids up for the future, and our kindergarten facilities have improved to the point where we now have the highest level of participation in Australia for four-year-old kindergarten. Kindergarten participation under this government has reached a record high of 97.9 per cent for a first year participation, and this figure rises to 102.7 per cent when counting children who undertake a second year of kindergarten. It is the highest rate of participation in the country. The national average is 72.5 per cent.

Ms Mikakos waxed lyrical about funding cuts to kindergartens and made a whole range of allegations about our government's inability to support kindergartens.

Ms Crozier interjected.

Mrs PETROVICH — She did not, Ms Crozier. She did not lobby her federal colleague, and she is not here now to acknowledge that we have the highest participation rate of first and second-year kindergarten participation in the country. She has just walked into the chamber.

We also have the best qualified workforce, and according to our most recent report on government services in Victoria we have the highest percentage — 94.6 per cent — of kindergarten staff with a qualification. That report also says that under the Baillieu government the median weekly cost of kinder in Victoria per child is \$20, the third lowest nationally and less than the average of \$22. We have made a significant investment in early childhood learning. That should be acknowledged, and it is in stark contrast to the information that is not being presented to the chamber to support this motion today. There has been a lot of rhetoric and spin, but there has been very little citing of real facts and figures.

Included in the capital grants allocated by the government are 24 new integrated children's service centres, 20 new stand-alone kinders and 145 renovation and refurbishment grants. There is a whole plethora of grants across the northern region, which is the area that I represent. I would be more than happy to read those out, but if I do that, it will probably take us through to mid-afternoon, and I know there are other speakers who are preparing to speak.

The community is being led to believe Victorian schools are not being funded, but that is not correct. However, the real lie in all of this is the plan that was formulated by Labor over the previous 11 years misled the community. It created expectations of new school rebuilds, but when the reality bit there was no funding. There was no money allocated.

I can talk about a couple of schools close to my home: one in my region and one in Western Victoria Region, which is very well represented by Mr Ramsay, Mr Koch and Mr O'Brien. Kyneton Primary School and Kyneton Secondary College were due for rebuilds. The plan was for a P-12 educational facility, but no money was allocated for it. This impacted on not one but two schools. That is not the worst of it. The primary school did not apply for Building the Education Revolution funding, although it needed significant work, so it missed out on well over \$1 million on the premise that it was going to get a new school as part of a new program. Kyneton Secondary College actually had some money and handed it back on the premise that it was going to get a new school.

Mrs Peulich — It's a concept.

Mrs PETROVICH — It was a great concept, absolutely. If wishes were horses, then beggars would ride, Mrs Peulich.

Mrs Peulich — It was a mirage.

Mrs PETROVICH — It was a mirage, and I feel very sorry for that community because it was misled very badly.

Mrs Peulich — Labor's smoke and mirrors.

Mrs PETROVICH — It was more spin and more smoke and mirrors but no substance. In my home township, for 11 years the member for Macedon in the other place, Joanne Duncan, allowed Woodend Primary School to languish with a lack of maintenance. I am appalled when I look at what needs to be done at the school. I would like to go onto the school site, but I am unable to. I have been there and have previously taken photos. One of my children attended that school. It has always had very good quality teachers and has a very good sense of community spirit, but it is also in a state of rampant neglect that has been allowed to develop over at least 11 years.

Mrs Peulich — Two hundred betrayals.

Mrs PETROVICH — Mrs Peulich is absolutely right. There are over 200 schools across the state in the same condition. We have done a maintenance audit

because that had not been done previously. There were obviously winners and losers picked by the previous government — mainly losers. With 200 schools across the state in disrepair and in need of money to be spent, school communities are in outrage because now we have gone past the tipping point. Some of these schools are in a very bad state; they have been allowed to languish under 11 years of neglect. The maintenance audit we are undertaking across the state is looking at the schools that have been misled into believing they were in line for a rebuild — not that there was any money set aside. There are 200 schools across the state like that. Woodend Primary School was neglected by Labor for 11 years. The local member, Joanne Duncan, should hang her head in shame.

We are systematically looking at what needs to be done and addressing the issues that have been ignored for a long time. We have to look at the impact of \$555 million being pulled from the education budget. The coalition has increased spending in schools by 3 per cent just this year, despite facing the worst set of economic conditions in 20 years. Our first budget included \$1 billion for education despite federal Labor — made up of the opposition members' federal colleagues — cutting over \$4.1 billion from Victoria's bottom line prior to that budget. We made the single biggest capital investment in special and autistic schools in over a decade.

Mr Lenders' motion has no substance. No examples have been mentioned to date in all of this so-called cost-cutting exercise — not one. What does this mean? It means that this is more smoke and more mirrors. The motion is all about spin and misleading Victoria's public.

Since coming to government we have invested in additional primary welfare officers and maths and science specialists, which we announced in February 2012, and in funding school maintenance, which I have already talked about extensively. We are looking at a conservative estimate of a \$300 million backlog that was created because of ignorance and neglect by the previous government, which ignored the reality of what those school communities had to deal with. This is on top of the \$550 million pulled from the bottom line. We are now expected to find \$300 million in addition to assisting those communities who need those schools to be built, which is very challenging. We are going through this work systematically, with a vision to deliver for the Victorian education system. While all this has gone on we have also been saddled with a backlog of Building the Education Revolution overruns of \$66 million.

Let us talk about Free Fruit Friday; I will try and say it right this time. It was a lapsing program — —

Hon. G. K. Rich-Phillips — It was unfunded.

Mrs PETROVICH — It was unfunded when we came to office; that is right, Mr Rich-Phillips. Where is the integrity in this motion? There is no integrity. The Treasurer has put a motion before us today, which includes a lapsing program — —

Ms Crozier — A former Treasurer.

Mrs PETROVICH — A former Treasurer. We extended that program for a year while developing a whole-of-community health and wellbeing lifestyle program. I commend the Minister for Health, David Davis, for the work he is doing across communities — and not just in schools, although we have some great programs in schools — with programs that look at healthy eating and healthy lifestyles from a community perspective. This is an integrated approach to healthy eating, not just one program. We are looking to work with schools, sports clubs, health centres — —

Mr Leane — When's that going to happen?

Mrs PETROVICH — It is happening now, before your eyes. Lift your head, Mr Leane; it is happening now. You were not elected; you are not in government. This is happening now.

Mr Leane — When's it going to happen?

Mrs PETROVICH — It is happening now.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn) — Order! I would appreciate it if the discussion across the chamber ceased and we were able to get back to the debate. It would be appreciated if Mr Leane would desist from interjecting and Mrs Petrovich would refer her remarks through the Chair.

Mr Ramsay — Where is the mover of the motion?

Mrs Peulich — He has not been here for most of the debate!

Mrs PETROVICH — That is correct, Mrs Peulich, the mover of the motion is not in the chamber. Our holistic healthy eating and wellbeing program is being worked on with local governments, health centres, schools and sports clubs, and it will educate our community. We are bringing the community with us. It is very encouraging to see the constructive and helpful programs being promoted by the Minister for Health for those working families whose time is short. From my perspective when I arrive home at 6.50 p.m. it is very

important to have some ideas for quick and nutritious meals that use easily available ingredients. It is not about a piece of fruit on Friday. This is a much more comprehensive program.

Let me now talk about the education conveyance allowance, which was designed to assist non-metropolitan students to get to school and operated according to metropolitan boundaries that had not changed since 1983. I have strongly advocated across my electorate of Northern Victorian Region for a tweak to the education conveyance allowance provisions, and the Minister for Education, Martin Dixon, has responded to these calls for change from the community. The coalition has made the allowance sustainable by redrawing the boundaries to reflect the urban growth boundary and ensuring that there is a grandfather clause.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.02 p.m.

Mrs PETROVICH — Before the lunchbreak I was talking about allegations in the motion before us today of supposed cuts, which those opposite have alluded to in their motion but as yet have provided no real substance or real examples.

I was just about to talk about the School Focused Youth Service (SFYS). I can inform members that there have been no cuts to youth services. This program was initiated under a coalition government in response to a report on youth suicide. It is a most serious issue, an issue that many members around the chamber, both from opposition and from government, have worked on, and there are no easy solutions to it. It is an issue we cannot ignore. It is an issue that we continue to strive to understand and look at in a holistic way. Unfortunately in an increasingly complex community there is no respite for our young people. We are still seeing an alarming rate of young people suffering from anxiety, depression, self-harm, drug abuse and alcohol abuse. As a community we need to work in a range of ways to ensure that we better understand where those young people are at and how we can prevent these problems.

As I said, the School Focused Youth Service program was initiated by the former coalition government in response to a report on youth suicide and was designed to coordinate community sector services for young people. Since that time the program run under SFYS has changed. It now covers a range of different youth services which were considered as part of the recent *Cummins Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*. It is a very good report, and I would encourage those who have not read it to have a substantial look at it.

The government is developing a whole-of-government response to the recommendations of that report, and the review of SFYS is being done in that context to ensure that our delivery aligns with the government's response to the report. This is not done in isolation, as part of one program or in a silo. We are looking at how we can best work with our young people to ensure their safety in an increasingly complex world.

I work on a safety committee in the Macedon Ranges that has done a lot of work with the Live4Life program. It is a module-based program that involves: going into the schools to talk with the kids about recognising signs of anxiety and depression; educating those in the teaching profession and helping them better understand how to identify those issues; helping the peers in the classroom to also understand what some of their classmates may be going through; and, finally, working with parents who at the end of the day are left to deal with many of the circumstances around young people's crises. That program has won a federal award, and I have great hopes it will be initiated elsewhere in a range of ways. It is working very well for those young people. It is a program I hope we can all embrace.

After a decade of Labor in government early estimates from our maintenance orders suggest that there is at least a \$300 million maintenance backlog in Victorian schools, which is what I was talking about prior to the lunchbreak. I cited the example of Woodend Primary School. I also cited the examples of Kyneton Secondary College and Kyneton Primary School, which are two schools that have been caught up in this issue under the false premise that they were getting a new school.

When we came to government there were over 200 schools that had been left by state Labor with the promise of funding, but unfortunately for those schools not one dollar had been set aside. We have currently increased maintenance funding by 40 per cent to over \$100 million, and we still have the issue of those 200 schools. We have now systematically gone through that program to assess the maintenance needs across the state. As I said, the previous government broke its promise to 200 schools, and prior to the lunchbreak I cited the figures in relation to how much funding we have to find. It is a challenge, and after 11 years I would have thought there would have been more progress. It is very disappointing for the communities concerned.

I will move on to the TAFE initiative. There has been a lot of hype around where we have come from and where we are going. In 2012 the coalition provided budget funding for training delivery at the highest ever level, with \$1.2 billion per year for training subsidies

alone. That is, there will be an extra \$1 billion over the next four years to ensure that funding in the training system is at a sustainable level.

Hon. M. P. Pakula interjected.

Mrs PETROVICH — There are some very interesting statistics around that, and I encourage Mr Pakula to look at them. The Labor government set \$855 million aside for training in 2011–12, and it cost this government over \$1.3 billion. That is a more than \$400 million blow-out. Obviously at that rate training in the state of Victoria was not sustainable, so there have been some decisions made about how training is provided, and we now have a much more equitable and powerful system after the review.

Over the next four years we will spend around \$5 billion on training subsidies to help Victorians get the skills that will provide them with real outcomes and give them a chance at rewarding and stable employment and life skills. This is probably the largest investment in training in Victoria's history. We want to see Victorians take up training that leads to real jobs and personal development. We want to see Victorians being able to reach the highest level they can. Those skills need to be able to return an economic benefit to the state of Victoria and the nation, and that is why we have changed the way we fund training to make sure that it is better targeted and is a reliable pathway to education and to achieving real skills and getting real jobs at the end of it.

Under new subsidy levels ranging from \$2 per hour to over \$10 per hour of training, courses which provide the greatest public value will receive the highest level of government investment while courses of lower public value will receive the least. I do not think that prevents people from pursuing those courses, but it places a higher priority on jobs that provide real outcomes.

There are some very interesting charts in relation to the vocational education and training market that I would encourage people to look at. Graphs showing the growth in vocational education and training delivery reveal that enrolments grew from 89 382 in 2008 to 124 871 in 2012. In 2012 I believe the Victorian training system experienced growth, continuing the trend with 670 000 government-subsidised enrolments — up 22 per cent from 2011 and 76 per cent since 2008.

I could talk for much longer on this subject because we have a motion before us today that is very unrealistic. So far no real examples have been provided to support

the allegations made in the motion regarding cuts, and I would be happy to hear them. I am very pleased to be able to provide information to those who are perhaps not as aware, but there is a level of duplicity being shown by the former Treasurer, who knows full well what was promised and what was underdelivered. Unfortunately on Wednesdays motions such as this one are moved, and they just serve to highlight that Labor members are at a crossroads and are dwelling in the past, as vampire diaries highlights. They need to have a pretty good look at where they have been over the last 11 years and where they are heading, and they should remember that they had their turn. We are making real progress and ticking the boxes, and I will certainly not be supporting the motion.

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

ACCIDENT COMPENSATION LEGISLATION (FAIR PROTECTION FOR FIREFIGHTERS) BILL 2011

Statement of compatibility

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (charter act), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Accident Compensation Legislation (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2012.

In my opinion, the Accident Compensation Legislation (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2012 as introduced to the Legislative Council is compatible with the human rights protected by the charter act. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

The purpose of the bill is to amend the Accident Compensation Act 1985, the Workers Compensation Act 1958 and the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 to simplify compensation claims by career and volunteer firefighters, and their dependants, by deeming certain prescribed cancers to be caused by their career or volunteer work.

Human rights issues

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

Recognition and equality before the law

Section 8(3) of the charter provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination (within the meaning of the Equal

Opportunity Act 1995). The relevant Equal Opportunity Act attributes are impairment and employment activity.

The bill provides for 12 cancers to be deemed to be caused by the activity of firefighting for the purposes of making a claim for compensation by firefighters who are suffering, or have suffered, one of those cancers.

The bill also provides for a firefighter or his or her dependants to make a new claim for compensation if a previous claim for compensation was rejected and no compensation payment was made under the act, because they could not establish the disease was due to the nature of the firefighter's employment.

The simplified and new claims are only available to firefighters who suffer, or have suffered, one of 12 prescribed cancers, but not for other impairments.

In my view, the bill does not discriminate on the basis of employment activity, as it deems the same cancers to be caused by the activity of firefighting for career and volunteer firefighters with the same level of exposure to the hazards of a fire scene, regardless of their employment activity.

In my view, the bill does not discriminate on the basis of impairment, because section 8(4) of the charter provides that measures taken for the purpose of assisting or advancing persons or groups of persons disadvantaged because of discrimination do not constitute discrimination.

It is effectively impossible for a firefighter to access information about their exposure to cancer-causing chemicals during their firefighting activities, which prevents firefighters from accessing compensation for cancers caused by their workplace or volunteer work.

By simplifying compensation claims of a type to which firefighters should have equal access, but have been restricted from accessing, this bill enhances the right of recognition and equality before the law.

Conclusion

I consider that the bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

Colleen Hartland, MP

Second reading

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

The fair protection for firefighters bill will give all Victoria's firefighters equal access to compensation if they suffer from a cancer caused by exposure to the hazards of fire scenes over a long service, either as a career or volunteer firefighter.

There is an artificial barrier that prevents firefighters from gaining compensation for cancer caused by their workplace. It is not an intentional barrier, because the compensation schemes for career and volunteer firefighters allow for claims to be made.

But firefighters have a unique workplace. Today it might be a burning car, tomorrow a house fire and the next day a fire at a chemical factory. The day after it might be Black Saturday.

There is no record of the chemicals they are exposed to at each workplace, but we do have a body of scientific knowledge that links exposure to the hazards of a fire scene with a range of cancers.

The link is also recognised by our commonwealth Parliament.

This bill provides that if a firefighter suffers from one of 12 prescribed primary site cancers, and if they have been exposed to the hazards of a fire scene as a significant part of their career or volunteer work as a firefighter over a prescribed number of years, their cancer is deemed to be caused by their workplace.

It is based on the rebuttable presumption for firefighters that was added to the commonwealth workers compensation scheme a year ago pursuant to a private members bill from Greens MP Adam Bandt, which was co-sponsored by Labor and Liberal colleagues, and supported by MPs across party lines.

Victoria's commonwealth-employed firefighters have access to that presumption. This bill will harmonise our compensation laws so that all Victoria's firefighters will have similar rights.

I will go through the bill in detail. But first I want to talk about firefighters.

Firefighters

Firefighters are heroes. I do not mean that in some symbolic sense. And I am not exaggerating. I mean heroes, literally.

When we run away from an explosion and fire, firefighters run towards it.

They approach the fire even though it is dangerous. When our schools, our hospitals, our workplaces and our homes are on fire, the firefighters go inside the burning building to control the fire and to rescue those who are trapped.

They walk towards walls of flames when all instincts must tell them to do otherwise.

They do it to protect us. We rely on them to do it, so we can be safe.

But there is an additional layer of bravery faced by every firefighter who is regularly exposed to the

hazards of a fire scene. They approach a fire knowing it could contribute to giving them cancer.

And yet they do not hesitate to approach.

Over the last 200 years or more, a body of scientific knowledge has emerged linking fumes from fires with cancer.

There is no protective clothing that can protect firefighters from the chemicals in hot fire smoke, because their suits have to breathe in order to keep their bodies at a safe temperature. They let in benzene, styrene, chloroform and formaldehyde, to name a few, which can be absorbed by the skin.

Every firefighter will tell you that after fighting a fire, they peel off their suits and their skin is covered in black soot. They shower, then the next day their skin is filthy again as their skin gradually expels the muck it has absorbed.

This phenomenon was first described in the late 18th century in the little boys who swept chimneys. After they washed, their skin blackened again spontaneously. They got testicular cancer at extraordinary rates.

This example tells us two things. One is that the link between cancer and fumes from fires is not new to science. The other is that even soot from wood is carcinogenic.

These days, firefighters are exposed to toxic fumes from burning furniture, plastics, fabric, glues and a range of composite materials.

When cars catch fire, they are like a burning chemical factory. Buildings are even worse, because the chemicals in them are simply unknown.

Firefighters have to go inside buildings, into an enclosed space full of toxic fumes so they can control the fire before flash-over occurs, which is the point at which materials and gases get so hot they combust, and the fire spreads rapidly.

When a firefighter goes to make a WorkCover claim or a claim under the CFA compensation scheme for volunteers, they cannot provide a list of hazardous chemicals from those exposures. It is an artificial barrier that means our firefighters have less protection for workplace-related cancer than other Victorians.

In other words, our compensation laws discriminate against firefighters.

When the chemical storage facility at Coode Island exploded in 1992, spewing fumes over Melbourne, firefighters approached the inferno even knowing that more explosions could occur, and even knowing that the fumes were a toxic soup of unimaginable danger.

I was a spokesperson for the local hazardous materials action group, HAZMAG, so I knew what was in those tanks. I was brought in from my job in the Parliament kitchens to advise the minister, still wearing my pinny.

I did not know his name then, but Peter Marshall was amongst those who had the courage to approach the wall of flames. He was standing underneath a tank of benzene when the top blew right off. And yet he stayed to protect us.

These days, Peter Marshall is a union leader for the United Firefighters Union. Now I am a Greens MP, I honour the bravery Peter and all the other firefighters showed that day as I provide passage into the Parliament for this legislation.

Firefighters are not asking for protection from cancer, because they know we cannot offer it. But if they get sick from fighting fires to save our lives, the least we can do is provide them with the same access to compensation as every other worker.

Volunteer firefighters

I have been talking about firefighters generally, rather than career firefighters and volunteers, or MFB and CFA.

The bill treats them as equals, because the distinction between career and volunteer firefighters is irrelevant in the Victorian context.

The first thing this Parliament must do is put aside any false impressions that volunteers fight bushfires and professionals protect our cities.

There may have been a meaningful distinction between career and volunteer firefighters from a commonwealth perspective, but there is none in Victoria.

Career and volunteer firefighters attend the same fires, in the same trucks, in the same gear, in the same cities.

Sixty per cent of Melbourne's suburbs are served by CFA brigades. All of our regional cities are served by CFA brigades, plus all our regional towns.

CFA volunteers contribute \$1 billion to Victoria in the value of the emergency services they provide each year. On top of that, they prevent untold amounts of damage

to state and private assets and businesses, which in turn protects Victoria's economy.

When I talk about industrial fires, I am talking about the CFA volunteer fire brigade in Geelong. It is surrounded by factories, refineries, a smelter, houses, cars, office buildings, the works.

When I talk about Melbourne's suburbs, that includes the CFA volunteer fire brigade in Werribee — one of the biggest in Melbourne, with one of the highest number of call-outs for fires.

The concept of professionalism is irrelevant, because CFA volunteers fight fires with the same level of professionalism as their career firefighter colleagues.

Cancer does not discriminate based on the profession of the firefighter. Firefighters are firefighters.

The science

I will not detail the scientific evidence that links exposure to fire scene hazards with certain cancers, save to say that the relevant issue is regular, cumulative exposure by firefighters over a number of years. These elements are reflected in the bill.

I recommend that members read the Senate inquiry into the commonwealth legislation upon which this Victorian bill is based, for a summary of the evidence which concludes¹:

4.39 The committee has carefully examined the large amount of evidence with which it has been presented. Study after study has pointed to a higher risk of cancer for firefighters than the general population. Science has confirmed what firefighters suspected for decades: that a disproportionate number of them in the prime of their lives are brought down with illnesses usually reserved for the old and the infirm.

It goes on to talk about cancer in the general community, then continues:

4.41 The committee recognises that when a person spends their professional career inhaling and absorbing known — and probably some as yet unknown — carcinogens in the course of public service, it is the moral duty of the community to enable them to seek compensation should they fall ill as a consequence. For this reason the committee believes this bill needs to be passed after being improved upon through incorporation of the committee's amendments.

Those amendments included increasing the list of cancers from the original 7 to 12. The amended bill

containing all 12 cancers was co-sponsored and passed with the support of all MPs.

The report concludes:

4.42 The committee has conducted its analysis in the hope that similar legislation will be introduced across state jurisdictions in future as part of the harmonisation of workers' compensation laws. If this bill is passed, the committee encourages state jurisdictions to engage in a dialogue which will eventually see a positive, and fair, outcome for firefighters across Australia.

The artificial barrier

The Senate committee also heard evidence and reported on the artificial barrier that prevents firefighters from accessing workers compensation for workplace cancer.

I urge all members to read the testimony from the Senate committee inquiry, but I will give some examples of the kinds of problems that firefighters have. For the sake of their privacy, I will refer to them as 'firefighter A', 'firefighter B' and so on.

Firefighter A was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 2001. The committee summarises his lengthy and exhausting treatment for cancer.

Without access to WorkCover, firefighter A ran out of sick leave and annual leave. With the typically selfless generosity of firefighters, his colleagues rallied around. They gave him their own annual leave so he could continue to take leave to seek treatment.

I will not read out his beautiful testimony, because I want members of this house to read that quietly to themselves. It is summarised on page 42.

Then I want members to ask themselves why firefighter A's colleagues had to stand in the place of a WorkCover system that he should have been able to access.

After that, I would ask members of this house to compare firefighter A's story with that of firefighter B, on pages 37–39. Without access to WorkCover, firefighter B was forced to return to work. His widow speaks of the impact that had on his health and the progression of his cancer.

Firefighter C made a WorkCover claim when he got cancer. His testimony is summarised on pages 44–45. He describes the claims process as 'frightening', and that is a firefighter talking.

Through his experience, we see the financial risk of a sick man going into a court hearing that he is likely to lose.

¹ Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee report on the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Bill 2011* [Provisions], September 2011, pages 45–46

He gave up on pursuing his rights because of the impossible nature of proving what chemicals he had been exposed to between 1984 and his diagnosis in 2009.

He discovered that no records existed, whatsoever. He called it a 'brick wall'. He had a record of every call-out over a 26-year career, but there was no record of what chemicals he was exposed to. That is the artificial barrier we need to remove.

Firefighter C used up all his sick leave, turned to income protection, lived on a significantly reduced income and retired for medical reasons under tremendous financial stress.

He dedicated his working life to protecting Victorians. We relied on him so we could be safe. But when he needed our help we failed him.

The bill

I will now describe the main provisions of the bill.

Clause 1 sets out the main purpose of the bill, which is to simplify compensation claims by career and volunteer firefighters by deeming certain prescribed cancers to be caused by firefighting.

Clause 3 is the central clause of the bill. It inserts a new section 86A into the Accident Compensation Act 1985.

New section 86A includes a list of 12 cancers and a qualifying period for each of those cancers. It also sets out the conditions under which those cancers are deemed to relate to the nature of the employment as a firefighter.

This is based on the evidence of cumulative impact and the latency period for each cancer.

Firstly, the worker must have been a firefighter during the qualifying period for the relevant cancer — section 86A(1)(b).

Secondly, the firefighter must have been exposed to the hazards of a fire scene — new section 86A(1)(c).

A worker is only deemed to be a firefighter for the purposes of this section if firefighting duties made up a substantial portion of his or her duties — section 86A(2).

The qualifying periods range from 5 years to 25 years, depending on the cancer, and it may be served in two or more periods, under new section 86A(2).

The presumption is rebuttable under new section 86A(1).

There is no new right for compensation for firefighters. No new cause of action. But the burden of proof is shifted away from the firefighter in relation to this one element of the claim.

So far, the section is identical in meaning to the commonwealth provisions.

New sections 96A(3) and (4) provide that firefighters who have made claims in relation to one of the 12 cancers, who have not received any compensation only because they could not prove the link between their cancer and their firefighting, can make a fresh claim.

It is aimed at firefighters like firefighter C, who I named earlier. The old laws were so unfair, people like firefighter C might as well have not made a claim at all.

Without this provision, the new laws would be in danger of discriminating against people who have filed a WorkCover form, just for the sake of it, even knowing that their claim would fail.

Now I get to the provision that is close to the hearts of firefighters everywhere in Victoria.

New section 86A(5) names Brian Potter, whose cancer was caused when he worked at the infamous Fiskville training ground.

We can thank Mr Potter for lifting the lid on the dangerous practices at Fiskville. He stuck his neck out to prevent others getting cancer. The firefighters of Victoria are grateful to him.

Mr Potter made a claim for compensation, which was knocked back because he could not prove the link between his workplace and his cancer. I respectfully disagree. The only protection he had from burning toxic waste at the hot fire training ground at Fiskville was a clipboard!

Subsection 86A(5) provides that if Mr Potter or his family make a fresh claim (using the new provisions for fresh claims I have just described) and if his primary site cancer was one of the 12 in the list (and I understand that it was) that cancer is deemed to be due to the nature of his employment before the disease was first diagnosed.

It is unusual to name someone in legislation in this way, but it is by no means unprecedented. See, for example, section 3(8) of the Transport Accident Act 1986.

Clause 4 amends the Workers Compensation Act 1958. It mostly replicates the amendments to the Accident Compensation Act that I have just described.

In this way, the simplified claims process applies to qualifying periods from before 1985.

Clause 5 amends the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 in order to provide the same simplified claims process for our volunteer firefighters. The purpose is set out in a new section 66 of the CFA act.

Our challenge in drafting the CFA amendments was that the compensation scheme for the active firefighters in the CFA — that is, the volunteer officers and members — is accessed via CFA regulations 2004.

Firefighters need the stability of having the deeming clauses in the act, but the compensation scheme cannot follow them there.

So new section 67 provides that the CFA regulations apply as if they contained those deeming provisions.

The deeming provisions themselves and the table of 12 cancers are in the Accident Compensation Act 1985. It is the very same new section 86A of that act inserted under clause 2 of this bill.

This means that our volunteer firefighters must qualify in exactly the same way as their career firefighter colleagues. This includes consideration of whether firefighting duties made up a substantial portion of his or her duties, the qualifying periods, the exposure to the hazards of a fire scene and so on.

The CFA regulations 2004 will apply as if they contained a new regulation 76(3) and a new regulation 86(3) — those provisions are ‘read in’ to the regulations.

But they are in fact contained safely within the CFA act, where they cannot be removed except by an act of Parliament. It is an unusual mechanism, but it is not unprecedented and it is sound.

The CFA regulations 2004 are due for renewal in a few years. So new section 67(2) provides for the same provisions to be ‘read in’ to the new regulations in the same way.

Clause 6 provides for an independent review of the new laws to be undertaken and completed by 31 December 2015. It links that review to the review of the commonwealth legislation. In that way, we can benefit from the research, findings and actions taken pursuant to the commonwealth review.

My aim in having a review is twofold. Firstly, I want to give comfort to those MPs who are concerned about how the new laws might operate.

Secondly, should the commonwealth review recommend adding any new cancers to the 12 on the list, in light of new scientific evidence, it will provide an opportunity to harmonise any legislative changes across the states.

United across party lines

And harmonise we will, across the states and across party lines.

Fair protection for firefighters started as a Greens private member’s bill by Adam Bandt — it was amongst his first actions on being elected.

But his bill was co-sponsored by both Labor and Liberal parties, and passed by every single MP in the commonwealth parliament. It united them.

Since then, the Liberal government of Western Australia has promised fair protection for firefighters legislation — for both career and volunteer firefighters — if it is re-elected.

The Labor government of South Australia has announced new regulations for career firefighters.

But that might improve — the South Australian Parliament is presently debating a private members bill from my Greens colleague Tammy Franks, MLC. The bill has passed its second reading in the upper house and has been adjourned before the committee stage of the debate.

Differences to the commonwealth act

For the sake of clarity, I will outline the differences between my Victorian bill and the commonwealth legislation on which it is based.

Commonwealth firefighters can access compensation if they got cancer after 4 July 2011. My Victorian legislation has no starting date for the new provisions.

Since my aim is to remove the artificial barrier, I cannot see a reason to put in place a new barrier.

Other Victorian workers have access to compensation going back to 1958. So should our firefighters. To do otherwise is to discriminate against some firefighters and their families.

The provisions for firefighters whose compensation claims have been rejected to make a fresh claim are also unique to this bill.

So far as I know, it will affect fewer than 10 firefighters and their families, but it is the moral thing to do. To do otherwise is to discriminate against those firefighters.

Also, the Brian Potter provision is unique to Victoria.

Cost issues

I will now turn to cost issues associated with this bill, and whether those cost issues offend Victoria's constitution.

It is distasteful to talk about whether ending the legal discrimination against firefighters offends anything or anyone.

But I will go there, because I have been warned that there may be members of this house who will explore that argument.

In order to argue that this bill will lead to an increase in costs, they will need to argue that the artificial barrier — the barrier that prevents firefighters from accessing the same rights as other Victorians — is deliberate.

They will need to argue for the preservation of a system that treats some of the greatest heroes in our state as expendable.

Or, they will need to argue that other measures can be taken, instead of legislation.

For example, we can provide firefighters with a list of every fume they have been exposed to cumulatively over a period of years in thousands of fires. Cost that!

Or, they can argue for changes to be made by regulation, instead of by law. If they tread this path, they had better know the consequences.

Firefighters will die waiting. Some firefighters and their families will miss out. Why don't Victoria's career and volunteer firefighters deserve protection under law, when commonwealth-employed firefighters have that protection?

This bill does not offend Victoria's constitution.

I have heard argument that it creates an impost, by increasing WorkCover premiums.

Anyone who wants to argue that point had better come prepared with some evidence.

The Senate committee saw no evidence that an increase would occur. There is no evidence it has occurred overseas. Nobody in South Australia's Parliament has raised the problem, even though the Greens legislation there has met a robust debate.

Firefighters get certain cancers above the rate of other Victorians, but they still get cancer at very low rates. The evidence from overseas is the increase in successful claims falls within the ordinary variation built into a compensation scheme.

Even if there was an increase in compensation payments to firefighters battling cancer they got from saving our lives, it would be offset by a reduction in the cost of disputing those claims in court.

It would also be offset by the effect of getting the firefighter treated and back to work faster, without the stress on their health of a court case.

In a broader economic sense, there is value in creating an incentive for cancer to be diagnosed early and treated early.

The constitutional problem is a technical issue, because the bill itself is not in question. The only issue is whether a Greens MP may introduce it.

If the government thinks this is a problem, there is a simple remedy available.

The Premier can copy and paste this exact bill and introduce it himself.

I call upon this Parliament to put party politics aside, because firefighters do not ask who we vote for when they save our lives.

Protect those who protect us.

I commend this bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria).

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 13 February.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I thank Ms Hartland for her second-reading speech and note Mr Davis's action in deferring the bill for further consideration by the house on a later date, which is the standard practice after a second-reading speech to provide notice to members.

Notwithstanding the merits of the case put in the second-reading speech — and of the bill itself — by Ms Hartland, having examined the bill myself and

having listened to Ms Hartland's second-reading speech, I have some reservations about the capacity for this bill to be initiated in the Legislative Council because of certain provisions of section 62 of the Constitution Act 1975. I will further consider this matter before the debate resumes on the bill with a view to making a ruling as to whether or not the bill can proceed any further in this house. I hasten to add that my judgement or consideration is not prompted by who introduced the bill to the house or by their political persuasion but by the constraints imposed by section 62 of the Constitution Act 1975.

I also indicate that I have another concern with the bill personally, and that is in regard to the Brian Potter provision, which Ms Hartland spoke about in her second-reading speech. My concern is that it is a very different proposition to what we normally have in bills brought before the house, because it seems to request that the Parliament provide a clinical judgement and confer a benefit on an individual that distinguishes the rights of that individual from the rights of others. That concerns me in terms of a particular clause in the bill as well. That may be a debating point in the house, depending on my final examination of whether the bill meets the constitutional test.

EDUCATION: FUNDING

Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan):

That this house notes the Baillieu government's cuts to Victoria's education system, including —

- (1) its refusal to improve facilities for early childhood education and abandonment of occasional child care;
- (2) the devastating impact of the \$555 million pulled from the education budget, including cuts to vital programs like —
 - (a) the School Start bonus;
 - (b) Free Fruit Friday;
 - (c) the conveyance allowance;
 - (d) the education maintenance allowance; and
 - (e) the School Focused Youth Service;
- (3) the \$290 million TAFE cuts, which have forced the closure of campuses, making it harder for Victorians to access vocational education;
- (4) the abandonment of the infrastructure renewal of Labor's Victorian schools plan;

and calls on the Premier to guarantee that he will not make further cuts to education and skills in Victoria.

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to speak today in support of Mr Lenders's motion and join with other members of this house in condemning the Baillieu government's cuts to Victoria's education system.

Since coming to power the Baillieu government has delivered blow after blow to Victoria's families, and the \$555 million that it has stripped from our education system is having a devastating impact on Victorian families and students.

It has been interesting to listen to the contributions made by government members during this debate. One cannot help but conclude that members of the coalition live in a parallel universe. Somehow they seem to be totally oblivious to the cuts their own government is inflicting on Victorian families and the Victorian education system. To see this, no-one need go any further than read the comments made by the education minister yesterday during question time. He said:

We are putting money into the programs that matter, and into the students that matter ...

You really have to ask yourself what the education minister is referring to as 'programs that matter', and which students he thinks more important than others, particularly when his government is cutting, and he as minister has overseen cuts to, the School Start bonus, the student conveyance allowance, the education maintenance allowance, the School Focused Youth Service, VCAL (Victorian certificate of advanced learning) and TAFE, as well as the slashing of the Take a Break occasional child-care program, a massive underinvestment in our kindergartens — and the list goes on.

You really have to wonder who are the students Martin Dixon is concerned about? A report in the *Age* of 27 January refers to the government's so-called economic strategy, which it released just before Christmas and which sank to the bottom of the sea very soon after. That shows just how much Victorians were excited by their government's economic strategy. If you read the fine print of that document, you would see that Treasurer Kim Wells flagged a massive sell-off of school sites. There is a reference in the article to 200 education department sites, and the document also goes on to speculate on how those sites could be sold to the private system. You really have to wonder what the priorities of this government are.

The comments made by Martin Dixon are particularly revealing. He appears to be suggesting that only some students matter and only some programs matter. I can tell him and members of the government that the

programs that matter to Victorian families and to Victorian students are many of the programs referred to in this motion. They are programs that provide vital assistance to parents not only to enable their children to participate in the education system but also to provide important programs that help students, particularly vulnerable students, many of whom live in my electorate.

Only last week we saw many thousands of children, including Ms Pulford's children and many other young children, excited about going back to school after a long summer break. I know my nephew was very excited to be going back to school. We also know that a huge effort goes into preparing kids to go back to school. The costs incurred by parents in getting their children ready can be a lot, such as having to buy new uniforms. Even if children are going from prep to grade 1, some of them have growth spurts and sometimes they need to get new uniforms even at that very tender young age. Children need to get clothing, books and bags, and parents need to pay for transport costs, school excursions and so on.

That is why programs such as the School Start bonus that the previous Labor government provided are important. The School Start bonus provided \$300 grants to help parents cover these kinds of school costs for preppies and year 7 students. That is why the education maintenance allowance also was a very vital program. It assisted schools to help our most disadvantaged families. There has been a devastating impact since this government decided to scrap the School Start bonus altogether and to take away the school component funded directly to schools through the education maintenance allowance. That will deprive many schools in disadvantaged electorates of the ability to assist their needy families.

There have also been cuts to the student conveyance allowance, which has impacted on an estimated 40 000 children statewide. This allowance provides subsidised transport for school students, and will particularly hit families in low-fee areas, including those in the outer urban fringe and in regional areas, including independent and Catholic school students.

Many families, not just in the public system but more broadly, are also being adversely impacted by these cuts, but this government does not care — we know that very clearly. Government members could not even find it in their hearts to fund Free Fruit Friday at a time when we have a growing problem with childhood obesity. They would even do away with a program like that, so it is no wonder that this government has done away with the family statement. Government members

promised they would have an annual family statement. Clearly government members do not have much to brag about in terms of what they are delivering to Victoria's families, so that is why, despite a promise it would come in the first sitting week of every year, we have not seen a family statement this week.

We are seeing many cuts to the education system. We have seen the government walk away from its promise to make Victorian teachers the best paid in Australia. Government members have also walked away from the former Labor government's Victorian schools plan, which would have seen every school in Victoria rebuilt or renovated by 2016. Many schools in my electorate have been left in the lurch. During the term of the previous government many schools gratefully received funding to undertake much-needed redevelopment. Some of those redevelopments were not completed and are now in limbo. I refer to such schools as William Ruthven Secondary College in Reservoir, the creation of which resulted from an amalgamation of some local schools. That school community has been waiting for this government to provide the final stage of funding to complete the school's redevelopment. The Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Daniel Andrews, has gone out to visit this school, as have local members, including the members for Thomastown and Preston in the Assembly, Bronwyn Halfpenny and Robin Scott, and me, but we are still waiting to hear from the minister and from the government about when they are going to take an interest in the northern suburbs.

It is no surprise to me that that school and many others in the northern suburbs will miss out. When I looked through the coalition's election commitments during the election campaign and immediately afterwards I was shocked to see that not a single school in Northern Metropolitan Region was included on the government's list of schools that were to receive funding during this government's four-year term. It is no surprise to the people in the northern suburbs that they are being ignored, but this is a scandal — an absolute scandal — and I will keep talking about it, because it is atrocious to see that commitments were made purely with an eye to politics. Blatant pork-barrelling went on, and whole suburbs of Melbourne have missed out entirely on capital funding because their residents happen to live north of the Yarra.

I want to talk briefly about an important program that is referred to in the motion — that is, the School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) program. This program works to support vulnerable children and at-risk young people by establishing partnerships and coordinating services in the local community. This important service has been in operation for many years, and I understand that during

2010–11 alone nearly 50 000 young people participated in projects brokered by this program. This program plays an important role in keeping kids engaged with school and local services and helps to reduce the incidence of youth homelessness, substance abuse and suicide. A number of providers of this service are located in my electorate. These include Berry Street, Merri Community Health Services, Nillumbik Community Health Service, Kildonan UnitingCare and Dianella Community Health, all of which are being affected by the discontinuance of funding by the government.

I want to refer to correspondence from the City of Whitehorse that has gone to all members of Parliament and talks about the impact of the government's decision to discontinue funding for this youth service in that municipality. I will quote from a letter that the mayor, Cr Andrew Munroe, sent to the minister and that we have all received. It is dated 18 December 2012. I will quote only some parts of the letter; it is quite lengthy. The mayor says:

Council is alarmed at the government's decision and the potential ramifications it holds for our young people into the future. With this in mind, Whitehorse council resolved on Monday, 10 December, to support the concerns raised by other councils in the eastern metropolitan region and to directly correspond with all state MPs to request that funding for the SFYS be retained for a further three years.

The SFYS provides a vital link between at-risk and vulnerable young people in a school setting and community-based youth support programs. It enables innovative tailored programs to be delivered. In Whitehorse, the program is auspiced by council and sits within council's youth services team. It supports more than 900 young people per year.

In 2011–12, over 9000 students took part in 91 SFYS programs across the eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne.

The mayor's letter goes on to talk about just how important this program is, particularly for vulnerable young people in his municipality. I point to this particular letter, and I know that other providers are similarly concerned. I know that peak bodies that work with young people are also concerned about this decision. I hope the government will reconsider this, because it is an appalling decision.

I want to talk about the impacts of the cuts to TAFE and VCAL, particularly the impacts in my community. In her contribution Mrs Petrovich talked about there being a lack of specifics and so on. I encourage her to read yesterday's *Daily Hansard* from the Assembly. It is a good thing that the Assembly still bothers to print the *Daily Hansard*; it makes it much easier to find things. I hope the President reconsiders the fact that we

do not get the printed *Daily Hansard* in the Legislative Council. Hopefully with a new year a new regime might apply in relation to that decision. It makes for easy reading for government members in the Legislative Council to have a look at the Assembly *Daily Hansard* from yesterday, when members of the opposition in the Assembly asked the Minister for Education a series of questions and gave practical examples of the impact that these cuts are having. The shadow minister, Mr Merlino, the member for Monbulk in the Assembly, specifically referred to Chris from Caulfield, who was teaching the VCAL program. He said that his school's decision was to incur debt to keep the VCAL program going because it valued the program so much. Mr Merlino also referred to Jody from Wantirna South, whose son's VCAL motor mechanics course was shut down after he had completed only three or four modules.

In the Legislative Assembly *Daily Hansard* there are references by Ms Neville, the member for Bellarine in the Assembly, to Point Lonsdale Primary School, where eight grade 1 students will be without trained staff to assist them in the Reading Recovery literacy program. There are references by Ms Graley, the member for Narre Warren South in the Assembly, to the Narre Warren South P–12 College, which dropped 50 places because of the government's \$125 000 cut to VCAL just at that one school. There are references by the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly to Huntly Primary School in Bendigo, which has had cuts to its education maintenance allowance and Reading Recovery program.

If members of the government want to say there are no specific and tangible examples of the impact these cuts are having, then clearly they are living with their heads in the sand. I said at the beginning of my contribution that it seems they are living in a parallel universe. They are totally oblivious to the impacts the government's actions are having in their own communities and electorates.

I do not want to ignore TAFE cuts, because they are having an absolutely huge impact. We all know that the \$290 million cuts that have been made have led to thousands of jobs being lost, courses being cut, campuses closing and fees increasing. I continue to be concerned about the impact on my local TAFEs. For example, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE was expecting to lose \$25 million and 100 jobs and have 50 courses cut. Kangan Institute has also been affected. It is already in the process of selling off its Moreland campus. Many students and staff across these institutions remain very concerned about the future.

I am pleased that our shadow minister, Steve Herbert, the member for Eltham in the Assembly, along with other shadow ministers and the Leader of the Opposition, has developed a plan for the future and that Labor has made commitments, as announced in our plan for jobs and growth, to reinvest in the TAFE system to ensure that Victorians have affordable access to education and training. We recognise that education and training should not be a luxury that only a few can afford. We have said that funding TAFE will be our first budget priority, with additional funding coming from savings obtained from a crackdown on unscrupulous operators. This will mean that TAFEs will once again be able to offer essential student support services — —

Mr Drum interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — Mr Drum should read our jobs plan, because he might learn something from it.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Drum will get the call next, so he can respond then.

Ms MIKAKOS — We want to ensure that essential student support services and extra help are available to students with a disability, from a disadvantaged background or requiring numeracy and literacy development. Unlike this government, we care about young Victorians and their future.

The only planning for young people we see from this government at the moment is a plan for more of them to be locked up. The only construction that seems to be going on — the only priority this government has for major projects in this state — is the building of more prisons. Clearly the government is anticipating that its cuts to education, training and many other important programs that help put young people on the right path in their lives will in fact lead to more of them getting involved in the criminal justice system and needing to be locked up. What a damning indictment of this government's priorities that it thinks locking up young people has to be the priority.

We say education has to be the priority. We said in government that it was our no. 1 priority, and it remains our no. 1 priority. That is why TAFE has been at the top of the list of the commitments we have made, because we recognise that investing in our young people has to be the priority of good governance and good governments. Clearly the people of Victoria are not getting the benefit of a good government at the moment.

I want to touch upon early childhood education. One would think that investing in our youngest children

would be a priority for this government. Instead we see a government minister who continues to claim credit for funding that is coming from her counterparts in Canberra. Members of the government claim credit for increasing kinder participation rates with no recognition given to the innovative approaches and leadership shown by the previous government and, in particular, the previous Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Maxine Morand — —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Mrs Peulich, I cannot hear the member talk.

Ms MIKAKOS — The federal Labor government, through the Council of Australian Governments process, put in place a national partnership, and it is those national reforms that have seen a huge injection of federal money into kindergarten infrastructure.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I just asked Mrs Peulich to desist from interjecting and she has immediately started again. I ask her to desist and allow the member to complete her contribution. A member from Mrs Peulich's side will then get the call.

Ms MIKAKOS — Government members are sensitive because they have more front than Myer on this issue. They would like to claim credit for things that they are not prepared to put any money into. I remind them that in this year's state budget there was not a single dollar related to kindergarten infrastructure — not a single dollar. In terms of their funding they are underinvesting in early childhood infrastructure and the Productivity Commission report that was released last week makes that apparent. In *Report on Government Services 2013* net capital expenditure in Victoria for 2011–12 is shown as being only \$1.712 million compared to a net capital expenditure of \$44.713 million in 2010–11 when the previous government was in office.

The figures highlight the underinvestment in kindergartens and show that Victoria has the lowest state government investment in terms of net capital expenditure in Australia except for Tasmania. They are pretty damning figures. We have seen a 96 per cent reduction in net capital expenditure between 2010 and 2011. It will be interesting to see whether this government is prepared to put some dollars into the state budget this year for kindergarten upgrades. We continue to see the minister issuing media releases that play with words and semantics. She is deliberately seeking to confuse the Victorian people by using the

word 'allocating' rather than 'investing', because all she is doing is getting the money from Canberra and handing out the cheques. She is allocating Canberra's money and seeking to claim credit as if it were money she had fought for in her cabinet and then delivered in the state budget.

Hon. W. A. Lovell — On a point of order, Deputy President, I cannot let this go past. The member should be telling the truth in a debate, not lies.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! The minister knows that is not a point of order; she is making a point in debate.

Ms MIKAKOS — If the minister wants to make some points, she could participate in this debate rather than giving inaccurate information to her backbenchers and feeding them comments which do not reflect reality. It is important that coalition members understand — —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Mrs Peulich on a point of order.

Ms Mikakos interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I advise Ms Mikakos that Mrs Peulich is raising a point of order.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Deputy President, in alleging that the minister was disseminating inaccurate information Ms Mikakos is reflecting on a member and I ask that you ask her to withdraw.

Hon. W. A. Lovell — Further on the point of order, Deputy President, the member did reflect on me by saying I was disseminating inaccurate information. I have not disseminated any inaccurate information. It is the member who is saying things that are inaccurate. I take offence at her remarks and I ask her to withdraw.

Ms MIKAKOS — You ask me to withdraw and then you are giving me the same — —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Ms Mikakos I take the view that it is not my position to determine whether or not the remarks are offensive other than to say that they could be seen to be objectively offensive. The minister has taken offence and has asked the member to withdraw.

Ms MIKAKOS — I am prepared to withdraw if the minister also withdraws, because she used the same language — —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! When I ask for a withdrawal it is not a matter for debate or discussion. The minister has taken offence at the remarks Ms Mikakos made and I have deemed that, in the broader scheme of things, the minister has the right to request a withdrawal on the basis that she finds those remarks objective or offensive. I ask the member to withdraw.

Ms MIKAKOS — I withdraw. Thank you, Deputy President. The minister is a precious blossom — —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Ms Mikakos, that is enough. You may continue your contribution but do not push this point any further.

Ms MIKAKOS — Thank you, Deputy President. It is interesting that the minister does not want me to make a comment but then makes the same comment about me. Quite frankly the facts speak for themselves. I do not need to ask for a withdrawal because the facts speak for themselves. The minister should read the Productivity Commission's report.

Mr O'Brien — On a point of order, Deputy President, Ms Mikakos is continuing to reflect on your ruling by debating the question of withdrawal and it is an adverse reflection on the process of objections and withdrawal.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! The member is not reflecting on my ruling; she is making further comment about comments that she believes have been made about her. She is making comment on what she believes are similar comments made about herself and the fact that she has not sought a withdrawal, and that is perfectly in order. In the context of this debate her contribution is in order. It is not out of order, but I will ask the member to come back to the motion before the Chair.

Ms MIKAKOS — I encourage members of the government to read the Productivity Commission report, particularly in relation to early childhood. The minister does not seem to be aware of the figures I have been referring to that demonstrate her lack of investment. As I said, it is in stark contrast to when Labor was in government and we made significant contributions to capital infrastructure out of our own state budget. However, the thing that is most galling to me and to many others, including councils who are asked to organise these funding announcements and media opportunities, is then to be told or to discover that the money is coming from Canberra and all that the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Ms Lovell, is doing, or all that her

backbenchers are doing, in going out and making these media pronouncements is allocating or handing out cheques from the funds coming from Canberra.

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — Minister Lovell is handing out the cheques that are coming from Canberra. She may well be allocating the millions that she is claiming are coming from Canberra — \$210 million so far, and the federal government has announced that more is to come in future. I hope federal Labor will be re-elected so it can be in a position to deliver the \$1.1 billion further boost to Australia's preschool and kindergarten services. Of this, it is estimated that \$266 million will be delivered to Victoria's kinders to continue on the great contribution of \$210 million that it has made already. When the minister goes around claiming that the funding is a so-called combination of state and national partnership funding, she needs to be more honest.

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — She has put nothing in the budget, if it is such a priority. There was nothing in the budget this year, and she has put in a tiny amount from internal departmental funding, basically to try to fudge the issue and claim that it is a combination of funds. The overwhelming majority — —

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I have asked the minister to stop interjecting several times. This is not a town hall meeting; this is the Legislative Council. The member is speaking, and she ought to be able to make a contribution with some degree of silence. I understand that at times there will be interjections, but constant interjection is not appropriate.

Ms MIKAKOS — I want to come now to another aspect of the Productivity Commission report that also makes for interesting reading.

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Deputy President, I was hoping the minister might raise a point of order, but in Ms Mikakos's remarks that the minister should be more honest, there is a reflection on the minister and an imputation that she is dishonest. I ask that the member apologise and withdraw.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Firstly, there is no procedure to require members to apologise. Secondly, the remarks need to be objectively offensive. The minister has not risen to register her objection. She

did interject when the comment was made but she did not seek a withdrawal, so there is no point of order and the member is not required to withdraw.

Ms MIKAKOS — I know that the government is keen to shut opposition members down and this is what happens. Every Wednesday we have point of order after point of order from members of the government who do not want us to tell Victorians what is going on, but they know what is going on. I think government members all know that. They are starting to get the wake-up call that Premier Baillieu is not delivering. It is about time that they stood up to him and went into the party room, had a bit of backbone and said that these issues need to be fixed. Quite frankly, it suits us that the government members are all too cowardly and not prepared to stand up to their Premier, or at least the current one anyway.

Another issue in the Productivity Commission report that makes for interesting reading also relates to child care. It is clear in the report that if you look at the figures for state government real expenditure on child care for 2011–12, you will see it was \$631 000. If you look at the 2010–11 figures, you will see it was \$3.7 million. This is a significant decline of 83 per cent as a result of cuts to the Take a Break occasional child-care program. If you look at comparisons with other jurisdictions across that time period, you will see Victoria has the lowest real expenditure of any state in Australia, and it is far behind the closest state in Tasmania. It is clear that other jurisdictions are prepared to put some real expenditure into child care. This government was prepared to pull out of a very small program that did not cost a lot and actually had huge benefits for Victorian families.

Many centres across the state have been affected. This program was provided to about 220 neighbourhood houses and community centres. Last year the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres reported that up to 60 per cent of its centres were forced to increase their fees to cover the loss of this funding. Many centres also lost their public liability insurance that was previously funded by the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority. We even had some centres close down altogether. Yet Mrs Petrovich comes in here and basically says how dare I raise this issue again.

I can assure members of the government that this issue has not gone away in the community. I certainly welcome the announcements from Ms Ellis, the federal Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare, of additional funding for occasional care and home care places Australia-wide, including in Victoria. I am very

pleased that a number of regional centres were able to avail themselves of this funding to address some of these issues.

However, there are still many centres that are affected by the Take a Break program funding cuts, and the government should be aware that this is still a biting issue in the community. It cannot just hope that it will go away. It is a significant issue in the community. It is just astounding that members of the government do not want to even discuss it. I know that members of the government, including the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, were very excited when they heard that occasional child care was going to be included in the motion to be debated here today.

That is a quick overview of some of the key issues. I know that other members wish to speak on this motion and I want to give them the opportunity to do so. I just want to conclude by saying that a strong education system is one that provides all children with the best opportunities in life. It does not make any sense to me or to members of the Labor opposition that Premier Ted Baillieu and his acquiescent backbenchers would choose to cut funding to our schools and education system. You simply cannot create and improve services by cutting funding. These cuts have had a terrible impact across the community and the futures of our young people are being threatened. Along with other members of the Labor opposition I join the chorus of voices in the community that are calling on this government to stop the attacks on education and the cuts to our education system.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — As members would quite often have heard in the chamber over the last six or seven years, welcome to wacky Wednesday — —

Mr Barber — It's wacky now anyway.

Mr DRUM — No, it has always been wacky, but it is getting wackier by the day.

Mr Barber — It's wacky now that you've joined us.

Mr DRUM — Thank you, Mr Barber. Ms Mikakos has certainly not covered herself in glory with that contribution. She has all of a sudden become very precious about the origins of the money the Baillieu government is investing in early education and occasional child care, and the fact that it may be reallocating that funding, which has come from the federal government, into these respective areas. That is simply standard practice for a state government.

It is quite interesting to see Ms Mikakos become precious about the transference of money in the early childhood portfolio. When the federal government cut funding to the Take a Break program, Ms Mikakos would not even countenance the possibility of getting on the phone to the federal Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare, Kate Ellis. The idea of her being critical of a Labor colleague is just so far out of — —

Ms Mikakos — On a point of order, Deputy President, I am only raising this because members of the government did this to me earlier, but that is actually not correct — —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! That is not a point of order. Ms Mikakos should sit down. As Ms Mikakos well knows I am not accepting points of order that are points of debate. I have stopped them from the other side and I will not accept them from the opposition.

Mr DRUM — Talk about frivolous — frivolous contributions and frivolous points of order. However, when issues come into this chamber that are in some way critical or pit the state Labor Party against the federal Labor Party all of a sudden Ms Mikakos loses her voice. All of a sudden she is the little lap-dog who is just going to roll over and get a little tummy rub from Kate Ellis in Canberra.

Ms Mikakos — On a point of order, Deputy President, I take objection to being called a lap-dog and I ask the member to withdraw.

Mr DRUM — I withdraw that remark, Deputy President. If it suits the Labor Party in opposition for us to stump up to cover a federal cutback, it expects us to do that. I like Ms Mikakos's version of what has happened to the TAFE sector; I will get into the TAFE sector in more detail shortly. But for her to effectively use the words, 'We are going to reinstate the money that has been saved from the TAFE system; we are going to reinstate funding back to 2010 levels and we are going to pay for it by cutbacks' — —

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

Mr DRUM — It is interesting, Minister Lovell, that Labor is going to pay for this reinstatement of TAFE funding by getting rid of unscrupulous providers. It had better hurry up. There may have been a few unscrupulous providers of registered training organisations when it was in government; however, Mr Hall is doing a very thorough job of getting rid of them as we speak. So the opposition had better hurry up. If it wants to get in there and work out where it is

going to save \$400 million per annum, it had better hurry up because there will not be many unscrupulous operators left by the time it gets back into government — whenever that may be.

Hon. W. A. Lovell — God forbid!

Mr DRUM — God forbid! When Labor members found themselves on the opposition benches they looked across the chamber and said, ‘What on earth have we done with the training sector? We set in place a program that was going to cost \$850 million per annum’. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, as if those opposite should be surprised, it is going to cost \$1.3 billion per annum. I do not know how the Labor Party would handle this problem, but it seems it will be head in the sand stuff all over again. The good old Labor Party’s solution to financial accountability is to put its head in the sand. ‘We are not going to worry about the blowouts to funding. If it’s going to take four years at \$400 million, that is another \$1.6 billion we’ll have to borrow. That doesn’t matter’. Providing the Labor Party is happy with the way it funds the TAFE sector, it seems it is okay with adding another \$1.6 billion to the borrowings of the state.

It has been quite staggering to hear the contributions of Mr Lenders, Ms Pulford and Ms Mikakos on a whole range of issues and areas within the education portfolio.

It is important to note that the coalition has increased spending in schools by over 3 per cent, despite one of the worst economic situations that any government has faced. Our economic situation has not been aided by any assistance from Canberra, with the federal Labor government cutting over \$4 billion from the bottom line of our budget, including the single biggest cut ever in some of the GST write-downs. In spite of all of that, we still put in place the biggest capital investment in special and autistic schools in over a decade. The Labor Party members in this chamber should be extremely grateful for the action we have taken in the area of investment in autism and special schools.

We have had to sit and watch federal Labor implement its Building the Education Revolution (BER) program. The sheer amount of waste perpetrated upon the Victorian school economy has been nothing short of criminal. It is a \$16 billion program that has been able to achieve something less than 50 per cent efficiency. It is staggering that this federal government is totally supported by its state opposition colleagues. In effect everyone in Labor has been happy for this money to be spent and wasted within the public system. Everybody who looks at that program in a clear and analytical way asks how it is that the private schools were able to get

such value from the money they were allocated under the BER system. It certainly offers some insight into the future.

I will also touch on the recent health cuts. I know they are not associated with this motion at all, but they demonstrate the philosophy of opposition members who argue that the state government is linked to the federal government. On the one hand it suits state Labor members to put the argument to the government that ‘This is not really your money; you should be very clear about where this money comes from’, yet 10 seconds later in this chamber we will be talking about a health issue and all of a sudden the Labor Party expects this government to cover up health cuts in exactly the same way but in exactly the opposite direction. I do not know why the opposition wants to put forward supposedly coherent arguments that actually contradict each other. We will be talking about education or early childhood education, and then all of a sudden the exact opposite argument will apply if we start talking about health and cuts to our health system. But, as we know, this is what happens when members are in opposition: they can say anything they like, and it is very difficult to hold them accountable.

For the Labor Party to say it is going to reinstate funding to the TAFE system to 2010 levels based on funding that is going to be generated by a crackdown on unscrupulous operators — —

Mr Tee — Fix up your mess.

Mr DRUM — Mr Tee wants to talk about fixing up our mess. How is it that anybody could introduce an ungoverned, unregulated system of government-guaranteed positions within the training sector without putting in place any monitoring whatsoever? Who is the moron who invented this system? Who were the absolute imbeciles who oversaw — —

Mr Tee interjected.

Mr DRUM — Maybe Mr Tee can give me a couple of names of the imbeciles who oversaw this program.

Mr Tee interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Mr Tee will get to make a contribution. I understand he is the next speaker.

Mr DRUM — Those imbeciles thought it was acceptable to blow the training budget by approximately \$400 million per year, so we have to come along and fix up this mess again.

I am drawn to a comment made earlier by Mr Lenders. He took an opportunity in his contribution to quote Peter Kavanagh, a member of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) in the Legislative Council in the last Parliament. The quote was in relation to Mr Kavanagh's strong belief that debates should not be about how much is being spent or inputs but about outcomes and what is actually achieved with the money spent.

Mr Barber — I think there might be a merger of those two parties soon. I think a merger is on the cards.

Mr DRUM — You think the DLP and the ALP might get together again?

It is interesting that Mr Kavanagh used the phrase 'outcomes not outputs' eight times in the previous Parliament, and every time he was levelling the accusation at Mr Lenders, who was then a minister using the language he is now trying to forbid us from using. When Mr Lenders was a minister he used the term 'record spending' 50 times. In government Mr Lenders used the terminology 'record funding levels' and 'spending more than ever' more than 50 times as he explained what a great job his government was doing. Now that he is in opposition Mr Lenders is telling us we should not be using the terms 'spending more than ever' and 'record levels of funding' because that is the case in every year — every subsequent government tends to be spending more and taxing more than the government before it.

The hypocritical nature of this debate on terminology from Mr Lenders needs to be identified, because Peter Kavanagh's attacks, at their very core, were always aimed at Labor. He was always telling Labor, 'You have to be looking for outcomes. You have to be looking for results. It is not good enough to simply be throwing more money at more issues and problems without any care at all about the results and the outcomes that you are supposedly trying to support'.

Ms Mikakos — and Ms Pulford also used this terminology — used the slogan, 'Education is our no. 1 priority'. That was something the Labor Party used to espouse when it was in government. However, it never actually qualified that statement. It never gave any indication as to what it meant other than it just being a nice catchy slogan. Does that mean it was going to spend more money on education than on any other portfolio? I do not think the health department would have been happy with that.

Were there going to be increases in the educational outcomes of regional students? I do not think Labor did

very well in that area because in its 11 years in government the gap between outcomes for regional students and for metropolitan students widened to a size never seen before. The difference in the ability of regional students to move into tertiary education compared to their metropolitan counterparts widened to a gap never seen before. The Labor Party, using selective terminology, came up with slogans of a hypocritical nature like 'Education is our no. 1 priority' when it was never going to be held to account because no-one knew what it meant. It was totally subjective and the Labor Party could never be held to account. It was a beautiful part of Labor Party spin that we had to endure for 11 years.

Mr Tee interjected.

Mr DRUM — It was a bit like its slogan, 'Victoria is a great place to live, work and raise a family'. Has Mr Tee heard that one to his fill? It is unbelievable.

These slogans the Labor Party used were all about spin; there was never any substance to them. Another one it came up with was, 'The Labor Party is going to rebuild or modernise every school in Victoria'. There are those two words 'or modernise'. Why would it put those two words in its promise to rebuild or modernise every school? Quite simply it gave it an out so that if it fixed up the bike shed, fixed up the walking paths around the school or fixed up a toilet block, it had rebuilt or modernised that school. Again the Labor Party worked out a way in which it could not be held to account for letting schools run down into a state of disrepair. It let the maintenance bill build up to a level where it needs the coalition government to again come in behind Labor and fix up the mess. Effectively that is what has happened.

We have heard in the chamber today examples of areas suddenly needing a secondary college — for example, Bannockburn. Perhaps Ms Pulford has just discovered Bannockburn, but it has been a growth town for the last 10 to 15 years. It would have been desirable that Bannockburn had a secondary college eight years ago. Unfortunately that did not happen. Labor has found itself in opposition and it has just realised that it has a point it can argue.

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr DRUM — It is a bit like Torquay, Mr Barber, where about 500 babies are born every year. In a couple of years there is going to be a need for about 25 prep classes at Torquay Primary School. When we hear Gayle Tierney and others talk about the need for a school in Torquay it is as if the day after Labor lost the

election, it realised that there was a need for a new school in Torquay. It is just beautiful to look at the way members of the Labor Party come into this house and identify all these problems as if they have just arrived at our door overnight. However, we all know the funding pressures that exist. We all have common sense. We have a situation where there are a lot of problems and funding issues. We will be putting all these issues into play so that we can address them.

I have some notes that tell me that after a decade of Labor government in Victoria the early estimates from the government's maintenance audit suggest that there is at least a \$300 million maintenance backlog in the Victorian school system. There are schools which today have a bigger maintenance backlog than the total amount spent on them under the Labor Party's program. I must admit that rings true for my local area of Bendigo. Golden Square Primary School, which is close to my patch, was one of 200 schools that was given a promise from the then Labor government that should it merge, a new school would be built. The only problem with that was that the official merge took place in February-March 2010, and when the May budget was handed down in 2010 there was no money for a new school in the forward estimates or in the current year.

When I was made aware of this after the election was won I thought that school might be the only one, but I soon discovered, along with my Nationals and coalition colleagues, that this behaviour was absolutely rife right around the state. Schools had been given a wink and a nod and effectively told, 'Toe the line, pull your head in, do not say anything and your new school, your renovation or extension or whatever it is you need will be forthcoming'. The fact was there was no funding in the out years of the budget. Again it has been the coalition government that has had to find the money for the schools with the most pressing needs.

I am extremely glad that the Golden Square Primary School has received funding and will be moving forward in the very near future. Schools in areas such as Tongala have now been completed. Kyabram has received money for schools, and many schools in the Loddon Mallee region have received the funding they were chasing. They now know with certainty — not a wink and a nod, just keeping it quiet and away we go, but with actual certainty — exactly where they are.

The motion proposed by Mr Lenders highlights a real push against occasional child care. It is worth noting that in the Loddon Mallee region and also in the Hume region there is over \$7.5 million in capital grants funding for the early childhood areas, including at

Gowrie Street in Shepparton, Kialla, St Mel's School to the south, Toolamba 20 kilometres to the west, Beechworth, Rutherglen and at Yackandandah. There are two projects at Wallan and Wandong, and at Numurkah and Wangaratta, and a whole range at Wodonga. There is funding for projects throughout the Loddon Mallee region, including at Gannawarra, the Macedon Ranges and Mildura, and in Castlemaine as well. There has been over \$7.5 million in capital improvements to this sector, and that will assist many schools that are looking at getting positive outcomes.

Mrs Peulich said earlier that in the last two budgets the Baillieu government has allocated more to this sector than the Labor government managed to allocate in its last five budgets, yet Labor Party members still say we are turning our backs on the early education and kindergarten sector.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DRUM — If members want to argue the point even further, I would like to go — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Mr Drum without assistance.

Mr DRUM — In talking about outcomes, kindergarten participation under the Baillieu government has reached a record high. Participation is at 97.9 per cent for first-year participation — —

Mr Tee — What about TAFE? Let's talk about TAFE.

Mr DRUM — Have you got half a brain in your head, Mr Tee, or are you always this dumb?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Mr Drum! I have given Mr Tee some opportunities for interjection, but he is interjecting continually, and I ask him to desist.

Mr DRUM — Kindergarten participation at 97.9 per cent is a record high, and if you also take into consideration children who undertake a second year in kindergarten, the figure rises to over 100 per cent, which is quite astonishing. It is the highest participation rate in the country; the national average sits at 72 per cent. Irrespective of which party you are from you have to look at the outcomes the government is achieving in the area of kindergarten participation, and you should acknowledge what a fantastic job — —

Ms Mikakos — Based on Labor reforms at a state and federal level.

Mr DRUM — I am sorry; we should hand back government to the Labor Party. Labor members are putting together such a coherent argument that it is just impossible to argue against it. Anything that happens which is of positive benefit to this country or this state somehow or other must be the doing of the Labor Party. That is the arrogance and absolute hypocrisy — but more so the arrogance — of Labor; Labor members simply refuse to recognise a job well done by the minister and by a sector that is starting to achieve.

Look at the figures read by the Minister responsible for the Teaching Profession in question time today when he was talking about the increase in TAFE enrolments. When we came to government we were able to do that at the same time as we were fixing up one of the all-time great Labor Party messes that was the TAFE sector. Again, we should be looking at outcomes rather than outputs. I know it does not suit Labor Party members to talk about outcomes, but they should take a lesson from Mr Lenders, who says that it is a good way to think. He says, 'Let's start thinking more about outcomes and less about outputs'. If we have the highest level of kindergarten participation, we should acknowledge that. If we have improved and increased enrolments in the TAFE sector, we should acknowledge that. We need to be a bit more fair dinkum about it rather than just trying to push the blame anywhere we think will get a headline.

As Ms Mikakos leaves the chamber, I note that in her contribution she said that the Victorian families statement had been abolished by the Baillieu government. I have a copy of budget information paper 2, *2012–13 Victorian Families Statement*. The whole report is here — what we are spending, how we are supporting families, how we are rebuilding communities, how we are promoting crime prevention and community safety, how we are reducing alcohol and harm-related issues and how we are providing protection from family violence. Our families statement covers all parts of family life. I would like to know if this is what the Labor Party calls 'getting rid of' the statement. If we have somehow or other got rid of our families statement, I would like to see what we are doing with all the policies that are leading to even safer and more harmonious families across the state.

Mr Lenders's motion is mostly about getting a headline. It is mostly about trying to go back to an era when slogans ruled the day. Members opposite continue to come up with philosophical slogans about education being the 'no. 1 priority' and Victoria being

'a great place to live, work and raise a family'. Labor members are strong on saying things 20 times and hoping someone will believe them, but ultimately if you look at the outcomes from the Baillieu government's — —

Mr Barber — 'Fix the problems. Build the future'.

Mr DRUM — Absolutely. At least we are attempting to fix the problems and build the future.

Mr Barber — I hadn't noticed that.

Mr DRUM — Thank you. We want everybody to focus on the outcomes of our term in government. We will live and die by the outcomes of our term in government, as opposed to those on the other side, who think that if you cannot get a decent slogan for something, it is not worth supporting. They say, 'Whatever the truth is, let's try to swing it the other way; let's try to muddy the water'. That is what Labor has done in relation to the recent federal health cuts. That is something about which all Labor Party members should hang their heads in shame. Labor has tried to turn this into some sort of blame game.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — We've tried to turn it into a blame game? Are you kidding?

Mr DRUM — Labor has tried to turn the federal health cuts into some sort of blame game in which somehow or other everyone has equal blame. That shows an unbelievable lack of integrity. As Labor Party members in this chamber understand, the federal government cut its budget halfway through the year and then tried to muddy the water with \$600 million worth of productivity savings spread out over six years. If members opposite think that is acting with integrity, they should keep going the way they are going. That is simply — —

Mr Tee interjected.

Mr DRUM — Yes, that is right. I am just using that as an analogy for the type of terminology that members opposite are using in their interjections in a debate about education.

Hon. M. P. Pakula interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Mr Pakula is not in his place.

Hon. M. P. Pakula interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Through the Chair!

Mr DRUM — I do not think I can respond to an interjection relating to water while I am speaking on this motion. I am happy to break away, but I think the Clerk might give some advice to the contrary.

I will leave it there, and I hope all members of the Labor Party in this place take heed of the message from their leader today, which is that they need to focus more on outcomes and less on outputs.

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I welcome the opportunity to make some brief remarks on this very important notice of motion. I note Mr Drum's challenge, which was that members should focus on outcomes. He also stated that the government of which he is a part will be judged accordingly. That is right. When we focus on the outcomes we can do what Mr Drum has done, and that is look at the half a dozen schools in his electorate that have received some crumbs, and those schools are grateful for that. However, Mr Drum cannot walk away from the fact that he is part of a government that has ripped some \$555 million out of the education budget. The half a dozen schools that Mr Drum identified, which are very grateful for the crumbs they have been given, is one thing, but what about those other schools that have missed out because of this government's vicious approach to education? What about the kids?

There has been no mention in the contributions of those opposite of the people who really matter as part of this debate, and that is the kids who go to school. We know that completing an education is incredibly important. We know it is important because, one way or another, it sets you up for life. It determines your career and your income. If you do not complete school or do not have an opportunity to go to TAFE, there is a risk that you will fall through the cracks. All the research shows that of the people who finish their education, who go on to an apprenticeship or further education, most of them are very successful. But we also know that kids who do not finish school and who fall through the cracks are at risk. They are at risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. They are at risk of ending up in our prison system. I say to Mr Drum that that is what is at stake here. That is what you are playing with when you rip \$500 million out of the education budget.

If you look at what happens when you take out that human element, which is what was completely missing from Mr Drum's contribution, you can extend that to what has been done in TAFE. There has been a \$290 million cut to TAFEs. Mr Drum purports to represent a regional electorate, but he has not said one thing about the damage that has been done to regional communities because the government he is a part of has

ripped the guts out of the TAFE budget. He has not mentioned the small businesses that are crying out for this government to show some compassion and some humanity, and to reconsider this awful decision.

Mr Drum did not mention the kids in regional Victoria who now have to travel large distances because the TAFE programs they had aspired to for years are no longer on offer due to this government's heartless attack on the TAFE system. This is not just an attack on students and on regional Victoria; it is an attack on small businesses. It is an attack on communities whose TAFEs are a cornerstone. The TAFEs in those communities support the small businesses and add value to property. The TAFEs are the pillars of those communities. However, in his contribution Mr Drum did not mention that at all. I am very surprised that Mr Drum, as a representative of regional Victoria, has no sympathy and no compassion about this matter. He does not even seem to have an understanding of the damage that the government is doing in regional Victoria. I urge Mr Drum to talk to his community. I urge him to speak with those small businesses and TAFEs, because he would not be spouting the sort of stuff he is spouting at the moment if he took up that opportunity.

I turn to the removal of a particular program which is causing enormous concern in Eastern Metropolitan Region. I refer to the removal of the School Focused Youth Service. This was a particularly important program. I am glad Mrs Kronberg is in the chamber, because she might have to face the 9000 students in Eastern Metropolitan Region who benefited from this program last year but will miss out on it this year. There were 9000 kids who benefited from this program, which made sure that the children enrolled in it were not bullied and that they made the transition from primary school to high school. This program made sure that children living with a disability in Eastern Metropolitan Region, Mrs Kronberg's electorate, were not held back because of that disability. There were 9000 kids in Eastern Metropolitan Region alone who were picked up by this program last year. This program literally turned lives around. It made sure that kids who would otherwise have fallen through the cracks, ended up in our criminal justice system or had dealings with police were picked up, turned around and put back on the straight and narrow.

The cost of the program was about \$119 per student, and yet it has been ripped out by this government. That makes no sense at all when you compare that cost with the cost flowing from what will happen to those kids if they fall through the cracks and end up in our criminal justice system or our jails. Can members imagine the

cost of incarceration, the cost of the graffiti removal, the cost of dealing with the mess when the lives of kids are destroyed because they did not finish their education? Again it defies logic that members opposite could stand in this chamber, put their hands on their hearts and support this cut, which everyone knows — Blind Freddy will tell you — is a recipe for more crime. It is a recipe for ruining lives, and yet members opposite stand here and sanctimoniously try to defend the indefensible.

Mrs Kronberg should go and tell that to Bayswater Secondary College, which used the program very successfully, or go and tell it to Box Hill High School. She should look in the eye the kids with Asperger's, autism spectrum disorder and anxiety-based disorders who use this program to make sure they can get from primary school to high school, because that program is not going to be there this year. Those kids are going to miss out. Mrs Kronberg can tell those kids what is going to be in its stead — because there is nothing. This is like all these cuts: an accumulation of short-sighted and petty cuts which have long-term consequences. There is a cost in human lives and a cost in the community. It is extraordinary and the most short-sighted approach that you could imagine. I cannot imagine how members opposite can talk about what is happening in their communities without talking about the devastation that is being caused by this government.

It is worth noting that it is not just me talking about important programs like the School Focused Youth Service. An independent review of the project was undertaken by La Trobe University, and it found that this project made a difference to people's lives. The program worked for a minimal cost when you compared the cost at the other end of the devastation to lives if kids drop out. I urge members opposite to go and talk to some of these kids who have benefited from the programs and then examine their consciences and worry about the kids who in the future will not have that opportunity.

I have received correspondence from a number of councils which are particularly concerned about this program, including from the mayor of the City of Whitehorse, who wrote on 18 December:

Council is alarmed at the government's decision and the potential ramifications it holds for our young people into the future.

It is not just the opposition that is concerned about these kids. It is local councils and universities which have had a look at these programs. The only people who do not seem to care are members sitting opposite. The City of Whitehorse says that this program:

... provides a vital link between at-risk and vulnerable young people in a school setting and community-based youth support programs.

According to Whitehorse City Council, what is being taken away — just to be absolutely clear, so that there is no doubt — is the link between at-risk and vulnerable young people. That is what we are staring down, what this debate is about. It is about vulnerable young people and taking away the safety net. It is about taking away their opportunities and discarding them, which is what happens when you gut the budget in the way that this government is doing. It is the lack of compassion that has everyone, including the councils, alarmed. The mayor went on to say:

The removal of this program will undoubtedly reduce community capacity to meet the needs of vulnerable young people and increase the costs borne by statutory agencies and other acute service support agencies required to respond. It is also likely to lead to an increase in high-risk behaviour.

I urge Mrs Kronberg in her contribution to respond to what the mayor says, because — and let me be absolutely clear — what he is saying is the government is taking away the program that turns lives around. What that means is more kids will be involved in at-risk behaviour. It is not my view but the council's view based on its experience of this program, and it is a view reinforced by the La Trobe University study. To be absolutely clear, that behaviour involves drugs, alcohol and crime.

There are two sides to this equation. Do these kids have an opportunity to finish their education and lead constructive lives — entering into relationships, having children, settling down — or do they go down another path and engage in at-risk behaviour, fall through the cracks, get in contact with the criminal justice system and end up costing the community an absolute fortune, while at the same time their lives are all but destroyed? At its core that is what this motion is about. How you stand on this motion depends on which side of that ledger you want to be on. We on this side of the house have no doubt about which side of the ledger we are on. We are standing up for those children. We want to make sure they have every opportunity to reach their full capacity as human beings. We want to make sure that for those children who face difficulties there is a safety net in place so that they do not fall through the cracks.

What is most telling about the decision to cut this program is that it survived the Jeff Kennett era. The School Focused Youth Service was introduced by the Kennett government as part of its response to youth suicide. This was a program introduced by a conservative government, a program that received

bipartisan support, because even Jeff Kennett put children and their future first. As we know, he has gone on to recognise the importance of programs that save people's lives, programs that are part of a strategy to reduce youth suicide.

It beggars belief that those opposite stand there in their sanctimonious way and defend the indefensible. They need to examine their consciences, go out to their communities and talk to some of the people who have benefited from these programs. I would urge them to talk to Mr Kennett about why he saw the need for this program in relation to youth suicide, because that need is still there. Those opposite have no compassion when it comes to this issue. They are on the wrong side of the ledger — the wrong side of the debate — and the community will judge them accordingly.

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to make my contribution to the debate on the motion moved by Mr Lenders. I am pleased to see that he has finally resumed his position in the chamber after being absent for most of the day and missing both the high and low points — especially the low points offered by way of support for his motion from his side of the house. I am glad that his timing has coincided with my opportunity to speak on this motion.

Mr Lenders asked the house to note the Baillieu government's cuts to Victoria's education system, occasional child care and so on. I am still confused as to why the motion as presented on the notice paper today varies markedly from what he moved. I am looking for elucidation on that; I have not had a clear explanation. If it is part of some sort of primitive tactic to confuse us, it does not really matter because we are across it from every perspective anyway.

First and foremost, we have to say that the litany of woe that has constituted the utterances from members of the Labor opposition today highlights the selectivity of their recall and their emphasis. In their continual harping and carping they say programs have been cut when they may not have been cut — they may never have been allocated funding by the former government, or they may have run out of funding as the responsibility passed from one government to another. The funding may well have been subject to review or a whole-of-government approach to problem solving on some of these issues. It really shows that opposition members are stuck in a rut — that they think nothing can ever be reviewed or enhanced to provide better value for Victorian taxpayers money in a drive to deliver better outcomes and better solutions to problems. They think everything should be static.

Let me take up their points that Mr Tee made about the School Focused Youth Service. He pejoratively said it survived the Kennett government; rather I would say it was an initiative of the Kennett government. It is quite valid that any program that has been in place for about 20 years or so be subject to review no matter which government brought it in. Since the programs run under the School Focused Youth Service were established things have changed, and they now cover a range of youth service needs. These were considered as part of the government's response to the Cummins report into protecting Victoria's vulnerable children, not the La Trobe University report that Mr Tee relied on as the crutch for his argument. At this point I would prefer that to be the authoritative source on this subject.

The government is developing a whole-of-government response to that report, and a complete review of the School Focused Youth Service is being conducted in that context to ensure that our service delivery aligns with our government's response to the Cummins report. What a nonsense Mr Tee's desperate contributions have amounted to!

We need to put this into context. With the forbearance of the Acting President, I would like to read into the record something that I think is very relevant and central to what Mr Lenders is all about in accusing the coalition government of cutting education to the degree that he has suggested.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ondarchie) — Order! Please continue.

Mrs KRONBERG — I would like to share this. It is the essence of the problem Mr Lenders has. The motion before us today could have been dreamt up on one of the sleepless nights he might have been having since he ceased being the Treasurer of this state. It is central to the guilt pangs he is feeling about what might have been and where the money to fund education might have come from. The Victorian Auditor-General's report of June 2011 on the allocation of electronic gaming machine entitlements, conducted under the previous government, found that:

The revenue obtained from the sale of the entitlements was around \$3 billion less than the assessed fair market value of these assets.

The Auditor-General concluded that:

... the allocation largely failed to meet its intended financial outcome of capturing a greater share of the industry's supernormal profits.

As a result, large venue operators, rather than the community, were served. They were the beneficiaries of this windfall gain.

The former government sold 27 300 electronic gaming machine entitlements for just \$981 million, despite their being valued by the Auditor-General at a midpoint of \$4.1 billion. This was a complete failure. The allocation of electronic gaming machine entitlements by the former government was nothing short of an unmitigated disaster and a financial crime committed against the people of Victoria. This is where the financial shortfall for matters such as the education budget processes have not been realigned comes from — the missteps, the malfeasance, whatever fandango the state government was responsible for before we took over, a \$3 billion hole, which is money that might have been directed to hospitals, roads and schools. Mr Lenders stands culpable — \$3 billion washed away. What a yield! Some \$981 million instead of \$4.1 billion.

Mrs Peulich — A financial tsunami.

Mrs KRONBERG — A financial tsunami, absolutely. While I am talking about \$4.1 billion, let me say that we came into government to face the federal government cutting our budget. What a process we had to go through to accommodate that shortfall. What a particular obscenity. The figure of \$4.1 billion — it could have been \$4.1 billion that was withdrawn. I know that the state opposition has already given up on its federal comrades. It knows that they will be annihilated on 14 September. It knows that they will almost sink without a trace, that they could be converted into a rump of a party — and it is looking askance at what its federal colleagues are doing.

It is absolutely proof positive that opposition members have no ability to negotiate or lobby on behalf of their so-called constituents here in Victoria. How have they allowed that shortfall to occur? There is the double whammy of \$4.1 billion and what could have been with the gaming revenue, \$4.1 billion, and everybody standing still and avoiding eye contact with no holding the Gillard government to account.

Let us talk about some of the facts. The coalition has increased funding in schools by 3 per cent. This increase is being delivered despite the state facing the worst economic conditions in 20 years. We have talked about federal Labor hacking \$4.1 billion from the state's bottom line, and despite this the coalition delivered an extra \$1 billion for education in its first budget. This is the truth. No matter how much Labor members want to re-engineer the facts with their smoke-and-mirrors approach, these are the facts. The

opposition glibly slid out from recognising the coalition's funding for special schools and schools for autistic children. I have not heard any mention of that in this debate. How much suffering and deprivation was there in 11 years of the Labor government in terms of what the coalition had to do to make up for a desperate shortfall and a desperate need with special schools and autism schools. The fact is that our funding represents the biggest single capital investment in special schools and autism schools. No wonder Labor is avoiding eye contact on that — 11 years of neglect of special schools and autistic children.

The coalition has invested in additional primary welfare officers and additional maths and science specialists, and in providing alternative settings and a robust means of addressing a school maintenance backlog. The school maintenance backlog has been dimensioned; it is in the stratosphere of \$300 million.

I am reminded of an example of a school which needs maintenance and what the coalition government is doing about that. The school happens to be in Mr Tee's electorate, in Eltham; it is Montmorency Primary School. I am not sure that Mr Tee has ever been there. He probably needs some global positioning system to find his way there. He is leaving Eltham in the hands of his parliamentary colleague Steve Herbert, the member for Eltham in the Assembly.

No-one had lifted a finger for Montmorency Primary School for a considerable time. Montmorency Primary School was in such a bad state that the Labor government's resolution was to have it amalgamate with another school. People at that school said, 'We are proud of our school community; we do not want to be forced into a compulsory amalgamation', so they were punished, and punished very harshly, for the stand they took. Those people then went cap in hand to the member for Eltham, Steve Herbert, and said, 'What can we do about giving some sort of a facelift to our school for students for the upcoming school year? What can we do to attract a larger cohort of parents of children sending their children to the Montmorency Primary School?'. This is a verbatim quote, and it will be painful for Labor colleagues. Their colleague Steve Herbert suggested they, 'Go across the road to the RSL and ask them if they will help you put a lick of paint on it'.

That is where the people of the Montmorency Primary School were left by the member for Eltham, by the state Labor government, and of course Steve now has shadow spokesperson responsibilities for education and the teaching profession. I understand that is his only

strength and that he resides in that orbit, but that is what it is.

A lot of pressure has also been brought to bear by the shortfall in Building the Education Revolution (BER) funding at the Eltham North Primary School. Members of that school community had to go cap in hand to the state government for funding for a lift so that their disabled students would be able to access a two-storey building that had been squashed onto a very tightly packed school campus precinct built on a near escarpment. The building had to be a two-storey building, but no funding came from the federal government's BER regime so that people could access the building. Anybody who could not climb up a rope or climb the stairs could not get into the building.

Members of the Eltham North school community appealed to the state government, and the state government has helped them out. This is an example of a shortfall and lack of concentration and attention to detail. All those buildings were just building envelopes with no fit-out.

Another example of a fit-out is what happened when an \$800 000 extension was put into the Montmorency Primary School. The federal government redefined what a fit-out was and what fixtures were. I know that Labor members would be attuned to this, and it would probably add to their general discomfort and ill ease about how the BER was executed. We know there were great cost overruns and all sorts of Eddie Obeid-kind fandangos.

What we do know is that Labor redefined the definition of 'fixtures'. People thought a fixture might be a cupboard, a bookcase or a power point. Not so! School communities have had to club together and wring their hands to put in shelving, cupboards and power points in a BER building, so gross was the project cost overrun on their site. Has anyone ever known a building to be handed over without certified fixtures, fittings and power outlets? When has anyone ever heard of an example of that happening? Perhaps if you were building a cattle shed, but even a cattle shed would need power. Here we are dealing with selective memory.

Federal Labor has inflicted a terrible burden on Victorians. We have had to come up with another \$66 million in maintenance and replacement programs for the failed revolution — another failed revolution. Our Labor comrades are still into revolutions.

I return to the School Start bonus. Let me say to the ladies and gentlemen of the opposition that members of

the coalition government extended the School Start bonus for another year for families on the education maintenance allowance (EMA). I think Mr Lenders should not have the temerity to point an accusing finger at the coalition government, when it was Premier Brumby himself who planned to cut the funding. As Treasurer at the time I would have thought Mr Lenders would have known about this. He might have even instituted it, so what a lot of humbug is coming back at us!

It is very important for Victorians to know that the EMA funding is combined with the School Start bonus funding, so every family receiving the EMA will get more funding — another fact. Families receiving EMA funding for students entering prep and year 7 will receive additional funding in recognition of the increased cost of preparing for school when there is peak expenditure.

I hope that the next time Mr Lenders prepares to raise his profile against the obvious competitive pressures he is feeling from his colleague, Mr Pakula, he draws upon the facts and does not use selective memory. It will make him more bulletproof and less open to attack on so many obvious points.

In relation to the Free Fruit Friday program, Labor Party members love slogans and alliteration. It is hard to say free fruit Friday, especially if you have bitten off a bit of apple before you try to say it. It was a lapsing program and the coalition has extended it for a year while it develops a whole-of-government approach to healthy eating and lifestyle programs to replace it — not just a box of apples, which could be indifferent in quality, but a holistic approach to healthy eating and good outcomes.

Time is short and I have made a detailed contribution. As far as TAFE funding is concerned these are the simple facts: under Labor \$855 million was allocated to TAFE. When we took it over we were whacked by a \$1.3 billion problem — that is, a big, festering problem in the TAFE system. It is evidence and proof positive once again of a \$400 million blow-out. What would Labor have done if we had not inherited the problem and adroitly, skilfully and prudently addressed it? Dug more holes? Borrowed more money? Had an \$800 million blow-out the following year?

It is probably no surprise to anybody in this chamber that I cannot say one positive thing about Mr Lenders's motion, and of course I will be supporting my colleagues, with their well thought out, well-researched, erudite and cogent contributions, in voting against it.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — For the viewers at home the Lib-Labs have spent most of today arguing about education while failing to mention that Victoria is the lowest spending state on education per student. It was the lowest spending in Australia under the Kennett government, the lowest spending under the Bracks government, the lowest spending under the Brumby government — which said that education was Labor's no. 1 priority — and today it is still the lowest spending state under the Baillieu government. I do not know why we want to be an average spender on education. We are competing against the world now in a knowledge economy and we should be aiming to match some of the other economies who invest much more heavily in education and reap the benefits of economic growth from that.

This rather limited motion addresses a small short list of programs. However, it does reference TAFE where the cuts have been quite large. I quote the Victorian TAFE Association's most recent update of 15 January which states:

In 2009, the Victorian government introduced a policy called the Victorian Training Guarantee where all eligible students would access government training subsidies. Previously, the government purchased discreet packages of training from TAFEs and some private registered training organisations (RTOs).

That is where the rot set in, because from 2008 through to 2011 we saw only 4 per cent growth for TAFE providers, which became stagnant during 2010–2011. In the meantime funding to private RTOs grew by 310 per cent between 2008 and 2011 and then by 122 per cent between 2010 and 2011. So the share of government-funded enrolments of TAFE providers has decreased from 66 per cent.

The government cut funding to 80 per cent of TAFE courses in the 1 May budget, and the TAFE sector estimates that this is a reduction to the tune of \$290 million, which is what is recorded in Mr Lenders's motion. That includes about \$170 million that was paid to TAFEs as full service providers — that is, funding for community service obligations, a full spectrum of student services and facilities, statutory obligations and specific requirements as public entities. Another \$130 million was lost through adjustments to the prices paid by the government for delivery of accredited courses.

That is what the TAFE system has had to bear in just a short time under the so-called level playing field set up by the Labor Party in 2009, opposed by the Greens and, for one brief moment, opposed by Mr Hall when he was a shadow minister. No wonder the TAFE sector is

howling. I have heard them trying to howl down the Leader of the Opposition, Daniel Andrews, at rallies that oppose the TAFE cuts.

Then there is the devastating impact, as Mr Lenders characterised it, of cuts to a number of programs. Free Fruit Friday only ever ran in about 300 schools but it was certainly not costly, and we believe it should be extended to all primary schools in addition to other programs because it is real and it is practical. Of all the important things we pass on to our kids in the school system we now understand that it is absolutely critical that they learn about healthy eating. We need to work on this in the home, in the workplace, in the ads on our TVs and in schools in a concerted approach across society, otherwise those kids will lose years from their lives.

As noted, there have been a number of changes to family school allowances. This was known back in May last year. Yes, there are some slightly higher payments under the education maintenance allowance, but schools no longer receive their portion of the allowance. Small increases do not make up for the loss of the School Start bonus, and school budgets overall are worse off — that is where the pinch is being felt. There are also problems with school-focused youth services. Several councils have written to the Greens about the programs, and we will write to the minister and ask for those programs to be retained.

We should not be competing about who has cut what and who should take the blame. The citizenry wants to hear us talking about how we can boost our education system to a high standard and how best to allocate what should be increased funding for our schools here in Victoria. I hope over the next two years — over the remainder of this term — that we can shift the debate to the demonstrated positives that education provides for society and for the whole economy.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 19

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

Noes, 21

Atkinson, Mr	Koch, Mr
Coote, Mrs	Kronberg, Mrs

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

Motion negatived.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Legislative Council on Tuesday, 19 March 2013, the Rolling Stock Procurement Plan described on page 15 of the *V/Line Pty Ltd Initial Strategic Operations Plan*, 10 November 2011 and, in addition, any updated versions of the Rolling Stock Procurement Plan.

We have seen something of V/Line's plans for the future development of its network, and it is not good news for regional communities.

Of all the essential services that citizens expect a state government to provide — health, education, emergency services and protection of the environment — we have seen some harsh treatment from the Baillieu government in its first two budgets, and when it comes to public transport, particularly regional public transport, that treatment is really quite unfortunate.

I recently obtained a 20-year strategic plan from V/Line that makes a number of interesting observations, the first being that the regional rail link — a six-year, \$6 billion project — will be full the day it opens. There will be standing room only on those trains because not enough trains have been ordered to meet the demand. V/Line said it would need 67, and the government went ahead and ordered 40. With the growth in suburbs along the way, such as Tarneit and also Melton on the Ballarat line, it will not be long before those residents will find trains bypassing them because they are too full; hence the necessity, V/Line says, to buy more trains to do short-run services out to those suburbs and back again in order to carry the load.

Government members would acknowledge that everywhere they go people are crying out for more frequent V/Line services. We can see from V/Line's previous plan that that is not going to happen without a bigger government investment. I am looking forward to the May budget to see if there is any new investment in public transport, city or country, because in the last two budgets there was no increase in service kilometres for either bus and train on either the city network or on V/Line.

The government says the *V/Line Pty Ltd Initial Strategic Operations Plan*, which was published in November 2011, is out of date. I am looking forward to seeing whether Mr O'Donohue, as Parliamentary Secretary for Transport and someone who is aware of transport challenges east of Melbourne, has had a more recent briefing and whether we can expect anything new. Let me tell the house that V/Line's estimate of patronage growth was pretty lowball — certainly not as high as we have seen in recent years — and its asks were quite modest in terms of infrastructure, facilities and rolling stock.

Since the time V/Line released that plan another Baillieu budget came out, which offered it very little, so no doubt V/Line is lowering its expectations even further. It may be that the next plan asks for even less. But out there in the regions they are asking for even more. When I go out to meet people in those areas to talk about a whole range of issues I travel on V/Line wherever I possibly can, and when I tell people that at the end of our meeting they all then want to get into a conversation about it. Everybody likes V/Line, everybody wants it to be better, but everybody finds it to be inadequate for the sorts of journeys they know are needed in their communities.

In Portland people told me that students who would like to attend university in Warrnambool and whose parents cannot afford to put them up in a house there are missing out because there is no bus that can get them there and back on the same day to time in with their lectures. I know that members, particularly from the government, which has a heavy weighting of members in country areas, would know this is a fact. This is why it is critical that we table the document that talks about V/Line's plan for the future purchase of rolling stock. The plan states:

... peak period demand will be met in 2012 but with little opportunity for further growth ... The rolling stock procurement plan highlights the importance of ordering trains in the 2012–13 budget cycle to cater for V/Line's high-patronage growth.

It also talks about latent demand for services not yet being matched by supply in the peak. Therefore, it says:

... the increase in service level after RRL is expected to have a similar impact on patronage to the increase in services after the RFR project ...

Not only will the regional rail link — which was shovel ready in 2009, as then Premier John Brumby told us, and that will now have trains running on it in about 2016 — have standing room only on the day it opens but the extra services will then bring on more demand.

The plan notes that there is a significant maintenance deficit across the network, which has accumulated due to insufficient funding over an extended period of time — let us say decades. V/Line is seeking what it calls ‘deeper level maintenance funding’ for both 2011–12 and 2012–13, which it says has been allocated at a significantly lower level than required to meet its service level delivery requirements and contractual obligations.

The plans talks about some potential industrial issues, although that section was blacked out from the document that I obtained. In terms of mobile coverage, not just for passengers but for the drivers themselves, V/Line says the existing communication system is ‘life expired and requires replacement’. That has a direct impact on our ability to run trains.

Each chapter of the publication then goes around the clock face and talks about the situation on each line. For the Gippsland lines, V/Line floats the idea of terminating peak-hour trains at Dandenong and putting Gippsland commuters onto suburban services, which would be met, it says, with ‘strong resistance from V/Line customers’. That is the understatement of the decade. Gippsland services have the poorest reliability of all V/Line services.

V/Line says the long-term solution is a fourth track on the Dandenong line, but that would be at very high cost and would have a long implementation period. It lists a whole range of infrastructure updates and some lower cost workarounds to improve service just through to Sale and Bairnsdale and flags the benefits of that. Interestingly it notes a conflict with coal export trains. If we are that close to exporting coal from the Latrobe Valley by train, I would be keen to hear more.

In regard to Geelong, the plan notes that there will be a frequent service following the regional rail link but that it will be overcrowded. The plan states:

The capacity provided in the peak hour as well as across the peak 2 hours will be insufficient to cater for the forecast patronage.

By the way, V/Line has gotten rid of its own forecasts and is using the Department of Transport’s forecasts because there was a clear difference between the two.

Then there is the promised Grovedale station, about which I have not heard much. When I go to the department’s website there is no update, although there is a form I can fill in for updates. The department says a new stabling and maintenance facility is required as well as some boom gates on six level crossings on the other side to allow for a fast train service.

In regard to Tarneit and Wyndham Vale, the plan clearly projects that passengers will not be able to get a seat when the regional rail link opens.

In regard to Melton and Deer Park, the V/Line plan says the capacity to be provided is well short of being sufficient to cater for forecast demand. The report also says:

Services to stations at Rockbank, Deer Park and Ardeer are currently sparse and unattractive to users.

There is nothing in the plan about Caroline Springs station or Toolern station. V/Line is projecting that duplication and electrification to Melton is needed to cope with the growth. I wonder if we will see anything about that in the budget coming in May.

On Ballarat to Wendouree, the plan says the regional rail link will only provide one additional train from Wendouree to Ballarat in the peak 2 hours between 7.00 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. in 2016. There are currently three trains operating in that period. The plan foreshadows overcrowding between Melbourne and Melton and says no further increase in Ballarat services is possible until that duplication and electrification occurs. According to the plan, with those infrastructure upgrades we could be getting four trains per hour in peak periods in 2040. That is a far cry from what the community out there is calling for. I know, because I have been out there and spoken to the well organised lobby for a better commuter-style service.

On Colac to Warrnambool, the plan says a fourth daily service to Warrnambool is not possible until the Baillieu government commits to upgrading the Shepparton line to take modern trains so V/Line can move the older locomotive trains from the Shepparton line down to Warrnambool. However, there is strong population growth in the area. The plan also says Warrnambool station facilities are inadequate, even for the current patronage level, especially at peak times. I know that because I have gone out there. It is quite a small waiting room for the large numbers of people shifting from connecting buses from points to the west onto the train and vice versa. The plan also says that upgrades to five crossings between Marshall and Warrnambool would help speed up those trains, which of course would run a better service for passengers and also allow V/Line to carry more passengers for the same amount of rolling stock.

In regard to Shepparton, the V/Line plan says a 2-hour service is possible if crossings are upgraded to take new faster trains. On the Bendigo line, as everyone up that way knows, trains are reaching capacity and will not be able to cope with the forecast growth. The plan says by

2018 the service frequency will have reached its maximum level.

V/Line even flags some fairly simple infrastructure improvements — for instance, dual train tracks where in one direction there is a different speed limit to the other direction, making it hard to coordinate the timetable. That entire document — the memo, if you like, from V/Line to the government, a begging bowl being put out for even a basic service to keep up with a limited estimate of patronage growth — seems to be the basis on which the government has made decisions.

It was put to the Premier that he had fallen short on investment in this area at a press conference he organised on 24 January. The Premier was surprisingly animated. I believe the media noted that while typically it is like trying to get a rise out of an Easter Island statue, the Premier got quite excited. He said:

Spare me. We've just ordered 40 new carriages and I've got to say ...

The journalist interrupted by saying:

They say apparently 67 is the figure that has been requested.

The Premier said:

We have just ordered 40 and I'll leave it to the Greens to deal with that issue. The previous government hadn't made that order. We have and we've got good value for it.

There were further attempts to get him to explain that position, and they were unsuccessful. I believe he is leaving it to the Greens to deal with the issue. We have brought this motion here today calling for some transparency. The *Age* newspaper today says that the government has no transport plan. That is not true. Of course there are transport plans being put forward all the time, it is just that we never get to read them, and we should get to read them. There should be nothing to hide.

When a geographic franchise like V/Line puts forward its plan to the government and says, 'This is what we need looking 20 years out', that should be a public document. It should be a subject for public discussion. People should be able to understand what certain levels of investment will provide in terms of certain levels of services. Communities should have that certainty. Land-use planners, local councils and even our own Minister for Planning should have that kind of information when they make decisions about areas for future development. We can only hope that the government will adopt a more transparent approach and release the rolling stock plan so that we can understand for ourselves the impact that decisions, such as the one

the government has to make in May about how many new V/Line train sets to purchase, will have on all our communities.

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to speak on behalf of the government in relation to the motion moved by Mr Barber. Whilst the motion that Mr Barber has moved and has spoken to, motion 515, is a relatively narrow motion dealing with a request for documents in regard to the rolling stock procurement plan of V/Line, the contribution he made was quite expansive and covered a range of issues to do with the V/Line rail network, as well as the metropolitan rail network and other public transport issues. Following the lead of Mr Barber, I will also touch on a number of issues in relation to public transport — V/Line, Metro Trains Melbourne and others in Victoria.

The government does not oppose Mr Barber's request for the document described in his motion to be tabled, with the usual caveats around cabinet confidentiality and other forms of privilege. The essence of Mr Barber's contribution, in addition to asking for that V/Line document, was to seek additional investment for further improvements to the public transport system, whether that be rolling stock, the duplication of railway lines or station improvements. He cited Warrnambool station as a station where he believes additional investment is required.

Of course many of the suggestions Mr Barber proffered in his contribution may be worthy of consideration; they may be worthy of investment. I just make the simple point that all those things take money. To pick up the point made by Mrs Kronberg in her excellent contribution on the previous motion, the Victorian government has many revenue pressures. Many of those pressures are the result of external factors outside the control of government, whether that be the global financial environment, the global level of growth, the write-down in GST revenue from the commonwealth or other decisions made by the commonwealth in relation to funding.

Some of those revenue pressures, though, are the direct result of financial mismanagement by the previous government. The one that says more about the previous government's financial management than any other is the sale of electronic gaming machines (EGMs). I want to quote from the response to an adjournment debate matter raised by me on 28 November 2012 provided to me by the Minister for Gaming, Michael O'Brien, who said:

In 2012–13 the budget includes \$85.8 million in revenue from the sale of entitlements.

That is the EGMs.

Had the Auditor-General's midpoint been achieved —

That is the Auditor-General's June 2011 report on the auction of the EGMs —

revenue in 2012–13 would have been \$358.75 million. Thus in 2012–13 alone the budget is \$272.95 million worse off due to this failure of the former government. Across the ... forward estimates years, the budget includes \$98.1 million per annum in revenue from the sale of entitlements compared with \$410 million that should have been received, representing a loss to taxpayers of \$311.9 million each year. The total loss to taxpayers over the four years of the budget forward estimates is more than \$1.2 billion.

That is quoting the Auditor-General's estimate of what a fair value should have been for those entitlements.

As I said, there are a range of pressures on revenue for government, and many of those are outside the control of either the previous or the current government because of external factors. This is one situation where Mr Lenders, as the former Treasurer, taking the midpoint of the Auditor-General's estimate of the value, has cost the Victorian taxpayer and the Victorian budget \$1.2 billion over the four years of the budget's forward estimates.

I simply make the point to Mr Barber that \$1.2 billion would buy a lot of V/Line carriages; it would improve a lot of stations or it would buy a lot of rolling stock for Metro Trains Melbourne; it would improve signalling significantly. It could be used for a range of infrastructure improvements to the network. I just make the point that there are pressures on the revenue side and Mr Lenders's failure to achieve a fair value for the auction of the electronic gaming machines has put significant pressure on the Victorian budget.

I now turn to some of the other pressures on the Victorian public transport system; many other problems that this government has had to address. I am no engineer and I do not profess to have technical knowledge of these things, but to me providing things like power and trains is pretty critical to operating a railway system. As we know, the previous government commissioned a new railway station at Cardinia Road — a fantastic asset for the people of Pakenham. It was a second railway station for the people of Pakenham and an excellent contribution to the public transport system and the Pakenham line.

But the previous government commissioned a new railway station without the power to enable trains to stop and start. On coming to government we found we had a new station on which construction had literally just started. I think the sod turning had occurred before

the change of government but substantial construction started in early 2011. We had a new station without power. The new government has had to build a new substation to allow trains to stop and start. As I said, I am not a railway engineer but I would have thought that providing power to enable trains to stop and start would have been a fundamental requirement for any new railway station. A new substation has recently been commissioned at McGregor Road in Pakenham that enables trains to stop and start so that they can actually use the railway station.

The regional rail link is again a project that was commissioned by the previous government. We all remember Premier Brumby and the then Minister for Public Transport, Mr Pakula, announcing at ZINC at Federation Square to a group of people with an interest in the transport space the new route for the regional rail link and what the project would entail. Regrettably for many residents affected by this new rail line, many people whose houses were to be demolished did not know about it until the media came knocking on their doors to talk about it. Not only do you need power for train stations but you need land for the tracks. The other important ingredient is rolling stock. The regional rail link was commissioned by the previous government without any additional rolling stock.

The Baillieu government has had a good look at the regional rail link project. We will remove two level crossings at Anderson Road in Sunshine, which I know Mr Elsbury and Mr Finn have advocated very heavily for within government. The government is committed to removing those two level crossings, which will make for a significant improvement for the people of Sunshine. The coalition government has ordered 40 new carriages for the regional rail link once it comes online, as well as for the broader network.

There are some fundamentals the previous government failed to understand when it comes to the rail system. You need power for stations, you need carriages for new rail lines and you need land to build the tracks. This government has addressed those remarkable and astonishing oversights of the previous government. If money were no object — if Mr Lenders had delivered fair value for the electronic gaming machine licences — we would have a lot more money to do many more things. One can only lament that failure by the previous government — by Mr Lenders as the Treasurer of Victoria — in selling the electronic gaming machine licences for an estimated \$3 billion short of fair value, which has put significant pressure on the Victorian budget at a time when global growth is low, when GST revenue is down and when state-based

taxation, such as stamp duty and the like, are soft because of the property market.

The government does not oppose Mr Barber's motion. We have ordered 40 new V/Locity rail cars, which will help secure 70 jobs at Bombardier in Dandenong South. It is a \$210 million investment, which is a significant investment. We have got on with the job of fixing some of the gross failures of the previous government, such as building a railway station without power where trains cannot stop or take off. We have fixed that situation by building a new power substation, as I said, at McGregor Road in Pakenham. With those words, the government does not oppose the motion moved by Mr Barber.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — If you hang around long enough, you see everything, and receiving a lecture about regional rail from a member of the state parliamentary Liberal Party is nothing if not a little ironic. The Labor Party is happy to support Mr Barber's motion seeking this information.

I will make just a few comments about the day-to-day reality for people who use V/Line services. There are some significant V/Line rail services which operate in my electorate, and there are some really disturbing trends in punctuality. In Ballarat the December punctuality figure was 83.8 per cent, with an annual average of 89.75 per cent; in Geelong the December figure was 82.5 per cent, with the mean for the year being 85.94 per cent; and in Warrnambool the December figure was 77.7 per cent, with a year-long average of 86.6 per cent. The Ararat–Maryborough line tells a better story. It is not a particularly frequent service — I know that people who use that service would love an additional service or two a day — but the figure was 88 per cent in December, with a mean of 94.47 per cent. A train that is not punctual is one that does not arrive within 6 minutes of the scheduled time.

The government has some work to do to improve punctuality, and rolling stock is an important part of the equation. The reality for V/Line commuters is that trains consistently run late. New timetables have meant that services have been reduced, and for daily commuters that means literally hours a week out of their lives. The number of people who travel on the trains continues to grow and, as Mr Barber and Mr O'Donohue have indicated, the need to purchase additional rolling stock is something the government must deal with. The government refuses to acknowledge that 40 trains by 2016 is going to be too little, too late. V/Line needs more carriages and more trains, and punctuality needs to improve.

It has been demonstrated over a number of years now that when governments invest in regional rail, people use the service. It is certainly a service I am very fond of and use whenever I can, and the information Mr Barber is seeking today will provide important additional information for users of regional rail services across Victoria. We certainly support his endeavours to get hold of that information.

In the last week or so there have been media reports that V/Line has removed 22 of its older carriages from service to ensure that appropriate safety standards are able to be maintained. Other areas of concern for commuters include off-peak tickets being removed from sale without warning at Bacchus Marsh, Lara and Little River stations in my electorate of Western Victoria Region.

The regional rail project, for which Labor in government was mercilessly mocked by coalition members, is something of which we are incredibly proud. The Kennett government closed numerous train lines across regional Victoria, and people in regional Victoria well remember that. To be reminded of just how upset people were to lose their rail service, all government members need to do is take a trip to Ararat. They will hear about that and see how pleased the people of Ararat were to have their rail services restored. This was not a simple task, and it certainly was not one that came at a low cost. A significant upgrade of our regional rail infrastructure was required after its dereliction, which was overseen by the Kennett government.

With those words, I emphasise Labor's ongoing support for regional rail. Any additional information that could assist the public debate around meeting the needs of regional train travellers would be welcome. We are happy to support Mr Barber's motion today.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Barber's motion, which states:

That this house requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Legislative Council on Tuesday, 19 March 2013, the rolling stock procurement plan described on page 15 of the *V/Line Pty Ltd Initial Strategic Operations Plan*, 10 November 2011 — —

Mr Barber — Have you read it?

Ms CROZIER — I have a copy here of the V/Line strategic plan. I will continue my contribution, but I indicate to Mr Barber that I have done some background research on this. I notice that Mr Barber has taken a particular point from page 15, as is highlighted in his motion.

I would like to make a few points in relation to comments made by Mr Barber, Mr O'Donohue and Ms Pulford just now, because this is an important issue. I, like Mr Barber and all members of this chamber, value public transport. I have used it extensively in the past and no doubt I will continue to use it in the future. We can be very pleased that we have a public transport system, although it obviously needs support. As Mr O'Donohue highlighted, when we came to government the Minister for Public Transport faced great challenges in addressing a number of issues relating to the public transport system and the transport system in general. Those issues related not only to trains and trams but also to roads and the condition of those roads.

In his contribution, Mr Barber mentioned maintenance. There are many roads in country Victoria, and that includes Ms Pulford's electorate, on which I have travelled for many years. I know the roads in that area very well, and I can say that over the last 10 to 15 years there has been major neglect in the maintenance of those roads. This government has done an enormous amount of work in addressing those issues, particularly after the floods of 2011.

Getting back to Mr Barber's motion, which relates to the rolling stock and the issues that were addressed there, Ms Pulford should absolutely embrace this issue. Under the previous government Mr Barber could not have raised this motion, because there was no rolling stock. In regard to Ballarat, Ms Pulford should embrace the fact that the trains this government commissioned and which have been delivered came out of Ballarat. In June of last year a media release from the Minister for Public Transport stated that at Alstom's Ballarat maintenance centre the first of seven new X'trapolis trains were under construction and were expected to be delivered before the end of this year. Not only is that good news for the public transport system, it is also good news for the local economy and, more importantly, for the jobs that are being generated at that site.

The minister's media release goes on to state:

The company now plans to invest \$8 million to develop the Ballarat site, creating high-skilled jobs for regional Victoria.

That is happening in Ms Pulford's electorate, and in the city she comes from. I would have thought Ms Pulford would have embraced this government initiative. This is a good news story for the city of Ballarat and for those people who are working at that particular site. This initiative delivers more jobs and provides all sorts of returns for Victoria's economy.

As Mr O'Donohue said, the Baillieu government has faced significant major challenges, and it continues to face those challenges, in relation to fiscal responsibility and financial issues. He cited an example in his electorate in regard to Pakenham, where a station was completed but did not have any electricity. How extraordinary. I could not believe that, but I suppose I should not be surprised by that given we had a new \$1 billion hospital without an IT system — that was another mess that we highlighted when we came to government. We discovered it and we had to address it. That is another example of the mess the previous government left us with and which we are now addressing.

I am pleased to say that not only do we have that rolling stock but we are also developing new jobs in relation to those trains. It was a pre-election commitment of the coalition government to improve services and train timetables. We have been able to do that. There are instances where we have improved services right across regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne. Late last year a new train timetable was released that delivered 90 extra weekly metro trips and provided some additional train trips to outer areas of Melbourne. In my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region, there was an increase in morning peak hour trains that were stopping at various stations, including Hawksburn and Toorak stations, and again in the evening. The train timetables for those areas were also increased and improved.

That was acknowledged by Metro Train Melbourne's chief executive, Andrew Lezala. He has also acknowledged that Metro's punctuality has improved markedly over the last 18 months. Metro's September on-time performance result was 93.1 per cent; that is the highest result since the franchise began. That is very good news for commuters who use public transport. There is lots to do. It is another issue that the government is addressing, given the previous government's failure to plan for the increases in population in outer areas. It just goes to show that there was a lack of planning by the previous government in a whole range of areas, not to mention the need to put on new rolling stock.

The Minister for Public Transport, Mr Mulder, should be commended on the enormous amount of work he has done in this area. It is a very difficult area. It is one of those areas of government that is always challenging because of the different competing interests. As Mr O'Donohue highlighted, we have been under enormous pressure from the financial burdens that have been placed upon us, such as the write-downs in GST revenue. We are faced with international economic

issues as well as some decisions that have been made at the federal level that are impacting on not only our manufacturing base but also other areas of operation. Of course I am referring to the additional taxes that are going to affect every single business, including operators of our public transport system, which require a great deal of electricity. The carbon tax will affect services such as public transport along with other public services.

I return to the point in Mr Barber's contribution where he referred to a comment made by the Premier. Mr Barber said that the Premier had said, 'I'll leave it to the Greens to deal with that issue'. That might have been a bit tongue in cheek, because Mr Barber would probably have us all on bicycles, truth be known.

Mr Barber — Have you been on a bicycle lately?

Ms CROZIER — I have not been on a bicycle lately.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr) — Order! Mr Barber, from your seat!

Ms CROZIER — I have to say that I do not often get on a bicycle. I had a bad experience in Melbourne on a bicycle some years ago, and it terrified the living daylights out of me. I have not had the nerve to get back on a bike. I prefer to walk, and I do that regularly. I would gladly get on a tram, train or bus and use public transport, but I am not a great fan of bikes.

Mr P. Davis — Ms Crozier has been distracted from her speech.

Ms CROZIER — I have been distracted from my speech, Mr Davis, but I had to make the point that I am a great supporter of public transport. In the summer months I used public transport a number of times to get around Melbourne. It was an absolute delight and not too crowded at all.

Nevertheless, there are significant issues relating to the rolling stock, and the contractual obligations are being taken seriously by the government. We are ensuring that this is done in a responsible manner and financial components relating to any of these contracts will be looked at closely and carefully. The operations plan Mr Barber referred to in relation to the rolling stock has various elements that need to be addressed. Metro Trains Melbourne was mentioned briefly, as was the regional rail link project, and I am pleased the Baillieu government is supporting that. It will make an enormous difference to many people living in regional areas who rely on public transport not only to get

around public areas but also to travel from country areas to metropolitan Melbourne.

In relation to the responsibilities of Mr Mulder's portfolio, I reiterate that he has delivered in a number of areas, and not only in areas the government said it would deliver on. We are improving services right across the metropolitan network, and we are improving passenger travel times. There are in excess of 1000 new train services across Melbourne and they are moving more people. There has been much to do within the relatively short time frame since we came into government. Melbourne is an expanding city with an expanding population. More planning is required, but I am confident we will deliver those train services. As Mr O'Donohue said, the government will not be opposing Mr Barber's motion.

Motion agreed to.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Education and Training Committee: education of gifted and talented students

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — I would like to make some remarks on the report into the education of gifted and talented students prepared by the Education and Training Committee. At first blush the final report of the committee makes a number of sensible recommendations that go to the need to evaluate school programs that purport to cater to the needs of so-called gifted and talented students, for a statewide policy to be developed, for support and the establishment of units within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to look at matters relevant to gifted and talented children. As well, there are a number of recommendations for the system to identify so-called gifted students and others that promote the development of strategies for educating these students, spreading the focus to primary schools, teacher training, and supporting teachers and parents.

I welcome the thrust of the report only when it states in the executive summary that the fundamental premise is that suitable education for the gifted must be available in every classroom because this is the only way to provide equitable access to such students. I am all for equitable access to all schools and all curriculum programs. I also welcome the view contained in the report that the emphasis should be on the centrality of curriculum differentiation that enables a wide range of student abilities to be catered for within a single classroom. This aspect of the report lines up very well

with the long tradition of democratic public education going right back to the Education Act 1872, which outlines that state education should be free, secular and compulsory.

The line within this tradition, which I have always supported, takes the view that state schools should accept all children no matter what their background and must develop educational programs that meet the individual capacities of students and that best foster their educational development. This tradition is suspicious of selective intake, where schools select the students; it is suspicious of streaming, where children are graded into classes based on test results and so-called ability; and it supports schooling that accepts all children in the neighbourhood and where classrooms are of mixed ability. The recommendations in a report of this type are not too bad in that they uphold the principle of common classrooms where the curriculum rather than the groupings of children are differentiated.

The profound disappointment I have with the report is that while it makes a desultory gesture at defining giftedness and talent and sets out three conceptualisations of giftedness and talent, there is no discussion of the problems arising from these definitions and conceptualisations. I am dismayed, for example, that in searching the electronic version of the final report I found no reference to the work of Professor Richard Teese of the University of Melbourne, who has an international reputation and has written and researched extensively on many aspects of education.

The failure of the report to critically scrutinise the conceptualisations of Professor François Gagne of the University of Quebec and Montreal, Dr Abraham Tannenbaum of Columbia University and Professor Joseph Renzulli of the University of Connecticut is a significant weakness. It is interesting to note in passing that the model of intelligence developed by Harvard University's Professor Howard Gardner is dismissed, because if it were applied, all students might be considered gifted in one way or another. The report seems to be saying that it is enough to present a model of giftedness without examining the utility of the model; how it can be used to identify a particular student in a particular school setting as being gifted and standing to benefit from a particular program. None of this is examined in the report.

There are significant problems with definitions of giftedness, and they include the fact that experts do not agree and cannot agree because the question itself is problematic; it cannot have an answer. Intelligence is dynamic, individually specific, situation related and

associated with social values that have a historical and cultural basis. Intelligence is not something that is physically real. The problem is that there is a debate amongst experts — educationists, psychologists, scientists and philosophers — about what intelligence and giftedness is. It is a debate that has not been resolved, yet the report fails to address it and goes on without a care to estimate that up to 85 000 children are gifted in Victoria. The report goes on to make recommendations to develop all manner of programs on what can only be a foundation of sand.

Department of Sustainability and Environment: report 2012

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the Department of Sustainability and Environment annual report for 2012. In commenting on this report I am mindful of the fact that staff of this department are vigorously engaged in dealing with wildfire, bushfire or forest fire in north-eastern Victoria and Gippsland in particular. We have two significant live fires — the Aberfeldy fire and the Harrietville fire, which have consumed an extraordinary amount of resources.

But what I want to talk about in particular today is the ethos of the Department of Sustainability and Environment. One of the things I note from this report is a proud reference to the new office in Heyfield, which was opened sometime last year. That office is a great complex and serves as the basis for a control centre for the Aberfeldy-Gippsland fire. It was designed to be able to be ramped up to provide appropriate accommodation for an emergency response, and it has sufficiently done that. I want to refer to the staff who are working for government agencies at the moment and what I perceive to be a change of culture among those staff.

After Black Saturday the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommended an increase in the level of investment in fuel reduction burning. The report says on page 60:

DSE and Parks Victoria completed 834 planned burns treating a total of 197 149 hectares of public land in 2011–12 as part of an integrated plan to reduce bushfire risk to people, property and communities.

This is 87 per cent of the annual target of 225 000 hectares and more than any other year since 1991, despite one of the wettest years on record.

The annual planned burning program will gradually build to an annual target of 390 000 hectares — or 5 per cent — of public land in response to the government's commitment to implement all of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommendations.

The reason I refer to that is that it was not so long ago — in fact particularly after the 2002–03 alpine fires and the 2006–07 Great Dividing Range fires — that we had some difficulty persuading the then government of the need to reduce fuel loads. I remember the lengthy and enduring debates we had in this chamber about that matter, and it was only as a consequence of the tragedy of Black Saturday that the previous government conceded it needed to change its view. The reality is that it is this government that is implementing the recommendations of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. In my view the 5 per cent target is grossly inadequate. I saw Mrs Petrovich, the Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Environment, who is responsible for bushfire — I think for lighting bonfires; no, for putting bushfires out; I am not sure which — blanch when I said 5 per cent is inadequate.

However, I have to say that the attitude of departmental staff has vastly changed in the past few years, the four years since Black Saturday. There is now no or little resistance to the need to improve the output in terms of performance targets and measures in relation to fuel reduction. However, importantly, what I see from my own experience in state forests and national parks — and I have to confess I would far rather be in a national park than in this place — it is a terrible admission, Mrs Coote, I know — is that fuel loads are vastly excessive. Unfortunately time does not permit me to list where these fuel loads are excessive, but I will do so at a future opportunity.

Auditor-General: *Local Government — Results of the 2011–12 Audits*

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report entitled *Local Government — Results of the 2011–12 Audits*. The audits incorporate 103 agencies which pertain to local government and include all 79 councils.

Essentially the upshot of these audits is that the Auditor-General assures the Parliament of Victoria that overall these agencies and councils have performed well and are on track with their performance and financial reporting as well as with their internal controls. The apparent deterioration of the budget surplus from \$1.11 billion down to \$1.3 billion was due to an increase in employee benefits and a call on the superannuation defined benefits scheme of \$367 million. This was a financial matter that arose and was not within the control of the councils.

Of the 79 councils audited, only 5 councils indicated a medium financial sustainability risk whilst one council,

Buloke Shire Council, indicated a high financial sustainability risk. Overall the audits are indicative of a concerted effort from councillors and council officers to maintain and sustain their council's productivity and financial viability for years to come.

Of course there are the obligatory Auditor-General recommendations that go to the heart of improving systems to ensure maximum value for the ratepayer's dollar. We live in harsh economic times. Programs that look after the elderly, who are rapidly increasing in number as our population ages, need to be accountable not only for performance but also for ensuring home care programs are delivered to a high standard. Professional and caring day care programs for children must be made available to parents who are balancing work and family commitments.

Councils provide a multitude of services to the everyday householder, and it would cause unbelievable chaos if they were withdrawn. All in all, local councils provide a vital role in our community and, according to the Auditor-General's audit, the vast majority are doing a good job. Gone are the days of a one-stop shop for local councils, so outsourcing is a necessary evil to ensure transparency and accountability to ratepayers.

The Victorian Auditor-General's report has provided 13 recommendations, most of which are sensible and relatively easy to implement. I support the recommendations contained in this report.

Victorian Law Reform Commission: sex offenders registration

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — Acting President, in your capacity as Chair I have not had a chance to wish you the very best for 2013, and I know you will continue to do an excellent job in the role.

I am very proud to be part of a government that is not frightened to tackle the hard issues. Today I would like to speak on the Victorian Law Reform Commission's *Sex Offenders Registration* final report. It is timely to go back and see how this report came into being. The preface of the report states:

In April 2011, the Attorney-General asked the commission to review the registration of sex offenders under the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 (Vic.) following a report by the Ombudsman, which revealed that Victoria Police had not informed the Department of Human Services of more than 300 registered sex offenders who were living with children or had unsupervised contact with them.

The Sex Offenders Registration Act established the first of three statutory schemes in Victoria that seek to protect children from exposure to people who are living in the community after completing a sentence for sexual offending.

The act took Victorian law into the largely uncharted territory of preventative responses to sexual offending. The other two statutory schemes designed to protect children from convicted sex offenders are the working-with-children checks and legislation that permits the detention and supervision of serious offenders after they have completed their sentences.

As I said, this is a government that is prepared to challenge and tackle some of the very difficult aspects of the community in which we live and to make quite certain that our most vulnerable Victorians are protected in the best possible way. If you have a look at what the Baillieu government has achieved since it has been in office, you will see it has done a remarkable amount of work. One of the landmark decisions was to ask former judge Philip Cummins to inquire into and report on matters involving vulnerable children in this state. Again I put on record my praise for this comprehensive report and for the work done by Phil Cummins and his team, and for the way in which the Minister for Community Services, Ms Wooldridge, and the Premier approached the recommendations of that report. Not only were the recommendations accepted in full, but Ms Wooldridge put in \$60 million to support the recommendations.

The inquiry looked at a whole range of areas, but basically the thrust of the inquiry was to protect vulnerable children within our state. There have been a number of other areas that have gone to reinforce and support just that aspect. For example, a media release from the Premier issued on 15 November 2011 is headed 'Vital funding for sexual assault counsellors and advocates'. Another media release, issued on 29 March 2012, is headed 'Victoria's vulnerable children to get better protection through workforce reform', which relates to reforms made in March that year. Yet another media release, from 21 June 2012, is headed 'Report to help improve protection of vulnerable children', which refers to the annual report of the Victorian Child Death Review Committee, which:

... provides valuable input into the coalition government's strategy to improve the lives of vulnerable children, the Minister for Community Services Mary Wooldridge said today.

Other areas include the child protection reforms, which went live on 7 November 2012, and the Parliament's support for a new commissioner for children and young people. It was very pleasing today to see that Bernie Geary has been appointed as the first commissioner.

A most important media release was put out yesterday by the Premier. It talks about people who have been on parole, who have reoffended and who will automatically have their parole cancelled under the coalition government's reforms to make Victoria's

parole regime the toughest in Australia. Although I do not want to pre-empt discussion and debate on this bill, I would like to quote from the press release. It states:

The changes ensure:

sex offenders and serious violent offenders convicted of a sex or violent offence while on parole will automatically have parole cancelled;

sex offenders and serious violent offenders charged with a sex or violent offence while on parole must have their cases considered by the adult parole board, with a presumption that parole will be cancelled;

sex offenders and serious violent offenders convicted of lesser offences carrying a term of imprisonment while on parole must be re-assessed by the adult parole board, with a presumption that parole will be cancelled;

all other offenders convicted of fresh offences carrying a term of imprisonment while on parole must be re-assessed by the adult parole board, with a presumption that parole will be cancelled; and

all other offenders charged with fresh offences carrying a term of imprisonment while on parole must be re-assessed by the parole board.

These will be very pleasing changes. They strengthen and make very clear what is going to be happening in this state. The report by the Victorian Law Reform Commission contains a number of very good recommendations, and I know, as I said earlier, that the Attorney-General was not afraid to take on the hard issues.

I would also have to say that the Premier wants to make quite certain that vulnerable children are protected into the future, and he has given Ms Crozier's committee, the Family and Community Development Committee, a brief and a reference to have a look into systemic child sexual abuse in organisations in this state. The committee is working very effectively, and I praise Ms Crozier.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development: report 2011–12

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise and make some comments on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development annual report 2011–12. At the outset I would like to acknowledge that the department has a huge set of responsibilities to provide a range of learning and development opportunities for Victorian children, young people and adults.

The report states that during 2011–12 the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development planned and implemented important reforms to ensure

that services continued to meet the evolving needs of the Victorian community. It also states:

Our focus began to shift from completing election commitments to developing the government's next phase of reforms ...

Of course the department's focus began to shift because we now know that the Liberal-Nationals coalition had no intention of honouring its election commitments, especially to make Victorian teachers the highest paid in Australia.

The Baillieu government has instead launched legal action against the teachers industrial action, which raises serious questions about the government's willingness and ability to reach agreement with Victoria's public school staff. It is also a clear sign that members of the Baillieu government have neither interest in reaching an agreement nor faith in their ministerial colleague the Minister for Education, Martin Dixon.

One concern is that teachers could be fined up to \$10 000 each if the Baillieu government's bid to have their action declared illegal is successful. Teachers, families and the broader community have had enough. They are angry, and they want the situation resolved immediately. Teachers have accused the state government of being more interested in spending money on lawyers than on schools. Labor's Victorian school plan to rebuild and renovate or extend every Victorian government school by 2016–17 has been abandoned by the coalition government. The education minister, Martin Dixon, told the *Age* on 31 January:

... while the coalition was committed to rebuilding and renovating all schools, 'I can't give a guarantee of how much we'll be spending each year and when that program will finish'.

The coalition gave a commitment in opposition that it would complete the program by the 2016 target date, and schools expect it to deliver. In May 2012 the Australian Education Union said:

According to the recent State of our Schools survey, over 80 per cent of Victorian schools have urgent maintenance needs. As promised, the Baillieu government needs to uphold their election commitment and recommit to the school building program which requires \$1.7 billion in funding during this term of government.

In October 2012 the Victorian Principals Association called on the department to review funding of front-line services in line with the 2010 election promise.

On 17 February 2012, Martin Dixon, the Minister for Education, visited Wangaratta High School, in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region, and when he

viewed the large hole in the ceiling of the middle school he said, 'The extremes are incredible; it even smells different'. Wangaratta High School is still waiting for its \$10 million funding for the third and final stage of the upgrade. The first two stages were funded by the former Labor government. This is the third year in a row it has been overlooked, which is very disappointing.

Echuca West Primary School is waiting for \$20 million to build the new school which will amalgamate Echuca West, Echuca South and Echuca Specialist schools. In 2012 it was the biggest budget priority of the member for Rodney in the Assembly, Paul Weller. It is disappointing that the Liberal-Nationals government has failed to understand the increased financial burden it is placing on families with its savage cuts to education.

Families in northern Victoria have made it clear to me that they are struggling to deal with the \$555 million that has been ripped out of education. It has affected the School Start bonus, Free Fruit Friday, the education maintenance allowance, the travel conveyance allowance, which was a debacle, and of course the funding cuts to the Victorian certificate of applied learning, which has impacted many of the schools in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region. The Premier must ensure that schools have the funding they need to get the best possible outcome.

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

Department of Sustainability and Environment: report 2012

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — I rise to speak on the 2012 annual report of the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), and I do so with some pride. The achievements of the DSE in the last 12 months have been substantial. Firstly I would like to highlight the work the department is currently doing around the state in firefighting as lead agency in the protection of places such as those threatened by the Aberfeldy-Donnellys fire and the Harrierville-Feathertop fire. Currently Aberfeldy has a large and very long-running fire of 71 000 hectares, and the Harrierville fire is 4115 hectares. On a code red day, I am personally very cognisant of and thankful for the work the DSE does along with the Country Fire Authority and Parks Victoria in firefighting, which is often not acknowledged as part of DSE's role by the broader community.

DSE is best known for its prescribed burning work, but this report highlights the range of works that are completed by DSE. They include work done during flood relief efforts around the state, assisting emergency service agencies on the ground to support aircraft, and incident management staff. This has been done in recent times when in one part of the state there were massive floods and destruction and in another part of the state our DSE officers were doing their prescribed burning work as part of the burning program. In the last 12 months they have completed almost 200 000 hectares of planned burning, the program's highest in 20 years. That has been done during one of the wettest years in recent times.

One of the other things that needs to be acknowledged and appreciated is the way that DSE now engages with the community in its fire operations planning — the way it communicates with communities about smoke, preparation and understanding what will happen around prescribed burning programs. This is in stark contrast to the previous government's initiative, which was to do prescribed burning when people did not know. People were not consulted. Often the DSE people were actively discouraged from doing their work. As Mr Philip Davis said, there has been a cultural shift in many respects. The people conducting those burns now feel more confident that they are supported in their work. DSE is a very positive organisation doing a variety of works and achieving under some difficult circumstances in a range of spheres.

I am particularly proud of the planned burning program. DSE and Parks Victoria completed 834 planned burns, treating a total of 197 149 hectares of public land in 2011–12. This was 87 per cent of the target of 225 000 hectares, and the total was more than any other year since 1991. This was in spite of the wettest year on record. In addition, 180 000 hectares were prepared for burning when weather and other conditions became suitable. Fire operations planning around the state is well under way. We are ready to go at a range of stages.

I will speak about other aspects of this report because DSE has many facets. It has areas of land and fire, natural resources and environment, water, capital projects, and corporate business services. The department has been restructured in many ways, and it has a much more regional focus, which many people are appreciating. The real skills out on the ground are going into the regions, and that is important for those communities. We as a government are leading the way with our policy direction. We have made a commitment to the recommendations following Black Saturday, and I am proud of the hard work of DSE in achieving those significantly increased targets.

Regional Development Victoria: report 2011–12

Mr VINEY (Eastern Victoria) — I wish to make a contribution on the Regional Development Victoria annual report of 2011–12, particularly the reference in the report to the Moe activity centre plan of the City of Latrobe. The annual report shows that in 2011–12 Regional Development Victoria allocated \$750 000 for the continuation of this project. It is unfortunate that I have to advise the house that the project has been stopped by some of the councillors, particularly a couple of councillors who have had a longstanding opposition to the project. I think that is unfortunate.

Last Friday in Moe I attended a public rally of people expressing their concern about the project being stopped when it was a considerable way into its development. At least \$4 million has been spent on the project, \$2 million being funded by the federal government and a further \$2 million by the former Labor government. At the public rally I attended last Friday night there were about 1000 residents of Moe expressing their concern at the cancellation of the project. Those of you who know Moe would know that that is a pretty sizeable crowd for that town. It is a town of about 10 000 people, so 1000 people turning out that evening was a significant indication of community concern.

I can also advise the house that the people who support this project and who are trying to get the council to reconsider its position circulated a petition in Moe, which was submitted to the council at its meeting last Monday night. Out of Moe's population of about 10 000, 6500 people signed that petition, which shows the overwhelming concern in this community about the council's decision.

This project has had a long history of course, as many of them do. The project started in 2007 with the launch of the Latrobe transit centred study precincts and Moe town strategy. It went through numerous public consultations throughout 2007 and all the way through to 2011 — so there were four years of public consultations. The project that the community and the council developed out of these processes was quite visionary and included the redevelopment of the rail precinct with the demolition of some very old buildings. It was so visionary that there have been millions of dollars committed by the business community for investment in Moe, and there is strong public support and investment support for this project that will revitalise the township.

I think the 1000 people who turned up in Moe last Friday night demonstrated that they believe in their town, and I must say I believe in them and their town. I think the council has made an error in this process. The project was well under way, and I am not even sure how a council can stop a project that has attracted federal and state funding. The demolition of buildings has commenced and roadworks are in progress. Nevertheless, it has occurred and I am calling on the council to carefully rethink the situation. It would be useful if government members in the Latrobe Valley, specifically the members for Morwell and Narracan, Mr Northe and Mr Blackwood respectively, were to come out and publicly support this project and the people of Moe. This vital project has attracted millions of dollars to the community and was going to help give the Moe community a new and fresh start.

Regional Development Victoria: report 2011–12

Mr O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — I wish to make a contribution in relation to the Regional Development Victoria annual report of 2011–12. I particularly focus on the significant benefits that have been delivered to all regional Victorians as a result of the election of the Baillieu government and its commitment to establish the Regional Growth Fund at \$1 billion over two terms of government. The fund has been enshrined in legislation, which allows communities to come to government with proposals for development in their communities and for government to provide those funds and ensure that they are available over the two terms that the fund is in existence, irrespective of which party is elected to govern at the next election.

We heard Mr Lenders in his motion this morning cite my predecessor, Peter Kavanagh, for a doctrine that was at the essence of that motion, namely, that it is not how much money you spend, but how you spend it. That is a philosophy that we are happy to recite to Labor members and Green members whenever we put their record against ours, and I will quote the words of Deputy Premier Peter Ryan, the principal minister administering the Regional Growth Fund who said: 'If there is one thing that is absolutely true, it is that Labor cannot manage money'.

Mrs Petrovich interjected.

Mr O'BRIEN — Labor likes to spend other people's money, Mrs Petrovich, but it certainly cannot manage it very well. That is why when we as a government established the Regional Growth Fund, we insisted it was done through a carefully audited process that is enshrined in legislation. I will try not to

overestimate the time, but I think Mr Hall was on his feet for what might have been up to 6 hours answering questions about the careful balances that are in the program. Most importantly, it allows communities to access these record funds that have not previously been available. We have allowed more money to be made available for regional Victoria and, yes, as I will go to shortly, the communities are spending it well.

There are many highlights in the package. In its first year, the Regional Growth Fund has in collective terms driven the ongoing economic development of regional Victoria by supporting 481 projects to the value of \$161 million and by leveraging total investments of \$433 million to help create approximately 1400 new regional jobs. This is in contrast with the Labor approach of building things like a north–south pipeline that might create jobs while it is being constructed, but what have you got left? You are left with the legacy of a pipeline that at its very best could drag water from regional areas into the city, but, more importantly, is one of the litany of white elephants that the Labor government has left the state. I will not even touch on the desalination plant that Mr Lenders was also responsible for, because it has been well canvassed by other speakers. I wish to focus on the many positive initiatives that are outlined in this annual report. I will go through them as quickly as I can.

Under the Economic Infrastructure grant announcements in the annual report, in 2011–12 the government provided approximately \$1 544 854 to the Carisbrook Renewal Park project through Central Goldfields Shire Council to assist that very needy community to repair damage that occurred as a result of the floods. A further grant of \$500 000 went to Horsham Rural City Council for stage 2 of the Horsham Enterprise Park Industrial Estate. Pyrenees Shire Council received \$1.1 million for the Beaufort Economic Growth project. Ballarat City Council received \$330 000 for the upgrade of the Art Gallery of Ballarat and \$1.5 million for the Australian Centre for Democracy at Eureka.

You have Ballarat Airport's investment attraction program at \$2.642 million. In a speech I gave yesterday on the things we have done for Stawell, I omitted to mention the \$500 000-odd that Mr Rich-Phillips, Victoria's first Minister responsible for the Aviation Industry, had delivered under the Regional Growth Fund to that important community. On Friday I also had the benefit of announcing \$500 000 funding for the Young Leaders Program in Warrnambool. What a terrific program, what a terrific fund and may the community keep benefiting from it.

South West Institute of TAFE: report 2011

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise to make some comments on South West Institute of TAFE. Members might recall that I often talk about TAFEs in western Victoria. That is largely because they do such an amazing job. They provide access to education for a number of students in their local communities, which would not be possible if those TAFEs did not exist. South West Institute of TAFE was awarded the honour of being no. 1 training provider in Victoria by winning the Victorian large training provider of the year award during this reporting period. Although there are a number of highlights contained in this annual report, this honour really is a standout achievement in a year which exceeded the performance targets set at the beginning of the reporting year.

South West Institute of TAFE is an institution that people living in the area, whether they live in Portland, Hamilton, Warrnambool or around Glenormiston, are really proud to be associated with. The community understands and appreciates its close connections to local industries and the importance of the work the institute does in skilling up people in the region and its close connections to local industries. It was a real surprise when in the last state government's budget \$10 million was taken out of the allocation for South West Institute of TAFE.

Understandably and inevitably, the community rose up and protested very strongly about what occurred. There was a significant rally outside the offices of the member for South-West Coast in the other place, Denis Napthine, with many people complaining about the irresponsible, irrational and savage cuts to not only South West Institute of TAFE but also all other Victorian TAFEs. We heard from a number of students and staff who queued up at the microphone to give their personal stories about how these TAFE cuts would affect their lives and their access to education and skills. Not long after that rally there was a full-page ad in the Warrnambool *Standard* signed by a range of prominent people from the region. It was an open letter to the minister expressing the business community's concern over the damage and negative consequences that the cuts would result in for the local community.

South West TAFE has a number of campuses, and it caters for the major local industries in the area. It has a strong focus on the tourism industry as well as on agricultural courses and the dairy industry. The cuts mean that not only has the TAFE had to restructure its courses but it has also had to cut courses. Services have also been cut and fees have dramatically increased. Sport and recreation courses have also been cut. At the

time the cuts were announced, 54 students were enrolled in those courses, and they were all employed part time or full time in local industry. They were there to gain skills to assist the health, fitness and recreation industries in the local community. They were hardly what I would consider mickey mouse courses.

We also have a strong retail sector in Warrnambool, and these cuts have meant that all certificate II and III business courses have been completely scrapped. Certificates in hospitality and agriculture have also been in the gun, and the equine course at Glenormiston College has been scrapped as well, which will have a dramatic impact on veterinary science and a whole range of other areas that are important to the racing community in the south-west. General courses that are supported by local industry in terms of human resources have also been cut. In recent weeks, we — —

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

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee: livability options in outer suburban Melbourne

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak to the report entitled *Inquiry into Liveability Options in Outer Suburban Melbourne* by the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee, which was tabled in December 2012. This report is the summation of a rich harvest of information and extensive consideration and deliberations. The committee arrived at 50 findings and has put forward 132 recommendations. It received 80 submissions and took evidence from 209 people during the hearings.

I address this report and its contents in my capacity as the chair of that committee because there is so much to be said about this report. The approach I am taking in my contribution today is that of setting the scene. The report itself is a tome of considerable detail — it runs to 605 pages. I would like to stress the fact that our hearings were conducted in Melbourne and each of Melbourne's 10 interface municipal areas. Hearings were also conducted in Perth and in four of its outer suburban areas, as well as in Adelaide and the city of Playford.

A lot of the committee's effort went into evidence gathering and seeking international input for the hearings. Because we were looking at Melbourne once again being voted the world's most livable city we chose to look at cities that had claim to that title themselves — namely, Vancouver, Calgary and

Toronto. We compete with these cities for the title of world's most livable city, so it was important for us to see what they had to offer their citizens and visitors.

Calgary is a highly ranked city, having come in fifth in terms of livability in 2012. Vancouver was the city from which Melbourne won the title in 2011. Toronto was ranked fourth in 2012 for livability. We felt it was worthwhile choosing those cities so we could learn from their experiences.

As outlined in the report, Toronto is important in terms of its many parallels with Melbourne. Its scale, growth projections and patterns and its industrial base provide a window into Melbourne's probable future. The committee took evidence across the greater Toronto area and gained an appreciation of the area known as the Golden Horseshoe, which is of a scale similar to what a future greater Melbourne metropolitan area would encompass if we kept growing towards Geelong in the west and Warragul in the east. Toronto's geophysical boundaries include Lake Ontario in the south, the Oak Ridges Moraine in the north and a water catchment area of exceptional beauty and ecological and agricultural importance, so its geophysical area is very similar to Melbourne.

The committee also visited London, where it took evidence from a number of key people in the city of Croydon. We looked at the urban renewal projects in east London and also sought the input of the authorities responsible for the Thames Gateway. We looked at the effects of the legacy project from last year's Olympic Games and particularly at what the athletes village had to offer the people of east London from an affordable housing perspective. The housing authorities are looking to let out 50 per cent of the athletes village for private rental and 50 per cent for public housing. So a very interesting social exercise is under way in London at the moment in providing that mix of private and social housing.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ondarchie) — Time!

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission: report 2011–12

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's annual report for 2011–12. I am proud to say that for another year this organisation has proactively worked and advocated for Victorians across the state who have been discriminated against. I would like to congratulate chairperson John Searle and acting commissioner Karen Toohey on this wonderful report

that has highlighted the busy and proactive year the commission has had. I know all members of this house would agree that discrimination has no place in our communities across Victoria, which is why this organisation is so important in this state. It ensures that everyone gets a fair go.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's vision is to work with others to eliminate discrimination and build a community that respects and promotes human rights and equal opportunities. It also actively engages communities, strives to educate, resolves disputes, conducts research and offers Victorians policy and legal advice. All these elements are crucial to ensuring that all human rights are protected.

It was a delight to read that in 2011–12 the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission introduced numerous programs to improve access for all Victorians to fairer treatment. This included the implementation in 2011 of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. This act has strengthened discrimination protections in Victoria, redefined the key definition of discrimination and created new responsibilities for the commission.

I am also proud to say the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission has produced an online resource to equip young Victorian women with the necessary information to understand and take action against workplace discrimination and sexual harassment. I read that, shockingly, more than one-third of young women have been discriminated against at work or when looking for work, and one-third have been sexually harassed. I am proud to say the commission is proactively fighting to defend women's rights and stamp out unfair discrimination. It is hard to believe but sadly it is true that in 2013 women are still discriminated against and treated unfairly compared to their male counterparts. This is not a world that I want my own or anyone else's daughter to grow up in.

In addition to these initiatives, other highlights for the commission in 2011–12 included the Fair go, sport! program, and teaching employers how to utilise tools for compliance. In addition to this, more training was introduced to community organisations, government agencies and employers.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission continued to work with communities across the state, including the Aboriginal community, to combat discrimination. The Indigenous community and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service have set up a collaborative process which enables the commission to

contact those Indigenous Australians receiving aid from the legal service who feel they are being discriminated against.

In addition to this, Indigenous people have been engaged with their community in a number of activities to inform them of their rights and how to recognise and report discrimination. A total of 9550 queries from 7940 contacts were received in 2011–12, an increase of 26 per cent on the previous year. Disability was the largest attribute of inquiry.

That is a strong indication of the significance of this commission to Victoria and the importance of the messages it is sending out to communities across the state. More people who feel they are being discriminated against are standing up for their rights, and we can attribute this to their empowerment by the commission. I commend this report to the house.

Ombudsman: own motion investigation into governance and administration of Victorian Building Commission

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise to speak on the Victorian Ombudsman's *Own Motion Investigation into the Governance and Administration of the Victorian Building Commission — December 2012*. I do so because this report has raised some very alarming aspects in relation to the Victorian Building Commission. I am very pleased that the Minister for Planning, Mr Guy, has taken steps towards restoring integrity to the process and is putting confidence back into the building industry. That is a great thing.

The report provides a devastating account of some very serious issues. In his executive summary the Ombudsman says:

In March 2012 my office received information from several sources in relation to concerns regarding the Victorian Building Commission ...

He highlights three areas: the registration process, governance and administration, and recruitment. I will speak briefly to those three areas.

In relation to the registration of building practitioners there are a number of key issues. The investigation identified that the registration process for building practitioners was poorly administered and contained a number of gaps and integrity risks. There are a number of case studies in the report that highlight how appalling some of these situations were. One particular case study relates to an applicant who was identified as overstating his building experience and who submitted

supporting documentation with his application containing fictitious building works. That is just one example.

The next area, governance and administration, makes extraordinary reading and is quite alarming. As the minister has said, quite rightly, it is just not good enough. The report says:

This investigation identified that:

Significant public funds were spent by the commission on industry bodies. This included:

over \$200 000 on meals and entertainment over a three-year period

over \$100 000 in 18 months on entertaining at sporting events

over \$300 000 incurred by the former commissioner and another director over a three-year period in relation to overseas travel

nearly \$950 000 expended in less than four years on sponsoring various events and awards of bodies such as the Master Builders Association of Victoria and the Housing Industry Association of Victoria.

a substantial increase in the cost of developing the commission's e-toolbox customer relationship management system — from an initial contract amount of \$698 000 to over \$4.65 million.

It is a damning report. It demonstrates once again the project overruns that occurred under the previous government. But more concerning was the blatant abuse of public taxpayer funds, which should be absolutely condemned. I am pleased that the minister has overseen this matter.

The last area I will mention is recruitment, termination and contractors. Again the Ombudsman's investigation found some damning evidence. The report says:

This investigation identified:

consultants and contractors were engaged by the commission and paid up to \$350 000 a year without competitive or open tender processes

managers and directors knowingly employed people with questionable backgrounds and a criminal history ...

This report is quite extraordinary, and there are a number of recommendations in relation to those three particular areas. I commend the minister for acting on the concerns raised by the Ombudsman in this report, in particular through his announcement of a new Victorian Building Authority, which will incorporate the functions of the Victorian Building Commission, the Plumbing Industry Commission and the Architects Registration Board of Victoria. In a media release last

year the Minister for Planning, Mr Guy, stated that they will be absorbed into a single entity for the governance of builders, plumbers and architects. The minister has moved to restore integrity to Victoria's building industry, and I commend him for his actions so far.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ondarchie) — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Ambulance Victoria: Mooroolbark station

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, so I am very pleased that he is in the chamber. It concerns a proposed ambulance station at Mooroolbark on the site that previously housed Mooroolbark Primary School. I have raised before with the minister a concern about this site, which was that there had been media articles stating the site had been sold for a different type of development, namely housing and commercial. I salute the minister because he responded to me very promptly in a letter dated 2 October 2012, three weeks after I brought this matter to his attention. Unfortunately the adjournment response was handed to me only this week; it was held up somewhere else, but I salute the minister for his prompt action.

During that period the member for Kilsyth in the other house asked the minister in the adjournment debate about the same site and the same proposed ambulance station. He raised a concern that a local councillor had said the ambulance facility would no longer proceed, leaving the land in limbo. The member for Kilsyth asked the minister if he could clear this up for everyone out there.

Regarding the action I seek from the minister, I invite him to do some chest beating and perhaps put a sign on the site that says, 'Victorian government: the proposed Mooroolbark ambulance station will be here'. On top of that, I ask him to make sure that there is some funding in the upcoming budget to build the said ambulance station.

Hospitals: federal funding

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, the Honourable David Davis, who is in the house, and it relates to federal funding cuts to the Victorian health system. Federal funding cuts of \$107 million over the

next two years, along with the introduction of the carbon tax, mean that hospitals across the state are finding it hard to make ends meet. In early January the *Age* reported that 200 hospital staff across the state are likely to lose their jobs as a direct result of the federal government's health cuts. In a health system that is expected to support a population such as Victoria's the federal government's funding cuts are crippling hospitals across the state, and I know this because I have met with representatives of many of them.

Southern Health has been forced to close a 20-bed ward used for general medical emergencies and rehabilitation at Monash Medical Centre, and this is only the beginning. Funding limitations mean that emergency departments are also in the firing line. Hospitals have been forced to extend patient waiting times, which poses a real risk for emergency patients who require immediate care.

The carbon tax will also impact on the way hospitals are run. The coalition government's initial analysis indicates that the carbon tax will cost Victorian public hospitals an estimated \$13.2 million per annum.

I was very concerned to hear that we have had to step in to try to save placements for medical interns in rural Victoria following another savage funding cut by federal Labor. I ask the minister to continue to pressure the federal government to provide the Victorian people with the health funding necessary to support services for their communities and to reverse its decision to slash funding for the postgraduate general practice placement plan in Victoria.

Intralot: performance

Hon. M. P. PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — The matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Gaming, and it concerns the impact being felt continuously by numerous, in fact hundreds, of gaming venues as a consequence of the minister's decision to award the monitoring licence to Intralot. I have recently become aware that a number of venues have had great difficulty with machines being offline for substantial parts of the day in the period since the new monetary arrangement was put in place. This is despite the fact that the minister continues to assert that those venues should have collectively paid the government an additional \$3 billion in gaming licences in a circumstance where the minister cannot provide them with a reliable monitoring platform to allow them to run their machines.

If members opposite who were at the Australian Hotels Association event the other night spoke to the same

managers as I did, they would know full well the substantial difficulties being confronted by venues at this time. That culminated on Friday, 1 February, in a situation where some 470 venues out of about 550 in Victoria were effectively offline for between 2 and 3 hours as the new monitor tried to eradicate what we are told was a coding error that caused most of the network to be down.

In normal circumstances I would raise these issues with Ms Brockington of the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation (VCGLR), but as members know I have been barred by the minister from meeting with the VCGLR unless a representative of the minister's office is present in the room.

Hon. D. M. Davis — That was the rule under your government.

Hon. M. P. PAKULA — Mr Davis is aware that was not the rule under our government. As he knows, Minister O'Brien, when he was the shadow minister, met with the VCGLR by himself on numerous occasions with the full knowledge of the relevant minister.

The action I seek from the minister is that he provide venues with an assurance that the problems with the monitoring regime are over and, if they are not over, that he indicate what quality control he and the VCGLR are imposing to ensure that those problems either do not occur again or are minimised wherever possible so these venues can get on with implementing the licences they have paid for.

Moonee Valley Racecourse: development

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Planning. The minister would be aware of the redevelopment of Moonee Valley Racecourse and the concerns that have been raised by the council, members of Save Moonee Ponds and local residents. Because of these concerns, all are eager to participate in the consultation process, and I am sure that the minister wishes to protect the interests of the community, as I do. I am also certain that the minister would by now have received a letter dated 24 January 2013 which gives an excellent outline of the concerns of Save Moonee Ponds. It has raised a number of important issues in its letter, with community consultation being at the top of the list.

The minister would be aware that the community has been excluded from the Moonee Valley Racecourse redevelopment advisory committee, which is a surprise

considering the coalition in its election commitment plan states:

We have listened to Victorians who have told us that they want a planning system based on genuine consultation ...

The plan goes on to commit to an honest and genuine community engagement and consultation process.

If the government is committed to true consultation, as is stated in its election promise, the terms of reference need to be changed to include a representative from Save Moonee Ponds on the advisory committee. The action I ask of the minister is to consider the concerns of Save Moonee Ponds and change the terms of reference so the community can be included in the consultation process.

Hospitals: federal funding

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health. I have followed with significant interest, as I am sure have many of us, the funding cuts by the federal Labor government to Victorian hospitals. As I understand it these are unprecedented funding cuts that change the funding arrangements mid-budget.

As we all know, there are many competing demands for state resources, but once the budget is announced the expectation is that whatever the outcome the funding arrangement in the budget is maintained. As I said, I have followed closely the comments by the Minister for Health, David Davis, with regard to the impact of these funding cuts on various health services across Victoria. I am pleased that he met with the federal Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek, recently, but I regret that the outcome was less than satisfactory, as the minister has reported to this house and in other public comments.

I have received significant feedback from members of my electorate with regard to the impact of the federal funding cuts on Southern Health and in particular on Casey Hospital at Berwick. As the minister and members would be aware, Casey Hospital plays a critical role in the south-eastern growth corridor, an area that continues to grow rapidly. It is perhaps ironic that Casey Hospital and Southern Health have been impacted by these funding cuts given that the purported justification is a lower than anticipated population growth.

I would be more than happy to show the federal Minister for Health through Narre Warren, Beaconsfield, Officer and Pakenham. I could show her all the new housing estates and the significant population growth occurring in that precinct which is

serviced principally by the Casey Hospital. I have had significant representation from constituents who cannot believe the federal government has initiated these funding cuts to that hospital and many others.

The action I seek from the minister is that he continue his representations and advocacy for the interests of the Victorian community. I specifically ask him to continue to make those representations to the federal government with a view to assisting Casey Hospital, which is being detrimentally impacted upon as a result of the savage funding cuts by the federal Labor government.

Austin Health: federal funding

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — It is an honour to follow Mr O'Donohue in the adjournment debate tonight. My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Health, the Honourable David Davis. It concerns a surgery centre at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital in my electorate. The surgery centre provides elective surgery treatments for patients requiring inpatient stays of up to 72 hours, and it is part of Austin Health. An expansion of the centre, including the establishment of 12 new multipurpose day surgery beds, was recently completed, and I was honoured to attend the official opening of that facility with the Minister for Health just last Friday. I welcome that wonderful improvement to the facility at the Austin Health repatriation hospital site.

However, it is sad to note that through the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook* the commonwealth government announced a cut of \$107 million to Victorian health services over the remainder of the 2012–13 fiscal year. As part of this reduction in funding to health services, Austin Health is facing a cut of \$6.2 million. That is a significant cut in an operating year. I am deeply concerned about the effects that is going to have on my constituents and their capacity to have elective surgery.

Sadly, members opposite have been silent on this. Those opposite have not supported the coalition government of Victoria to make sure that Victorians get better health services. It is all based on some assumption that Victoria has not really grown in the population stakes. Come out to Northern Metropolitan Region. Come out to Laurimar. Come out to Doreen. Come out to the city of Whittlesea, which grows by 173 residents every single week. Come out to South Morang, which is the fastest growing postcode area in Australia. Tanya Plibersek, the federal Minister for Health, can see for herself that in fact the population is growing in Victoria.

The action I seek tonight is to call on the state Minister for Health to meet with the federal Minister for Health to advocate for the reversal of the decision to cut funding and for the funding to be reinstated for the good of Victorians.

Responses

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — Tonight I have one response to an adjournment matter from 13 November 2012, which is for Ms Broad.

I also have a matter raised for my attention today by Mr Leane, concerning a potential ambulance station at Mooroolbark. I am aware of the importance of this land. I have been in considerable communication with the local member, the member for Kilsyth in the Assembly, who has been very active on these matters. I am certainly committed to expanding ambulance services and committed to the importance of ambulance services. The government has a \$151 million package to provide additional paramedics across the state over four years. There is also a capital allocation, and we are working on the specific election commitments as best we can. We are working through those very fast. I know there are a number of them. I am about to open some more, and I am certainly very aware of the request by Mr Leane and particularly the many conversations I have had with the member for Kilsyth.

Mrs Petrovich also raised a matter with me about federal funding cuts of \$107 million this year and the impact of that on the health system. She points to bodies like Southern Health, one of our largest health services, which will face a cut of almost \$14 million because of the commonwealth's withdrawal of money — \$15.3 million every month, \$107 million this year and \$475 million over four years. Of that money, \$40 million is in effect clawed back retrospectively from patients who were treated last financial year, all on the basis that the Victorian population fell by 11 111 in 2011. The Treasury tables make it clear that that is the calculation the federal government used as the basis for the cut in funding.

One of the things about the new health system is that it was designed to provide certainty and predictability, but the federal government has made a bogus, dodgy decision — a decision not based on fact and flying in the face of the evidence provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and evidence from parts of Mrs Petrovich's electorate. The population on the edge of the city is very clearly not in decline; it is very clearly in significant growth. If you take a drive around Wallan or one of the towns on the edge of the city, it is

very clear that the population is growing significantly, so federal Treasury has got it quite wrong.

Mrs Petrovich also pointed to the carbon tax, and there is no doubt that the carbon tax is impacting directly on health services. There is no compensation by the commonwealth government to public health services, or private ones, for the impact of the carbon tax. Whatever level of energy efficiency they might demonstrate — whatever steps they take — I can guarantee that the costs of energy will rise and are rising this year, and that is going to impact on every hospital and every health service in Australia. It is already doing so.

The other issue raised by Mrs Petrovich concerned medical interns, and I am very concerned about the general practice placements program and the placement of interns that is funded by the commonwealth under that process. The commonwealth has recently withdrawn funding for a number of individuals who have placements with health services, and I am greatly concerned. The health services in question service Bendigo, Horsham and Kyneton. Those placements were supported by the commonwealth government.

The commonwealth government gave a commitment to the Australian Medical Association federally that in taking money from that program to support additional intern places elsewhere it would only take unallocated money; it would not take money actually being spent on supporting young doctors in training or in general practice. What is now happening is a dumb idea. It is robbing Peter to pay Paul, taking money from one lot of interns to fund another lot of interns and pulling the pin on a training program part way through. For those health services, the state is going to have to pick up the slack on that cut, and this is an absolutely outrageous cost shift by the commonwealth, seeking to saddle the state.

I wish to make a point on interns, and I pay tribute to the previous government on this too, to be absolutely fair. Since the first major discussions on interns were held in 2006 and 2008 the federal government of the time increased the number of medical schools and medical places around the country, including at Deakin University in Victoria. Those increases in medical places obviously require additional placements at the end of that course. Correctly the federal government is allowing international students to come into the country. I have no quibble with that, because we strongly support international students in Victoria.

I direct members to the Council of Australian Governments' communiqué of 14 July 2006 regarding

the health workforce. An agreement was signed at the time that made it clear that the states had responsibility for increasing intern places inside the public hospital system. The commonwealth was required to match that to increase intern places in the private system — that is, in private hospitals — but also in GP placements.

I pay tribute to the work of the previous government here and to the work of the current government over the last two years. We have increased intern placements in the public system by 70 per cent; 690-odd interns have been placed this year. Less than 15 places have been supported in Victoria by the federal government. That is a tiny amount, and it has not increased commensurately with the agreement that was struck in 2006.

The fact that the federal government is pulling money out of the general practice placement program and using that money to prop up additional intern places in other states, and that shows that it has really lost the plot on this. Young doctors have every reason to be angry with Tanya Plibersek, the federal Minister for Health, and very angry with those who have not lived up to their responsibilities at a federal level. It is time that the federal government faced up to the fact that it funds universities for the increased number of places, and it has to share its responsibilities to increase intern places. The states by and large have done a very good job in public hospitals. In Victoria's case we are about 70 per cent up.

I hasten to add that we have done quite a bit of work on this in Victoria. We have worked with the private sector and we have found GP placements and placements in some of our large public hospitals that the commonwealth could fund. At Epworth, Cabrini and St John of God hospitals there is a willingness to take part in this program. Commonwealth support is required for that to occur. We have costed that. I presented the federal minister with the details of that costing so that she can discharge the responsibilities that the federal government undertook after discussions in 2006 and 2008. We look forward to the commonwealth discharging its responsibilities as that will lead to a better outcome.

Mrs Petrovich made a point about the federal cuts, and there is no doubt that in her electorate major health services like Bendigo are facing reductions of the order of \$2.9 million this financial year because of the cuts of Tanya Plibersek, Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Treasurer Wayne Swan, which are all based on this dodgy population fiddle.

Mr Pakula raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Gaming. I will pass that matter on to the minister to examine in detail. He claims that a number of gaming venues were offline in recent days, and Mr Pakula particularly designated 1 February as a day when a number of venues were offline.

Hon. M. P. Pakula interjected.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — I am not vouching for numbers. I am just going to refer that matter through. I understand that the problem was caused by a coding error. Mr Pakula made the point that there was a significant loss of revenue by the state after the botched licence arrangements undertaken by the previous government. It is true, and Mr Pakula did not concede this, that as Mr O'Donohue pointed out the Auditor-General clearly pinged the previous government to the tune of \$3.1 billion. That was the loss of revenue that was due to a process put in place by the former government. Let us be quite clear about which cabinet ministers were on the original committee. Daniel Andrews, the former Minister for Health and now the Leader of the Opposition and member for Mulgrave in the Assembly, was a member of that original committee.

Hon. M. J. Guy — Who?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — Daniel Andrews was the Minister for Gaming at that time, and he was responsible for establishing the early part of this process. I say to Mr Pakula that he was the Minister for Gaming. I make it quite clear that Mr Andrews should hang his head in shame for the state's loss of revenue due to his incompetence and botched approach.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — On a point of order, Acting President, given that Mr Davis wants to treat the adjournment as an opportunity to go over the licensing process, I invite him to advise the house which particular Australian Hotels Association or Clubs Victoria venue should pay this money.

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

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — There is no doubt that Mr Pakula was also part of the cabinet that made those decisions.

Hon. M. P. Pakula interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Crozier) — Order! I ask Mr Davis to get to the point in relation to his response to Mr Pakula's adjournment matter and to make it brief.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — I was responding directly to Mr Pakula's point about the \$3.1 billion and the interjection made by Mr O'Donohue as part of his adjournment matter that the Auditor-General had actually pointed to that \$3.1 billion figure that Mr Pakula raised in the adjournment tonight. I am responding very directly to the \$3.1 billion figure of lost revenue that was raised by Mr Pakula tonight. That is a lot of money, and I will let the community get some idea of the scale of that \$3.1 billion figure raised by Mr Pakula tonight. It is almost twice the size of the federal health cuts, which were \$1.6 billion nationally. It is a much greater figure than that. That will give members some sense of the impact that \$3.1 billion of lost revenue will have on the state, which was a point raised by Mr Pakula.

Hon. M. P. Pakula — I will make sure every venue gets a copy of *Hansard*.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — I have to say to Mr Pakula that venues would much prefer not to have had his government administering the process to which I have referred.

Ms Hartland raised a matter for Mr Guy concerning Moonee Valley Racecourse and its redevelopment. I say to Ms Hartland that I am very familiar with that site. I had a practice just next door to it for many years in Moonee Ponds and Ascot Vale. I know that Mr Guy is committed to ensuring that community processes are adhered to and that community input is very much to the fore. I am not familiar with the exact process here, of course, but I will pass this matter on to Mr Guy.

Ms Hartland has indicated that a Moonee Valley advisory committee has been formed. At the last election the coalition committed to honest and genuine community engagement processes. As a former shadow Minister for Planning, I understand the importance of the matters that Ms Hartland has raised. I have no doubt that Minister Guy will adhere to those election commitments for genuine and honest community engagement.

The Save Moonee Ponds group is one representative group within that community, and there are no doubt many voices and representatives in the community. It will be a matter for the minister to work through with each of the communities who are the best representatives. I have no doubt that he will do so. I will faithfully pass this matter to him.

Mr O'Donohue raised a matter for me tonight concerning health and federal budget cuts. He made the point that these are midyear cuts, which is to say they

are occurring part way through the cycle. The point is a very valid one. Last year in May the state budget and the federal budget came down. The hospital funding pool was thereby set for the year, and the state government went forward as the manager and overall administrator of the system. In Victoria we have a decentralised system of governance, and this is a system on which the national changes have been modelled. This system involves casemix payments, decentralised governments and local community boards with management expertise that are able to properly manage health services on behalf of their communities and in the interests of their communities.

This is one reason the impact of these midyear federal cuts has been so devastating. Communities have made the honest decisions and the boards have made decisions to try to deliver services in the interests of their community only to have the rug pulled out from under them by the federal Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek, Prime Minister Gillard and Treasurer Swan through their use of a flawed and dodgy formula to claim that Victoria's population is falling. In fact Victoria's population is increasing. For health services in that context to have their budgets cut by the federal government through reduced pool payments is irresponsible and against all good management practice. It is very clear that good management would suggest that those cuts in the middle of the year do not enable health services to adjust in the way they should.

Mr O'Donohue specifically raised the matter of Southern Health, our largest health service, which in this half of the financial year will face commonwealth funding cuts of the order of \$14 million. There will be ongoing reductions across the state unless the commonwealth reverses this \$475 million cut, but Southern Health, as our largest health service, will be impacted on by both of the ongoing reductions.

I too am concerned by the significant population growth in the Casey corridor, and again I refer to the population formulas used by the federal Treasurer that claim that Victoria's population has fallen. I have since met some of the bureaucrats who made these calculations, and they very clearly hang their heads in shame when you put the tables with the population estimates in front of them. At that meeting on Friday, Minister Plibersek appeared not to have fully understood the importance of the federal Treasurer's table of population around Australia and the reduction of 11 111 in Victoria's population.

Casey Hospital is an important hospital in the Casey growth corridor. Unfortunately I cannot assure Mr O'Donohue that Casey Hospital will be immune to

the impact of the commonwealth government funding cuts to health services. The cuts will impact on Casey. People in and around the vicinity, despite the best intentions of Southern Health — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Crozier) — Order! There are no opposition members in the house, but under the standing orders I ask the minister to make his responses as brief as possible.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — But also to be as accurate and complete as possible, I would not want to leave out any important points about Casey Hospital, given its importance in the growth areas which was directly pointed to in Mr O'Donohue's adjournment contribution.

To conclude my response to Mr O'Donohue, it is extremely clear that health services will be impacted upon around the state, whether it is Eastern Health facing a reduction of more than \$8 million because of the commonwealth cuts or Southern Health facing a reduction of between \$13 million and \$14 million. The funding cuts cannot but impact on services. I know health managers are preparing plans to keep the impacts as much as possible to non-clinical aspects of their operations, but inevitably there will be some direct flow-on to services. Patients will be impacted upon, and that is what has made the Victorian government, health services and communities so angry with Prime Minister Gillard and Tanya Plibersek. They do not appear to understand that this will impact directly on Victorian patients, including those who need from time to time to avail themselves of services at Casey Hospital.

Mr Ondarchie also raised a health matter with me concerning the surgery centre at Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, which is part of Austin Health. I was fortunate to be at the opening with the local federal member, the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin. To be fair, she is a long-term supporter of health services in her area, and the new elective surgery centre will deliver a benefit for the community of the northern suburbs. The new surgery centre operates by separating emergency surgery from elective surgery. You can get more predictable flow, and in some cases less serious procedures requiring short stays of less than 72 hours are performed in these elective surgery centres.

While everybody welcomed the commonwealth support for the new surgery centre, as Mr Ondarchie pointed out, there has been a reduction in funding to the Austin of more than \$6 million. It is a very significant cut in funding to that hospital and will make it difficult

to meet the targets and approach that Austin Health had adopted in terms of elective surgery. One of the concerns is that whilst there is federal support for the capital project, you also need funding that will provide support for recurrent activity at those hospitals, including elective surgery. Mr Ondarchie asked me whether I will meet with the federal Minister for Health, and I will meet again with her. I am prepared to meet as many times as required to convince her to rescind the dodgy decision by the federal Treasurer and the Prime Minister to cut \$475 million funding from Victoria. I am prepared to meet with her as many times as required to get the \$475 million back.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Crozier) — The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7.05 p.m.

