

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 3 September 2014

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The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

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(from 17 March 2014)

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Economy and Infrastructure References Committee — Mr Barber, Mrs Coote, #Ms Crozier, Mr Finn, #Mr Leane, Mr Lenders, Mr Melhem, Mr D. D O'Brien, #Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pulford and Mr Ramsay.

Environment and Planning Legislation Committee — Mr Dalla-Riva, #Mr Finn, #Ms Hartland, Mrs Kronberg, #Mr Leane, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik, #Mrs Peulich, Mr Ronalds, Mr Scheffer, #Mr Tarlamis, Mr Tee and Ms Tierney.

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Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee — Ms Crozier, Mr Elasmr, Mr Elsbury, Ms Hartland, #Mr Leane, Ms Lewis, Mrs Millar, Mr D. R. J. O'Brien, #Mrs Peulich, #Mr Ramsay and Mr Viney.

Legal and Social Issues References Committee — Ms Crozier, Mr Elasmr, Mr Elsbury, Ms Hartland, #Mr Leane, Ms Lewis, Mrs Millar, Mr D. R. J. O'Brien, #Mrs Peulich, #Mr Ramsay and Mr Viney.

Participating member

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Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee — (*Council*): Mr Eideh, Mrs Millar and Mr Ronalds. (*Assembly*): Mr Burgess and Mr McGuire.

Education and Training Committee — (*Council*): Mr Elasmr, Mrs Kronberg and Mrs Millar. (*Assembly*): Mr Brooks and Mr Crisp.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Council*): Mr Finn, Mrs Peulich, Mr Somyurek and Mr Tarlamis. (*Assembly*): Mr Delahunty.

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

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Council*): Mrs Coote. (*Assembly*): Ms Halfpenny, Mr Madden, Mrs Powell and Ms Ryall.

House Committee — (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*) Mr Eideh, Mr Finn, Ms Hartland, Mr D. R. J. O'Brien and Mrs Peulich. (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Ms Beattie, Mr Blackwood, Ms Campbell, Ms Thomson, Mr Wakeling and Mr Weller.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Committee — (*Council*): Mr Viney. (*Assembly*): Ms Kanis, Mr Kotsiras, Mr McIntosh and Mr Weller.

Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Council*): Mr Ramsay and Mr Scheffer. (*Assembly*): Mr Carroll, Mr McCurdy and Mr Southwick.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Council*): Mr D. R. J. O'Brien and Mr Ondarchie. (*Assembly*): Mr Angus, Ms Garrett, Mr Morris, Mr Pakula and Mr Scott.

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

Rural and Regional Committee — (*Council*): Mr D. R. J. O'Brien. (*Assembly*): Mr Howard, Mr Katos, Mr Trezise and Mr Weller.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Council*): Mr Dalla-Riva. (*Assembly*): Ms Barker, Ms Campbell, Mr Gidley, Mr Nardella, Dr Sykes and Mr Watt.

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Council — Acting Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A. Young

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

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FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Mr J. LENDERS

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Leader of The Nationals:

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The Hon. P. R. HALL (to 17 March 2013)

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN (from 17 March 2013)

Mr D. K. DRUM (to 17 March 2013)

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Coote, Mrs Andrea	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Millar, Mrs Amanda Louise ⁴	Northern Victoria	LP
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	O'Brien, Mr Daniel David ⁸	Eastern Victoria	Nats
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Elasmr, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Peulich, Mrs Inga	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Elsbury, Mr Andrew Warren	Western Metropolitan	LP	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
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Guy, Hon. Matthew Jason	Northern Metropolitan	LP	Rich-Phillips, Hon. Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Hall, Hon. Peter Ronald ⁷	Eastern Victoria	Nats	Ronalds, Mr Andrew Mark ⁶	Eastern Victoria	LP
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Kronberg, Mrs Janice Susan	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Tee, Mr Brian Lennox	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Leanders, Mr John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Viney, Mr Matthew Shaw	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Lewis, Ms Margaret ¹⁰	Northern Victoria	ALP			

¹ Resigned 26 March 2013

² Appointed 8 May 2013

³ Resigned 1 July 2013

⁴ Appointed 21 August 2013

⁵ Resigned 3 February 2014

⁶ Appointed 5 February 2014

⁷ Resigned 17 March 2014

⁸ Appointed 26 March 2014

⁹ Resigned 9 May 2014

¹⁰ Appointed 11 June 2014

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Wednesday, 3 September 2014

The PRESIDENT (Hon. B. N. Atkinson) took the chair at 9.34 a.m. and read the prayer.

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

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND OUTER SUBURBAN/INTERFACE SERVICES COMMITTEE

Marine rescue services in Victoria

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) presented report, including appendices, together with transcripts of evidence.

Laid on table.

Ordered that report be printed.

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

This report identifies the serious lack of coordination, support and governance in Victoria's volunteer blue water key marine search and rescue services and volunteers. I acknowledge members of the committee who contributed to this inquiry: the chair, Mr Neale Burgess, the member for Hastings in the Assembly; and members, Mr Frank McGuire, the member for Broadmeadows in the Assembly; Mrs Amanda Millar, Mr Andrew Ronalds, Mrs Inga Peulich and Mr Geoff Shaw, the member for Frankston in the Assembly. I also thank members of the committee's secretariat: Mr Nathan Bunt, the executive officer; Mr Matt Newington, the research officer; and Ms Natalie-Mai Holmes and Ms Michelle Summerhill. In addition, I thank all Hansard staff who worked on this inquiry.

The findings outlined in this report are not being brought forward for the first time. Twelve years ago Ernst & Young conducted a statewide review of our state's volunteer marine search and rescue (MSAR) sector and made three key recommendations: the introduction of an overseeing stakeholder body to manage MSAR resources; accreditation of volunteer MSAR organisations, or affiliation with an accredited organisation, to be the basis for volunteer involvement and funding; and annual audits of volunteer capabilities. To the committee's surprise, not a single recommendation listed above was implemented.

This report identifies many reasons important changes need to be made to Victoria's MSAR sector, but having listened to a number of compelling and significant contributions, we on the committee feel that the most important reason is safety. Over the past three years there has been a 3 per cent increase in the number of recreational vessels registered in Victoria. This figure had reached nearly 173 000 as at June 2013. The increase in recreational vessels in blue water in the state has naturally been met with an increase in incidents, mainly disablements, which include vessels experiencing engine problems or fuelling issues. In addition to this, it is stated in this report that the annual number of fatalities and serious injuries has remained virtually unchanged. There has been an increase in the number of responses to marine incidents by volunteers in recent years, but the report highlights that this increase has not been matched with any financial support to better manage Victoria's volunteer MSAR organisations.

The sector outlined a number of its concerns during the inquiry, including duplication and gaps in MSAR coverage due to the absence of a statewide strategic approach to MSAR service provision; funding challenges, primarily due to the absence of funding for operational needs; the absence of an effective governing body or of an accreditation system to certify that a particular MSAR unit is able to provide services that are fit for purpose; new federal certification requirements for vessels and crew; varying communication protocols between organisations; and incomplete monitoring of very high frequency distress channels 16 and 67 along the Victorian coastline, both in terms of geographic coverage and hours of operation.

This inquiry uncovered another serious issue facing marine rescue services in Victoria — that is, the lack of a regulatory framework to guide our volunteers. When an MSAR incident occurs Victoria Police acts as the only control agency, and besides this the MSAR sector remains virtually ungoverned. This report lists a number of recommendations based on the committee's investigation of the volunteer MSAR sector in New South Wales. This sector has experienced a number of benefits which would be very successful if implemented in Victoria. These include improved service coordination and reduced duplication in service provision, a coordinated and statewide vessel replacement program and a five-year funding agreement between Marine Rescue NSW and the New South Wales government. This model of streamlined funding has proven to be of great benefit in New South Wales. On the point of funding, the financial pressures facing the sector were raised on numerous occasions throughout this inquiry.

A number of recommendations have been made as a result of this inquiry and are included in the report that I present to the house today. These recommendations, if implemented in full and as the committee advises, will ensure that those who volunteer with marine rescue services in our state will have the best possible chance of keeping recreational blue water users safe when using vessels. In addition to increasing safety, the recommendations outlined in the report will increase MSAR efficiency by introducing a system of accreditation and ongoing capability assessment. The MSAR unit has been identified as being needed urgently and will be subject to an annual audit of its capabilities as a MSAR unit. The recommendations — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Thank you, Mr Eideh.

Mr RONALDS (Eastern Victoria) — I also wish to talk on the Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee inquiry into marine rescue services in Victoria. I have had the privilege of being on this committee since February, and I take this opportunity to thank the chair, Neale Burgess, the member for Hastings in the other place; Mr Eideh; Mr Frank McGuire, the member for Broadmeadows in the other place; Mrs Millar; Mrs Peulich, who was a member when the inquiry started; and Mr Geoff Shaw, the member for Frankston in the other place, who was also on the committee at the start of the inquiry. I thank them for their wonderful input. I also mention Nathan Bunt, Matt Newington, Natalie-Mai Holmes and Michelle Summerhill from the committee secretariat who did a fantastic job in doing a lot of the groundwork for the report.

I also take this opportunity to thank those who gave evidence. We toured around Victoria and went to a lot of marine rescue services. They gave us full and, what I can only describe as, frank feedback on the situation in Victoria. I would also like to thank those in New South Wales who have gone through the process of having a single marine rescue service for their evidence. It was particularly helpful because not only did they tell us about the successes in putting this service together but they were also fair and reasonable about some of the challenges.

Our report looks at a number of different issues, but at the end of the day it recommends that we seriously consider a single marine rescue service in Victoria with the associated infrastructure and so forth that needs to go with it, because currently there is a lot of duplication. Again, I want to thank those who gave evidence, but particularly those in New South Wales who helped a lot to make sure we do not do some of the things that may be a bit more challenging than they

need to be. I again thank all members of the committee; their efforts are much appreciated.

Mrs MILLAR (Northern Victoria) — I am very pleased to make a brief statement on the Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee inquiry into marine rescue services in Victoria. I was extremely pleased to serve briefly on the committee, and I especially thank the member for Hastings in the other place, Neale Burgess, as the chair; and the other committee members with whom I served, including Mr Khalil Eideh; the member for Broadmeadows in the other place, Mr Frank McGuire; Mr Andrew Ronalds; and previous members of the committee Mrs Inga Peulich and the member for Frankston in the other place, Mr Geoff Shaw. I especially thank the committee secretariat for their work on this inquiry, including Mr Nathan Bunt, Mr Matt Newington, Ms Natalie-Mai Holmes and Ms Michelle Summerhill, and all the Hansard staff who worked in a very dedicated and tireless way on this inquiry. Members will see from the length of the report that it was no small task.

The recommendations in the report highlight the great efforts and contributions of Victoria's volunteer and professional marine rescue services. As someone with little or no exposure to marine rescue in any meaningful sense, I was blown away by the work and contributions of some of the amazing and dedicated volunteers whom we met around Victoria in the course of this inquiry. The recommendations highlight that despite no significant failings or incidents there are gaps in coordination and potential services in marine rescue. For that reason the unanimous recommendations in the report address these issues and in particular, as other have said, they recommend a single marine rescue service being established.

I thank all the witnesses, committee members and parliamentary staff for a significant report addressing an under-researched but most important function for our state. I will also speak on this report in the weeks to come in relation to some of its significant findings.

Motion agreed to.

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Heritage tourism and ecotourism in Victoria

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) presented report, including appendices, together with summary report and transcripts of evidence.

Laid on table.

Ordered that report and summary report be printed.

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

It is a pleasure to speak in relation to the inquiry into heritage tourism and ecotourism in Victoria undertaken by the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. It has been a most interesting reference, and I thank the Minister for Tourism and Major Events, the Honourable Louise Asher, for the opportunity for the committee to examine Victorian tourism as it relates to both eco and cultural heritage tourism in this state.

The committee received 92 submissions from a range of state and national bodies, with public hearings held in Ballarat, Port Campbell, Lakes Entrance, Halls Gap, Mansfield, here at Parliament House and in Hobart. While undertaking these public hearings the committee took advantage of the opportunity to make site visits across Victoria, including in the goldfields region, the Grampians, the Great Ocean Road, East Gippsland, the high country beyond Mansfield, and Point Nepean at the toe of the Mornington Peninsula.

Our travel also included Tasmania, which is well recognised as an international tourist destination. We looked at Cradle Mountain and made site visits to historic Oatlands, Hobart and Port Arthur. I thank the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service for generously hosting our Tasmanian visit. The committee travelled internationally to North America, taking in Hawaii, British Columbia and San Francisco, where we visited many iconic tourist locations. We were capably assisted by Mr Michael Kapel, Victorian commissioner to the Americas, and Ms Libby Ferguson from the Victorian government business office, who arranged an exceptional itinerary for our visit to North America. Without this much-appreciated assistance on the trips to North America and Tasmania the committee would not have gained such a comprehensive understanding of current tourism practices elsewhere. These visits provided much valuable information on which we could draw throughout the inquiry.

During the inquiry all members of the committee improved their knowledge of tourism activities across Victoria, nationally and internationally and to that end assisted in completing a comprehensive report containing 38 recommendations. Victorian tourism is well placed to consider taking on board many of these recommendations — they can only add to the exciting opportunities already on offer. The identification of further internationally iconic listed destinations beyond Victoria's Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton

Gardens, like the goldfield diggings at Castlemaine and Budj Bim near Condah, are relevant examples for inclusion if they meet the UNESCO criteria.

Eco and cultural heritage tourism opportunities are eagerly sought internationally, particularly by younger tourists who seek to participate fully at a physical level. I am confident that Victoria already offers many such experiences, but there is potential for further development opportunities that would attract this demographic.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge my colleagues for their extensive work and valuable contributions to the numerous meetings held during this year-long reference. I would like to thank the deputy chair of the committee, the member for Dandenong in the Assembly, the Honourable John Pandazopoulos, for his support, especially on occasions when I was unable to be present, and for contributing his knowledge of the tourism industry.

I also thank the member for Mordialloc in the Assembly, Lorraine Wreford; the member for Macedon in the Assembly, Joanne Duncan; the member for Gippsland East in the Assembly, the Honourable Tim Bull, prior to his appointment to cabinet; and more recently, Danny O'Brien, who joined us from 2 April 2014. I also sincerely thank the committee's executive officer, Dr Greg Gardiner, and the research officer, Dr Kelly Butler, along with Ms Karen Taylor and more recently Mr Justin Elder in their roles as office manager. The Hansard staff also did a magnificent job in the public hearings. The committee staff were relentless in gathering information, doing research, scheduling public hearings, briefings and site visits, recording meetings and keeping this important reference on track at all times. Their knowledge and contribution are much appreciated.

This was the largest reference undertaken by Environment and Natural Resources Committee during the 57th Parliament. The resulting report will greatly contribute to the future growth of tourism in Victoria, an industry that already makes a major contribution to the Victorian economy.

In closing, as I am not contesting the next election I would like to take this opportunity to express what a privilege it has been to be appointed chair of the committee. I have especially enjoyed participating in this inquiry into eco and heritage tourism in Victoria, the report of which again demonstrates the success of bipartisan parliamentary committees. I wholeheartedly recommended to our industry leaders and my parliamentary colleagues alike to study the report,

which provides a deeper understanding of the Victorian tourism industry. Hopefully Victorian tourism will benefit further through the tabling of this report.

Mr D. D. O'BRIEN (Eastern Victoria) — I rise to endorse Mr Koch's comments on the Environment and Natural Resources Committee's report on its inquiry into heritage tourism and ecotourism in Victoria. I must say that although I was late in becoming a member of the committee, it was an enjoyable experience. However, I was also disappointed because, as Mr Koch has outlined, I missed some fascinating field visits that the committee undertook prior to my arrival.

The report highlights that Victoria has some great heritage and ecotourism assets and that there are things we can do better to highlight and promote those assets to both domestic and international tourists. In my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region we have some wonderful assets, ranging from the historic towns of Walhalla, Old Gippsdown at Moe and Coal Creek at Korumburra to some amazing ecotourism natural assets like Phillip Island with its penguin parade, which is obviously one of Victoria's major tourist attractions, Wilsons Promontory, Mallacoota and Croajingalong National Park, which are underutilised particularly as international visitor attractions. I hope the report and some of its recommendations will help to improve that situation.

It is important that we spread the benefits of tourism outside Melbourne and particularly to international visitors. We have some great things in regional Victoria, particularly in my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region, and I am pleased to see that one strategy the government is trying to address is ensuring that we disperse tourists outside Melbourne to regional parts of the state.

I was pleased to note that we had an increase in international visitor nights in Gippsland of 24 per cent in 2013–14. That is a great sign, but we can do better. The report outlines a number of recommendations that should improve the visitor experience, particularly relating to technology, as well as visitor facilities inside and outside national parks. We must have these, including on some of our iconic walks.

This is a great report, and I certainly commend it to the house.

Motion agreed to.

LAW REFORM, DRUGS AND CRIME PREVENTION COMMITTEE

Supply and use of methamphetamines, particularly 'ice', in Victoria

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) presented report, including appendices, extracts from proceedings and minority report, together with transcripts of evidence.

Laid on table.

Ordered that report be printed.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

In doing so I would like to provide a briefing to the chamber in relation to this very long, intensive and extensive investigatory inquiry into methamphetamine use and the harm it does to the Victorian community specifically but more broadly to communities across the nation.

The inquiry into the use and supply of methamphetamines in Victoria has been a long and complex task. The committee has undertaken a wide-ranging investigation that has involved extensive consultation with the community. The committee received 78 submissions, held over 113 public hearings and heard from 220 witnesses, including police and emergency services personnel, hospital and health workers, drug treatment providers, researchers and families and friends of methamphetamine users.

In addition, the committee has undertaken extensive research, drawing from statistical evidence and academic and policy literature dealing with the prevalence, harms and the relationship between drug use, violence and criminal behaviour. This process has resulted in a comprehensive report that has examined, amongst other issues, the prevalence and supply of methamphetamine, the harm it causes and its impact on the wider community.

One of the main findings to come out of the inquiry has been that whilst methamphetamine use as a generic category may have stabilised over the last decade, there has been a significant rise in the use of crystal methamphetamine, known more commonly as 'ice', which is a more pure, more potent and dangerous form of the drug, used particularly by young people aged between 20 and 29.

The committee spent much time visiting rural and regional areas of the state to take evidence as to how the

use of methamphetamine, particularly crystal methamphetamine, was impacting on these communities. It was clear that people from across the state felt that methamphetamine was having a damaging effect on sections of their community and that extra support was required in the areas of health, law enforcement, education and particularly family support. The evidence-based recommendations and the findings of the report provide the government with direction for a coordinated and comprehensive strategy to address this problem, one that is grounded in prevention and harm-reduction approaches.

This two-volume, 32-chapter report, which I believe is the most detailed, comprehensive and current report of its kind on methamphetamine use in Australia, is the result of the hard work and dedication of the committee's members and the staff who contributed to the drafting of the report. In particular the committee would like to thank the staff of the committee secretariat: executive officer Sandy Cook, senior research officer Pete Johnston and committee administration officers Kim Martinow and Justin Elder. The committee would also like to thank editors Frances Essaber and Mignon Turpin. The commitment to finish this report by the tabling date required long hours and a heavy workload, and the committee would like to acknowledge the staff's guidance and professionalism in performing this task.

The committee would also like to thank the consultants who worked on the report, particularly the Australian Institute of Criminology and its staff, led by Dr Russell Smith, for their work on the prevalence and supply of methamphetamine, and Dr Nicole Lee and her staff for their work on treatment issues. The committee thanks John Aliferis from the Victorian parliamentary Road Safety Committee for his support and advice, particularly with regard to drug driving issues. The committee is grateful for the invaluable contributions made to the inquiry by members of the community, particularly those who made submissions or gave evidence at public hearings.

The tabling of the report of this inquiry is the culmination of 10 months hard work and a combination of goodwill and good faith from members of a bipartisan committee. As such I would like to thank the committee's deputy chair Johan Scheffer, and committee members David Southwick, Ben Carroll and Tim McCurdy, the members for Caulfield, Ivanhoe and Murray Valley respectively in the Assembly, for their support and hard work.

Finally, this report and the recommendations made by the committee were influenced by the many personal stories of those affected by this drug and the destructive consequences that crystal methamphetamine, known

more commonly as 'ice', has had on their lives. The committee hopes the report goes some way to addressing this serious social problem.

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — The report of the Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee's inquiry into methamphetamine is the most comprehensive undertaken on the subject, and it is remarkable that so much work was achieved in so short a time.

The report considers the nature of methamphetamine, how it is manufactured, the history of its use, the kinds of people who use it, how and where it is used, the effects of the drug and the harms it can cause, its economics and marketing at the global, national, state and local levels, the effect of methamphetamine in the workplace and on the roads, and the impact its use has on ambulance services, hospital emergency departments, treatment services, the police, the judicial system and the families of those who use the drug.

Many of the recommendations call for more research, because the evidence shows that not enough is known and that more research must be done if we are to be confident about how best to assist people to avoid the drug in the first place, how to minimise harm for those using the drug and how to help people get off the drug where they are using it problematically.

The evidence shows that around 2 per cent of people use methamphetamine and that there has been no significant increase. The problem is that more people within the 2 per cent who use methamphetamine are using a purer form — crystal methamphetamine — and the evidence suggests that this explains the increased level of harm that is so widely reported.

The inquiry heard that of the around 2 per cent who use methamphetamine an estimated 14.5 per cent had a dependency. Even though the illegal importation of the drug and its precursors is escalating, there does not appear to be an increase in use, and this conundrum needs to be further investigated. Despite the very serious issues associated with methamphetamine, submissions to the inquiry said that alcohol is a vastly greater problem.

I would like to thank the phenomenal work of Sandy Cook, Pete Johnston, Kim Martinow, Justin Elder and consultants Dr Russell Smith, and Associate Professor Nicole Lee and John Aliferis. I of course acknowledge the chair of the committee, Simon Ramsay, and my fellow committee members.

Motion agreed to.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Review of Auditor-General's reports 2009–11

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan)
presented report, including appendices, together
with transcripts of evidence.

Laid on table.

Ordered that report be printed.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I
move:

That the Council take note of the report.

I am very pleased to present this report on the review of the Auditor-General's reports to the Parliament from 2009 to 2011. This report represents over 12 months work by the committee.

Each year the Victorian Auditor-General's Office conducts a series of performance audits across the Victorian public sector. This report is a follow-up of eight performance audit reports tabled between 2009 and 2011. We selected these audits by applying weighted criteria, such as the public interest and the magnitude and extent of the audit findings, against a total of 76 performance audit reports. The selected reports cover a range of different policy and program areas, including education, gambling, information security and local government.

The purpose of the inquiry was to determine through evidence gathering from interested stakeholders, including the Victorian community, whether the Victorian public sector had addressed and implemented the recommendations contained in the selected audit reports. We identified a number of common themes arising from the audit reports, particularly around the need to improve monitoring and oversight, as well as performance management within the public sector. The committee hopes that by drawing attention to these areas the public sector can work to improve the delivery of policies, programs and services to the Victorian community. As an extension of Parliament in performing its scrutiny role, the committee is of the view that this inquiry complements the Auditor-General's independent audits and provides assurance to Victorians that Parliament undertakes its direct scrutiny role of public sector performance very seriously.

On behalf of the members of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee I take this opportunity to thank those public sector agencies and people who

participated in this very important inquiry. In particular I recognise the valuable assistance provided by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office itself. I am also very grateful to members of the committee secretariat for their hours of tireless work in supporting the work of our committee. In particular I acknowledge the executive officer, Valerie Chong, and her team: Michael Baker, Leah Brohm, Anita Madden, Melanie Hondros and Justin Ong.

Members of the committee worked together in a collaborative sense, and their contributions and cooperative approach to the inquiry were very much appreciated by all of us. In particular I thank the chair of the committee, David Morris, the member for Mornington in the Assembly; the deputy chair, Martin Pakula, the member for Lyndhurst in the Assembly; Neil Angus, the member for Forest Hill in the Assembly; Jane Garrett, the member for Brunswick in the Assembly; my upper house colleague David O'Brien, a member for Western Victoria Region; and Robin Scott, the member for Preston in the Assembly.

This is a very important review of the Auditor-General's reports from 2009 to 2011, and I commend the report to the house.

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — I, too, rise to make a brief contribution on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's report on its review of the Auditor-General's reports 2009–2011. I begin by expressing my thanks to the members of the committee; firstly, the chair, David Morris, the member for Mornington in the Assembly, and, secondly, the deputy chair, Martin Pakula, the member for Lyndhurst in the Assembly, who have continued the bipartisan tradition of this important committee. I also thank Neil Angus, the member for Forest Hill in the Assembly, who was an auditor and who continues to demonstrate the important skills of an auditor in his work on the committee. I also thank Jane Garrett, the member for Brunswick in the Assembly, my colleague Mr Ondarchie, and Robin Scott, the shadow Minister for Finance and member for Preston in the Assembly.

The role of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office is to provide a check on expenditure by the Victorian public service, and it is an essential role. In turn the work of this committee in reviewing the Auditor-General's reports to ensure that recommendations made are monitored and implemented is also a very important role.

In doing so the committee has, as has been summarised by Mr Ondarchie, identified a number of common themes arising from these audit reports, which covered

a wide range of policy areas, including education, gambling, information security and local government. These themes were particularly around the need to improve monitoring and oversight, as well as performance management by the public sector.

One example in relation to local government, which is an area I have worked in, is the need to continue to monitor the important issue of development contributions and how they are collected and spent. The committee has made recommendations to develop an effective monitoring and reporting framework which provides management with regular and relevant information to ensure that all contributions and levies are in fact received, that development contributions and levies collected are applied for their intended purposes and that infrastructure delivered through development contributions and levies is delivered efficiently, on time and effectively. I commend the report to the house.

Motion agreed to.

RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMITTEE

Opportunities for increasing exports of goods and services from regional Victoria

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) presented report, including appendices, together with summary report and transcripts of evidence.

Laid on table.

Ordered that report and summary report be printed.

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

Today I am presenting the final report of the Rural and Regional Committee of the 57th Parliament, which is on its inquiry into increasing exports of goods and services from regional Victoria. The Rural and Regional Committee received the terms of reference for this inquiry on 26 November 2013. As we hand down the report we find ourselves in an increasingly important time for primary industries, the education sector and tourism exporters, with significant growth opportunities to be realised but also challenges on the horizon.

The committee took the view that it was our job to listen to the people directly involved in exporting industries and to ensure that the policy settings from state, federal and local governments maximise returns

to Victorian exporters. In doing so the committee heard from over 130 witnesses, ran 9 public hearings, received 51 submissions and undertook 10 site visits during its inquiry, and it also received briefings interstate. These submissions and transcripts of public hearings will remain on the committee's website, and the committee is forever grateful to the exporters who took the time — sometimes at commercial risk — to share their learnings and understanding for the benefit of government policy settings and also for the benefit of other regional exporters. The committee genuinely appreciates the advice it received, in particular that firsthand experience. The committee has relied heavily on this knowledge in its deliberations and trusts that it has reflected these views accurately throughout its report.

On behalf of my committee colleagues I thank our diligent and excellent secretarial staff, Mr Christopher Gribbin, with whom I have also worked in his role on the secretariat of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee; Ms Lilian Topic; Patrick O'Brien — yes, another O'Brien! — and Laura Ollington for their contribution and dedication to the work of the Rural and Regional Committee. We trust that the rural exporters will, hopefully, give this report their stamp of approval.

I would also like to acknowledge the long contribution that has been made by members of the committee. It is an extremely important committee that has worked for regional Victoria over the 57th Parliament in a very bipartisan manner. In doing so I thank the deputy chair, Geoff Howard, member for Ballarat East in the Assembly, who has provided continual bipartisan support and collegiality in ensuring that we have delivered — fairly close to an election — a report that will, hopefully, have recommendations that can stand the political test of time. I thank the previous chair of the committee, Paul Weller, member for Rodney in the Assembly, who has also provided strong guidance and loyalty to me in my new role as chair of this important committee. He has significant experience as a dairy exporter and also showed himself to be a cultural giant of the committee in relation to his knowledge of music and the arts.

I would also like to thank Andrew Katos, member for South Barwon in the Assembly, and Ian Trezise, member for Geelong in the Assembly, for their contributions. For Mr Trezise and Mr Weller, this will be the last report they contribute to the Parliament. Again I commend them for their service to the Parliament, and no doubt they will take with them their fond memories of serving on this committee. I will be forever grateful for their support.

The report will build upon much of the previous work of the committee, which has also handed down excellent reports in relation to attracting young farmers to regional areas, telecommuting and building regional cities of the future. These recommendations are all part of deciding what governments can do to assist in the growth of regional areas. It is true that exporting is the end result of what regional areas can deliver, but the inputs into that, including the strategies to ensure that there is livability, competitive advantage and growth in exports, are the things people in cities sometimes take for granted despite them being essential to the building of Victoria's communities.

In essence the report found that in order to grow these regional exports governments need to continue to identify and support regional Victoria's competitive advantage, reduce the costs of production and increase efficiencies while seeking greater access to existing and emerging export markets. Victoria's competitive advantages mean we have a strong economy and a strong export sector with potential for further growth. Many of these advantages are based on our ability to produce high-quality products, our natural environment, our livability and our world-leading education, manufacturing, medical, scientific and agribusiness sectors. The breadth and level of skills of our businesses and individuals are a testament to rural and regional Victoria, and they need to be supported and listened to by government. I commend this report to the house.

Motion agreed to.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Acting Clerk:

Auditor-General's report on Managing Landfills, September 2014.

Coastal Management Act 1995 — Victorian Coastal Strategy 2014, pursuant to section 19 of the Act.

Forensic Leave Panel — Report, 2013.

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 — Notices pursuant to section 32(4) in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 54 and 55.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament:

Estate Agents Act 1980 — No. 113.

Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958 — No. 118

Honorary Justices Act 2014 — Nos. 110 and 111.

Magistrates' Court Act 1989 — No. 112.

Non-Emergency Patient Transport Act 2003 — No. 117.

Owners Corporations Act 2006 — No. 114.

Residential Tenancies Act 1997 — No. 116.

Sale of Land Act 1962 — No. 115.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Guidelines for the preparation of statutory rules and legislative instruments under section 26(3) of the Act.

Victorian Law Reform Commission — Final Report on Jury Empanelment.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

TAFE funding

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — The Napthine government should be ashamed of its continued assault on the TAFE system and condemned for its attempts to cover up the devastating impacts it has had. During National Skills Week the Napthine government released its latest training market highlights report, which omitted vital information on the failing state of Victoria's TAFE system. Previous half-year reports had included detailed information and analysis on vocational training activity — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms Pennicuik — On a point of order, President, we cannot hear what Mr Tarlamis is saying in his members statement due to the interjections from across the chamber.

Mrs Peulich — He should also slow down when he reads.

The PRESIDENT — Order! There is no requirement for a member to have a particular gait in terms of the delivery of their speeches. Mr Tarlamis fits a lot into his 90-second statements as a matter of tradition, and there is no problem with that. If Ms Pennicuik cannot hear Mr Tarlamis, we really are in trouble. Members will know that my view is that members ought to be able to deliver 90-second statements without interruption because they have a short time frame in which to be able to make the points they wish to make or convey the information they wish to convey. When delivering 90-second statements members deserve the courtesy of the house and to be heard in silence. We will reset the clock for Mr Tarlamis, if he wishes.

Mr TARLAMIS — Thank you, President. The Napthine government should be ashamed of its continued assault on the TAFE system and condemned for its attempts to cover up the devastating impacts this has had. The government has released the latest

Victorian training market report for National Skills Week, which omitted vital information on the failing state of Victoria's TAFE system. Previous half-yearly reports have included detailed information and analysis on vocational training activity and TAFE performance. This begs the question: if things are going so well as a result of the government's reforms, why would it hide this information?

Victorians have a right to see the full and damning effects of the Napthine government's cuts to TAFE. Despite the government's attempts to redact, delete and manipulate the evidence, all Victorians are aware of the truth, which includes \$1.2 billion cut from TAFE, campuses closed, courses cut, massive fee hikes, staff sacked and 11 000 young Victorians missing out on an apprenticeship or traineeship this year. Youth unemployment for 15 to 24-year-olds is now above 14 per cent, which is the highest level since October 2001. High unemployment and the cutting of funding for Victorians to gain new skills to help them get jobs is a dangerous combination. Despite this, the government's only plan to tackle this problem is to continue to decimate the TAFE system while covering up the very real consequences of its actions.

It is about time the Napthine government was honest with Victorians by accepting its failings and releasing the full TAFE report so that we can all see the devastating impacts the government's cuts have had on the TAFE system. Only then can appropriate and immediate action be taken to address the growing and alarming situation it has created.

Shepparton youth foyer

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — On Friday last week I was thrilled to announce that Benalla-based Contract Control Services has won the \$8 million tender to build the Shepparton Education First Youth Foyer. This will boost Shepparton's construction industry as 8 jobs and 4 trainee apprenticeships will be created and 56 jobs will be retained. Contract Control Services will also employ four local public housing tenants, adding to the employment opportunities that the Victorian coalition government already provides for vulnerable Victorians in the region. The Victorian coalition government is committed to building a better Victoria by working with regional cities to boost construction and employment opportunities.

Kangaroo Flat 2nd scouts

Hon. W. A. LOVELL — As a member for Northern Victoria Region, it was wonderful to reopen

the Kangaroo Flat 2nd scout hall recently. Scouts play a vital role in our communities, providing young people with opportunities to learn new skills, make new friends and enjoy the outdoors. The Victorian coalition government committed a \$30 000 grant to bring the Kangaroo Flat 2nd scout hall back to life as part of the \$5 million investment it has made in Scouts Victoria to update ageing scout and guide halls across the state.

Country Women's Association of Victoria

Hon. W. A. LOVELL — It was a pleasure to open the Eastern Goulburn Valley Country Women's Association of Victoria (CWA) half-yearly conference recently. The CWA makes a great difference to regional Victorian communities. It was great to have the opportunity to discuss the CWA of Victoria's state project for 2014, the Queen Elizabeth Centre, which assists vulnerable children and families.

I was also pleased to hear that the CWA is supporting Australian-grown fruit and vegetables this year. The Victorian government recognises the importance of the state's food and fibre industry and jobs in regional Victoria, and that is why it committed \$22 million to SPC Ardmona in February.

Legislative program

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — Last night the Council sat late debating a controversial bill which has raised huge concerns in the community. Like many pieces of legislation introduced during this parliamentary term, that bill is not based on any public inquiry, report or evidence and has received very little scrutiny. There are 25 bills in the lower house and 12 in the upper house with less than three sitting weeks remaining. Many of these bills are similar to the one debated late last night in that they are based not on any evidence but rather on populism. In its media release of 20 August, the Law Institute of Victoria said it is:

... deeply concerned about the raft of 'law and order' measures the state government is rushing to introduce before the November state election.

There are also some important bills, such as the Inquiries Bill 2014, that deserve more time and a proper process for consideration.

I notice that out of the 25 bills in the lower house, none of them is the IBAC bill, which the community and many commentators have been waiting for. It is not on the notice paper so far. The Attorney-General, who is also Minister for Finance, has assured me over the last few years that the much-awaited review of or amendments to the Audit Act 1994 is coming, but it is

also not one of the bills on the lower house notice paper. It will be interesting to see if those bills turn up on the notice paper before — —

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

Greater Shepparton on Show

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — On Tuesday, 5 August, I had the pleasure of attending Greater Shepparton on Show, an exhibition-style function which ran for several days in Queen's Hall. The event showcased Shepparton's economic importance in Victoria, and on the last day it provided fresh fruit to all visitors to the exhibition. I congratulate the mayor and councillors of Greater Shepparton on their ingenuity in organising this event.

Art of the Urban Pharaohs

Mr ELASMAR — On Tuesday, 19 August, I was delighted to attend, along with parliamentary colleagues, the Art of the Urban Pharaohs exhibition held in Queens Hall. The event was co-hosted by His Excellency Dr Hassan El-Laithy, the Egyptian ambassador, and the President of this august chamber, the Honourable Bruce Atkinson. It was a marvellous representation of art from young Egyptian artists who recreate their traditional storytelling through the medium of modernised graphic art.

Selby Primary School

Mr RONALDS (Eastern Victoria) — I rise to talk about creating safer conditions for Selby Primary School students. These students will soon have a safer route to school thanks to the coalition government's announcement that static speed limit signs on Belgrave-Gembrook Road will be replaced with electronic signs. I had the privilege of going to Selby Primary School with the Liberal Party candidate for the Assembly seat of Monbulk, Mark Verschuur, who is doing a fantastic job of advocating for local needs in the electorate. We talked to the Selby Primary School principal and saw firsthand the great need for electronic signs as well as a new footpath.

Selby Primary School is situated just up the hill from Belgrave-Gembrook Road. It is hard to see the school as you come down that hill so you come across these static signs and before you know it you are through the reduced speed zone and past the school. The new electronic signs will be flashing signs. They will come on before and after school to give drivers a good warning that a school crossing is coming up.

The new footpath will also be important. The school is in a very hilly part of the Dandenongs and the footpath will improve the safety conditions for students as they walk to school. This is another example of the coalition government building a better and safer Victoria and looking after our children.

Labor Party policies

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — This week the Australian Labor Party announced that under an Andrews Labor government energy companies which systematically break the law, such as changing contract or billing periods without explicit customer consent, will be named and shamed. Labor will also double the compensation for wrongful disconnection payable by energy companies to customers from \$250 to \$500 for every day they are without power; introduce a wrongful disconnection penalty scheme — for every breach that contributes to the wrongful disconnection of a customer an energy company will be liable for a \$5000 penalty; and give the Essential Services Commission (ESC) tough new watchdog powers to crack down on energy companies which flout Victoria's consumer protection laws. These new powers will equip the ESC to support consumers and deter retailers from committing future breaches.

Last financial year 40 000 Victorians had their electricity and gas disconnected, with 200 wrongful disconnections being made. There were 70 000 complaints against energy companies. No Victorian household should be wrongfully disconnected from their gas or electricity supply. Rather than protect consumers, the Napthine government has simply announced another review. A Labor government will take action to hand power back to consumers.

Macedon Ranges infrastructure

Mrs MILLAR (Northern Victoria) — Macedon Ranges continues to benefit from the coalition government investing strongly in rebuilding regional infrastructure, with dozens of projects underway or recently completed. Last week I joined the Minister for Education and the Liberal Party candidate for the Assembly seat of Macedon, Donna Petrovich, for the turning of the sod at the \$3.5 million indoor sports facility for Gisborne Secondary College as well as the opening of the new science wing at Kyneton Secondary College.

Other initiatives delivered across Macedon Ranges include \$5.3 million for Kyneton Secondary College and \$3.5 million for Kyneton Primary School; \$882 000 for resheeting Gisborne-Diggers Rest road,

plus recent upgrades to Woodend–Romsey road, Woodend–Tylden road and Gisborne–Bacchus Marsh road. There is \$500 000 for the Kyneton Community Park; arts funding for the Woodend Winter Arts Festival and the Daylesford Macedon Ranges Open Studios; \$650 000 for the new home of the Macedon Ranges Netball Association in New Gisborne; facilities upgrades for Gardiner Reserve in Gisborne and the Riddells Creek Football Netball Club; and \$270 000 for restoring the Bluestone Theatre in Kyneton.

Macedon Ranges will benefit from the \$4.1 billion regional rail link and the \$100 million Tullamarine Freeway widening project. The \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund has invested in over 1500 projects, including 24 projects in the Macedon Ranges. My predecessor in Northern Victoria Region, Donna Petrovich, and I are listening to the community and delivering real outcomes for families in Macedon. Of the Labor candidate from Northcote, Mary-Anne Thomas, and the two metropolitan men standing in Northern Victoria Region, Steve Herbert and Daniel Mulino, Macedon Ranges residents should be asking: who are these ALP factional puppets and why is the Labor Party not putting up real locals to be the voices of our community?

Ballarat women's health

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I highlight two outstanding funding announcements for Ballarat last week, and I congratulate the Minister for Community Services, Mary Wooldridge, who is also the Minister for Mental Health, on her work on both of these.

The first is funding of \$660 000 to Women's Health Victoria to address the growing problem of violence against women and children. The Ballarat-based Women's Health Grampians will share in that funding, and its project manager, Simone Mead, was enormously grateful for the funding to help overcome this ugly problem. This funding will help with work on the prevention of violence and the development of a local health plan.

The second announcement was for a smaller, but very important, funding amount of \$50 000. This will go directly to improving the safety of women in mental health care at Ballarat Health Services. It will allow for swipe card door locking and alarm systems for all bedrooms in the unit, a bathroom, the staff base and medication room. The extra security will enable female patients, who already feel vulnerable, to feel safer. It will provide privacy and, importantly, peace of mind, and it will ultimately lead to better health outcomes.

I was pleased to make these announcements last Friday morning and then to walk around the corner to observe the pouring of concrete for the hospital's helipad — another coalition government promise that is being fulfilled on time and on budget. Construction is advanced on the five-bed mother-baby unit for mums struggling with postnatal health. Also the contract has been announced for the \$46 million Yuille House redevelopment at Ballarat Base Hospital — including 60 additional beds. These are outstanding outcomes and developments at this pivotal health service and evidence of the care this government shows for those in regional Victoria.

Higher education reform

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — In May this year, Prime Minister Abbott and the federal coalition government showed their true colours to the Australian people as they handed down the most unfair, damaging, misleading and socially divisive budget this country has seen. While Mr Abbott arrogantly continues to tell us this is what we need, leaders from across all sectors are repeatedly explaining the damaging effects it will have across the country. In the university sector a number of chancellors and vice-chancellors, particularly from regional universities, have detailed the damaging effects deregulation of the sector will have. Deakin University vice-chancellor Jane den Hollander recently labelled the Abbott government's planned changes to student higher education contribution scheme loans as 'extraordinarily aggressive', 'punitive' and 'unfair'.

As a result of the Abbott-Hockey budget, student fees will soar by up to 30 per cent just to cover the \$1.1 billion cuts to funding to help Australians obtain a tertiary education. Along with this, the deregulation of the university market means that course costs will most certainly rise, with predictions that some will go into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. It will create a two-tiered university system that will be socially damaging for this country. Deregulation will significantly disadvantage regional universities, which do not have the competitive pull of large metropolitan universities. Regional universities have a much thinner market and a higher percentage of disadvantaged students, which renders it difficult for a market to operate. The latest modelling suggests that while top universities will continue to make money, regional universities will struggle to break even — —

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — The coalition came to government with a strong law and order agenda. Each day Victorians wake to fresh revelations of inappropriate conduct by disgraced union officials — union officials who use the money of ordinary, hardworking Victorians on themselves and their mates. Can the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Daniel Andrews, shed light on why in 2010, as reported in the *Age* in April this year, Labor accepted donations from the now disgraced Health Services Union (HSU), led by Kathy Jackson, whom the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption is now investigating in relation to a union slush fund of \$284 000? Can Daniel Andrews further shed light on whether payments from the HSU were made to support the 2010 election campaigns of a member for Northern Metropolitan Region, Mr Elasmarr?

According to Australian Electoral Commission records, HSU donated approximately \$189 000 between 2008–09 and 2010–11 to the Victorian ALP. Can Daniel Andrews assure Victorians that these funds did not come from Kathy Jackson's HSU slush fund to support her ALP mates getting elected? Daniel — 'Danny', 'Dan', 'Danno' — Andrews and Labor are risks for Victoria.

Eltham Montmorency Uniting Church

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — On Sunday, 24 August, I joined the congregation of the Eltham Montmorency Uniting Church at its 100th anniversary service. Along with the moderator of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania and church leaders from the Anglican, Catholic and Living Faith churches in Eltham, I celebrated the church's centenary on the basis of looking back and moving forward. My congratulations to the Reverend Tina Lyndon and her hardworking organising committee. It was delightful to share this historic occasion with Cr Steve Briffa, the Liberal Party's candidate in the Assembly seat of Eltham, who was there in his capacity as deputy mayor of the Banyule City Council.

Eltham College

Mrs KRONBERG — On another matter, on 29 August I joined the Eltham College community at the official opening of the school's new music and performance centre. Joining me were college board chairman Mr Chris Heysen, school principal Mr Simon Le Plastier, my parliamentary colleague Senator Scott Ryan, and Cr Steve Briffa. I congratulate the building's

designers, ClarkeHopkinsClarke architects, and its builders, the Lloyd Group.

We were very impressed with the stunning performances of the secondary students and the junior choir — which sang Johnny Farnham's anthem *You're the Voice* — and the theatre studies monologues by Brendan Duncan and Lucas Haynes. As always, it was a wonderful experience to visit Eltham College and marvel at its achievements and vision in 21st century education.

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party

Mr ELSBURY (Western Metropolitan) — The coalition came to government with a strong law and order agenda. The Brimbank City Council scandal was a sorry saga that uncovered the truth about Labor's factions and Labor members' attempts to rule at any cost for their own benefit.

Several questions need answers. Why does Daniel Andrews, the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, remain quiet about the preselection of Natalie Suleyman, the disgraced former mayor of Brimbank, as the next candidate for the safe Labor seat of St Albans in the Assembly? Why did he not intervene in the preselection to ensure that Ms Suleyman was not rewarded given her previous record? Is it because Mr Andrews is beholden to federal Labor war lord Stephen Conroy and is unable to exert any influence? Does Mr Andrews not have the strength to put an end to the factional wars that support the privileged few over the interests of the people of St Albans?

Daniel Andrews continues to say nothing about why he has allowed the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union to return to the Labor fold, and now he is silent on the preselection of a woman who was once referred to by a former member for the Assembly seat of Keilor as the 'Robert Mugabe of Brimbank'. Daniel Andrews and Labor are a risk to Victoria.

MainStream Aquaculture

Mr ELSBURY — I take this opportunity to congratulate MainStream Aquaculture for winning the Wyndham business awards last week. It is a great enterprise which is supplying 50 per cent of global barramundi stocks right across the world, to plates in the Middle East, North America and Europe.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Mr JENNINGS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house —

- (1) notes —
 - (a) that in the past the coalition government has provided ambulance response time data by branch at the 50th and 90th percentile in response to freedom of information requests;
 - (b) recommendation 5 of the Auditor-General's *Access to Ambulance Services* report that Ambulance Victoria publicly reports a comprehensive suite of response time indicators, including national measures of response times at the 50th and 90th percentiles and a breakdown of performance by region and locality; and
 - (c) the outright refusal by Ambulance Victoria to provide ambulance response time information by branch or by locality, as it 'may unduly excite public controversy' ahead of the November election;
- (2) affirms the privileges, immunities and powers conferred on the Council pursuant to section 19 of the Constitution Act 1975; and
- (3) requires the Leader of the Government to table, by 12 noon, Wednesday, 17 September 2014, a copy of a complete list of ambulance response times for code 1 dispatches for the period 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014 for each urban centre and locality and for each local government area, including —
 - (a) the total number of code 1 instances;
 - (b) the average time to respond;
 - (c) the 50th percentile;
 - (d) the 90th percentile; and
 - (e) the proportion of code 1 incidents responded to within 15 minutes.

This is a fairly formal motion. It is a little bit information rich in terms of what underlies an example of complete hypocrisy by the current government in terms of its position on the release of ambulance information. The motion also expresses the need and desire of the community to have information that reports on the effectiveness of ambulance services in this state. Victorians' access to that information is being denied by this government and by Ambulance Victoria. Access is being denied consistently in the Parliament of Victoria and through freedom of information requests, which have led to a number of proceedings at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) requesting that the information be released in the public

interest. The release of this information has been resisted time and again by this minister and by Ambulance Victoria. Victorians would be absolutely amazed at the hypocrisy that has been evident in the Minister for Health from day one of his administration.

I note the extraordinary explanations Ambulance Victoria has given as to why it should not release information which reflects on its capacity to respond to emergencies in the Victorian community. Ambulance Victoria claims that it is not in the interests of the organisation to release this information in case the community has a dim view of it, in case people think that they are being let down by the ambulance service and in case Victorian citizens decide not to renew their Ambulance Victoria subscriptions on the basis of the poor performance of the ambulance service.

This is quite an extraordinary response by this government agency. The Minister for Health, David Davis, has been extremely selective in his release of data and information about the performance of the health system, despite the hundreds of questions that I would estimate I have asked him during the life of this Parliament. Time and again I have asked him to explain the performance of the health system, whether it be ambulance performance, emergency department performance, surgery waiting lists or responses by the government, and at virtually every turn the minister has resisted the opportunity to share any facts with the people of Victoria. He has been running away from what hospital performance data, annual reports of Ambulance Victoria and national reporting data on the performance of the Victorian health system say.

At no stage does the minister choose to debate or disclose to the Parliament and the people of Victoria what the evidence clearly says. The evidence — given through national reporting, state reporting and the reports of individual agencies in Victoria — consistently reflects a deterioration in the response times and reliability of the ambulance service and the hospital system in Victoria. Time and again the state health minister tries to confuse the public by talking about the extraneous responsibilities of other players in the health field and trying to shift the blame to the federal Labor government, although he now finds it to be atrocious when the same type of criticism is directed at the budget decisions of the federal Liberal-Nationals government.

Minister Davis applies a completely different logic and set of mathematical assessment to the financial impacts of the previous federal government in terms of its support for the health system. On one occasion the federal Labor government reduced funding to the

Victorian hospital system, and Minister Davis embarked upon a community campaign for a year. To this day he continues to blame the federal Labor government for a financial adjustment that had nowhere near the impact of the financial decimation of the Victorian healthcare system that has been perpetrated by the Abbott government in terms of the forward projections of money coming to Victoria for hospital expenditure.

That does not stop the minister trying to confuse the public about those issues. It has not stopped him trying to confuse the public about the failings and poor performance of Ambulance Victoria, about the paramedics themselves and about the union representing the paramedics. He tries to blame the poor performance on industrial relations matters rather than on Ambulance Victoria itself, the way in which resources have been allocated to that service and the lack of funding that has been provided to emergency departments, which means that ambulances ramp outside hospitals and cannot transfer patients in a timely way. The minister chooses to ignore those structural and resource problems that he has not fixed. Instead he tries to confuse the community by saying that the failings of Ambulance Victoria are at the foot of an industrial dispute between the government, Ambulance Victoria and paramedics.

Time and again, rather than trying to resolve that industrial relations issue, the minister has chosen to go to war with the ambulance union, to abuse paramedics in a verbal way through public advertising, to criticise their work and to misrepresent the nature of the offers that have been made by the government through Ambulance Victoria in the name of fixing that dispute. He has spent, I think, close to \$1 billion of taxpayers money on publicising the government's view and its spin on these industrial relations matters rather than on providing new ambulances, finding a solution to the industrial dispute and trying to foster a harmonious workplace and good working relationships within Ambulance Victoria. On every occasion the minister has chosen conflict. He has chosen to withhold the relevant information. He has chosen to find dispute wherever he can rather than assuming responsibility for fixing the problems of the ambulance service and the hospital system in Victoria and delivering better outcomes for the Victorian community.

Acting President, you may be amazed, just as the chamber and the Victorian public may be amazed, to understand that the information I have sought through this motion today is in fact information that as far back as October 2010 the Auditor-General recommended be furnished regularly by Ambulance Victoria to the

public in the name of transparency, accountability and maintaining the appropriate performance measures of Ambulance Victoria. Extraordinarily the shadow Minister for Health, David Davis, actually applauded the Auditor-General's recommendation to make that information available. He went on to make a commitment as part of the election promises of the Liberal Party at the time that that information would be released. However, that has not been the enduring position of the government. In the early days of the Baillieu government, now the Napthine government, this information was released through freedom of information. The community did have a snapshot of the performance of ambulance services in the early period of the current government.

That policy of releasing this information changed quite drastically and remarkably, because the public could see for themselves what the effect was on ambulance performance under this government. The community could tell that ambulance services were failing them. The minister and Ambulance Victoria decided to have a change of heart and to contest the availability of the information and pursue withholding information at great length at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Just so we are very clear about it, the fifth recommendation of the Auditor-General in October 2010 is:

That Ambulance Victoria publicly reports a comprehensive suite of response time indicators, including:

national measures of response times at the 50th and 90th percentiles

a breakdown of performance by region/locality.

Recommendation 6 goes beyond that. The report suggests:

That the Department of Health reports on performance for total case time, broken down by the elements attributable to the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority, Ambulance Victoria, and hospitals.

I share the view of the Auditor-General that that information would be extremely useful, but at no stage in the four years since have we seen it. On various occasions we have seen the release of information under recommendation 5. That is unsurprising because of the response from Ambulance Victoria to the Auditor-General's report in 2010. I have a response authored by Associate Professor Tony Walker, ASM, acting chief executive officer of Ambulance Victoria at the time specifically in response to recommendation 5:

AV supports the recommendation in principle, and will work in consultation with the Department of Health to develop improved public reporting of response time performance.

In accordance with the response from Ambulance Victoria and the promises made on 6 May 2010, the then opposition spokesman for the Liberal and Nationals parties, David Davis, indicated in a policy statement that the then opposition, now the government, would support the release of information on ambulance services, including ambulance diversions, ambulance bypass and early warning system incidents and the number of ambulance ramping occasions and ramping hours that had occurred at Victorian hospitals. That commitment was made in black and white by the then opposition and supported by Ambulance Victoria.

The Labor government recognised the value of implementing the recommendation. We knew the information was available in that form because it was in the Auditor-General's report published in October 2010. If members of the chamber or members of the community want to see how ambulance services were performing in 2009–10, that information is shown in appendices A, B and C, which run from pages 57 to 82. Figure A lists the performance of ambulance services by response times, by metropolitan responding branch — it lists all the responding branches — and the number of incidents for all the services across Victoria at that time. Figure B identifies metropolitan code 1 response times by local government area. Figure C1 gives code 1 response times by urban centre population of 50 000 and over for the 2009–10 period. It covers all the local government areas and all the urban centres. That table runs from pages 73 to 82. As members can tell, the outgoing Labor government enabled the Auditor-General to not only collect information but to report on it, and the report features an extensive series of tables outlining the information being sought today.

It may well be of note to the chamber that the report also indicates the performance of the outgoing Labor government and the performance of Ambulance Victoria under Labor. If members look at page 11 of the report, they will see a table showing the statewide average response times for code 1 incidents during the life of the Labor government from 2004–05 to 2009–10. They will see that during that period the state average response time for code 1 incidents was about 10½ minutes at the start of the series and at the end was about 12 minutes, which was well within the expected outcome for performance at that time. Based on the most recent information we have, they are response times that this government has never achieved and is in no trajectory to achieve.

On page 13 there is a table showing the percentage of code 1 incidents responded to within 15 minutes. That trend series between 2004–05 and 2009–10 commences at a little over 90 per cent and ends at a little under 90 per cent, but there was consistently around 90 per cent delivery of performance in terms of responding to code 1 incidents within 15 minutes. That was the track record of the Labor government as recorded by the Auditor-General, and it was clearly demonstrated in the report. The report outlined response times that have never been achieved by this government or Ambulance Victoria since then.

Time and again we see the Victorian health minister rising to his feet, flustered and belligerent, to try to tell me, the chamber and the community that he inherited services that were in chaos. However, looking at the measures that I just outlined and that the Auditor-General outlined in October 2010, which was in the last two months of the Labor government, we can see that in the last six years of the Labor government the response times were consistently better than they are now. Ambulance Victoria consistently delivered an emergency response which was in accordance with not only what the budget papers were expecting of it but also what the community expected of it. Response times were commensurate with the needs of the community, providing a greater level of support in the community.

Labor's track record in delivering ambulance services is the benchmark we should use to understand and appreciate the performance by the current government. If members have a look at page 128 of this year's budget paper 3 they will see that under this government the expected outcome for responding to code 1 emergencies within 15 minutes was 72 per cent. Under Labor, Ambulance Victoria response times remained constant and stayed within the recommended time frames and performance targets of the budget papers. We can see that even though there is a target of 85 per cent of calls to be responded to within 15 minutes, the last measure by this government showed the figure to be as low as 72 per cent. That means that more than one in four calls are not responded to within the recommended time frame. It is a clear indication in the budget papers that Ambulance Victoria is failing.

We may find it extraordinary that the information I have sought to have tabled by the minister has been withheld but one of the reasons could be that either the minister or Ambulance Victoria is trying to pretend that the information does not exist. However, it does exist. There have been three occasions during the life of the current government where this information has been made available to the opposition. It was provided on

3 August 2012, 21 March 2013 and 26 July 2013. In a few minutes I will run through what that information said. In essence it said that response times were getting worse in every locality and at every branch across the network of ambulance services. I will be able to report on that later.

The sorry situation is that after the release of that information under FOI on those three occasions Ambulance Victoria decided to withhold it. It gave its reason for doing so to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. On 18 August — just two weeks ago — the chair of Ambulance Victoria, Linda Sorrell, sent an extraordinary letter to the opposition. In it she outlines why this information is being withheld. I will read from that letter to the opposition which indicates why Ambulance Victoria wants to withhold the information. Linda Sorrell said:

The publication of source data in an unaggregated form may unduly excite public controversy on an issue which is already attracting media attention and the subject of current protected industrial action by the Ambulance Employees Union ...

There is clear potential for the source data to cause confusion as to both the required performance standard and Ambulance Victoria's performance against that standard.

Ambulance Victoria is likely to be unreasonably disadvantaged if the publication of the source data further inflames the industrial campaign, the undertaking of which in turn affects efficient service delivery by Ambulance Victoria.

The publication of location-specific response times is likely to unreasonably disadvantage Ambulance Victoria in terms of its business, commercial and financial interests if any location-specific response times act as a disincentive to current and/or prospective patients subscribing to ambulance cover in the areas which reflect greater response times.

Apart from the sheer audacity of those propositions, in terms of how Ambulance Victoria is acquitting its public interest obligations to the citizens of Victoria and accountability for its performance, I find it a fairly extraordinary failure to rise to what is clear public interest and failure to provide community members with information so they can form their own view about the effectiveness of this service and the government's support for the organisation or lack thereof. Ambulance Victoria and the government should revisit that extraordinary denial of this information.

I implore the chamber today to seek a mandatory requirement invoking the sanctions of Parliament. In fact that is something the government is very interested in doing today. Today the government is interested in invoking standards of appropriate parliamentary scrutiny and rigour. The government appears to be obsessed, in its self-serving, selective and capricious way, with imposing standards of parliamentary

behaviour and performance, but it is not actually applying them to its ministers. It is not applying standards of public disclosure, accountability and consistency, and a flagrant hypocrisy is being demonstrated by one of its ministers.

Unless there is a road to Damascus conversion by all members of the government today and the government applies the same standards to all of us, I reckon there is a good chance government members will vote against this motion. But if they rise up in the spirit of improving parliamentary standards, they will probably put their minister on notice and say, 'This information should be made available to the Parliament and the people of Victoria'. I look forward to any government member rising to that opportunity to show they have some standards of propriety and accountability. Let us see whether they can do it. Let us just see whether that can be achieved today. It is a good test for the Parliament this week.

The evidence suggests something from what the chair of Ambulance Victoria has said — that is, that if this information was released, it would have an adverse effect on Ambulance Victoria's financial position. That does not ring true. I tabled evidence in VCAT hearings on the financial outcomes and financial positioning of Ambulance Victoria during the first two years of the current government, when its performance had deteriorated significantly. The evidence shows that the number of subscribers to Ambulance Victoria continued to rise. The argument mounted by Ambulance Victoria was that if the public knew how badly it was performing, they would not subscribe, but that does not ring true.

In 2009–10 there were 967 967 subscribers. In 2011–12 there were 1 014 360 subscribers, and in 2012–13 there were 1 038 467 subscribers. Members of the Legislative Council and anybody who is listening to this debate will know that those numbers have continued to rise. That is a rising trend, with each year's subscriptions higher than the year before, while Ambulance Victoria's performance was going in a negative direction. Its performance was getting worse, but the number of subscribers was increasing. The argument that Ambulance Victoria raised that revealing the figures would have an adverse impact upon its subscriber base or its financial positioning does not ring true when you examine the facts, which can be obtained through the annual reports of Ambulance Victoria.

I will refer to another aspect. In cross-examination at VCAT Tony Walker was asked, even with a reduction in the number of subscribers, if somebody in Victoria used an ambulance, how would Ambulance Victoria

make the most money from providing that service? He was asked if Ambulance Victoria raised more money from transporting a subscriber or a non-subscriber. The answer is pretty clear: you make a lot of money — probably about 10 times the amount raised by transporting subscribers — from transporting non-subscribers. One trip for a non-subscriber would make 10 times the amount of money earned transporting 10 subscribers. If you are designing your business model to increase your revenue, you would want to reduce the number of subscribers. You would want to have people being charged 10 times the rate every time they used an ambulance.

The financial argument of Ambulance Victoria is tenuous if it is suggesting that it will lose subscribers. That is one issue. Even if Ambulance Victoria loses subscribers, it makes more money transporting people who are not subscribers. In terms of the financial imperative, I would argue that it is a ludicrous proposition that Ambulance Victoria would be disadvantaged by the release of the information.

Indeed at some stage during the term of this government the CEO of Ambulance Victoria, Greg Sassella, was asked whether this information should be released. He was asked these questions by Neil Mitchell on his radio program, and Greg Sassella indicated a somewhat contradictory position on this subject. In 2013 he acknowledged the importance of the information sought through the FOI request, stating that the ambulance performance per branch is interesting information and is critical to some people. At one level he actually accepted the public interest argument that has been mounted by Labor, paramedics and members of the community that in fact the information is useful because it reflects on the quality of service and it is critically important to many patients across Victoria. Its importance was acknowledged by Greg Sassella in this interview. But then he goes on to say, 'We don't need to release it in this level of detail through FOI because it's released in our annual report and other reports'. He said that it was not a secret.

There has been no annual report tabled by Ambulance Victoria in this Parliament that has included that level of detail. Not once have the level of detail and the information sought by this motion today been provided in either the annual report of Ambulance Victoria or the budget papers. I have a transcript of this interview available to validate my reporting of this issue to the Parliament, and in this interview the CEO of Ambulance Victoria sorely let down the public of Victoria by indicating falsely that the level of information sought by this motion is available in Ambulance Victoria's annual report, in the budget

papers or through other formal reporting mechanisms by Ambulance Victoria. That is not the case. It has not been the case apart from the information released during the life of the Labor government, the information made available and reported on in the Auditor-General's report and on the three occasions that Ambulance Victoria released this information subject to FOI request in the early days of the current government.

What did that information show when it was released through FOI? I reported to Parliament on 12 June 2013 on what the outcome was for the reporting period provided to the opposition on 21 March 2013. The information indicated deteriorating ambulance response times right across Victoria. On 12 June 2013 in a debate similar to this one, I put on the public record what the impact upon response times had been.

I remind the chamber that that information demonstrated that for Broadmeadows, code 1 response times had worsened during the life of the current government by 3 minutes. In Cranbourne response times were 3 minutes and 15 seconds longer than they had been before; in Essendon, 3 minutes and 22 seconds; in Footscray, 3 minutes and 26 seconds; in Frankston, 4 minutes and 22 seconds; in Gembrook, 3 minutes and 35 seconds; in Ivanhoe, 3 minutes and 54 seconds; in Kororoit, 3 minutes and 28 seconds; in Macedon, 4 minutes and 48 seconds; in Melton, 3 minutes and 33 seconds; in Narre Warren South, 3 minutes and 6 seconds; in Niddrie, 3 minutes and 20 seconds; and in Northcote, 3 minutes and 9 seconds. In Prahran response times had increased by 3 minutes and 17 seconds; in Richmond, by 3 minutes and 31 seconds; in Thomastown, by 3 minutes and 29 seconds; in South Morang, by 4 minutes and 3 seconds; and in Tullamarine, by 3 minutes and 37 seconds.

That is a snapshot of the metropolitan area. It is replicated across regional Victoria. It is a clear indication of the deterioration of ambulance performance in an environment where most educated Victorians know that, when you are in an emergency or crisis situation and your health is on the line, every minute counts. For many medical conditions, every minute of delay reduces your chance of survival, your chance of a full recovery and your chance of successful treatment through the health system. Every minute counts.

At the same time we gathered information on the incidence of ramping that occurred during the first year of this government. In an environment where every minute counts, what did that information show? This

government had promised to remove ramping of ambulances and to increase ambulance response times, but as I indicated to the chamber on 12 June 2013 — a year and a quarter ago — the situation got worse. From the time a year and a quarter ago I reported to the Parliament how Ambulance Victoria was performing, Ambulance Victoria and the government have shut up shop and denied the people of Victoria this information. With the information made available to us before they shut up shop we showed that since 2012 at Monash Medical Centre ambulances had been ramped for an average of 1294 hours a month. At Frankston Hospital they had been ramped for 1323 hours a month; at Dandenong Hospital, for an average of 1012 hours a month; and at the Northern Hospital, for an average of 1081 hours a month.

The extraordinary amount of time that ambulances were sitting with their patients in car parks and waiting bays outside Victorian hospitals was a disaster in the reporting period that I shared with the Parliament a year and a quarter ago. It continues to be a disaster because we know Ambulance Victoria's performance and the community's experience have not improved during that time. This minister is very self-serving and selective about any information he releases, which is inevitably incomplete. When we have wanted to know the average response times for getting to a crisis situation within 15 minutes, the minister has on one or two occasions released one measure — the 50th percentile. Why does he release only the 50th percentile? Because it is the one that measures the least; because he tries to pretend that is an average. He tries to pretend that it is in accordance with the budget measures, the community's expectations of performance and what is medically appropriate in terms of the timeliness of the response. He chooses to ignore all those issues and tries to confuse the community.

If any government member can refute any of the facts I have put on the record in the chamber today, I will acknowledge that. If any government member can refute any of the technical data and information that I have put on the public record as far back as June last year and again today, I will acknowledge that in summing up this debate. I sincerely doubt that I will be called upon to do so, because the track record of this minister and the people who are forced to represent him in this chamber time and again is that they are not charged with the relevant information. They are not charged with data, they are not charged with budget extracts and they are not charged with hospital performance data that can validate the position of this minister who operates in a very rhetorical, confronting and, in my view, mischievous way that misleads the public. He does not take responsibility for his portfolio

and he fails under any good measure of public administration.

If the minister or any government member stands up to prove me wrong in debating this motion, if the minister comes into the house and provides this information, then I will congratulate him and anybody who is taking corrective action in relation to this issue. If the minister complies with the terms of this motion, I will congratulate him appropriately for the disclosure that the Parliament would expect of him, if he delivers. However, I am not expecting to have to do that because I am not expecting the minister to rise to the occasion and to the expectations of the Victorian community and deliver better ambulance and hospital performance.

The health system generally has deteriorated significantly under this minister's watch. If in the last two months he has in government he comes clean on that, then maybe all Victorians will be in a better position to assess his effectiveness during the four years he has been in this portfolio and not assumed responsibility for fixing the things he said he would fix and delivering the things he said he would deliver.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to be able to follow Mr Jennings in speaking to this motion. I will not outline the motion in detail as that has already been done this morning. I have been listening to Mr Jennings's contribution and I want to make some comments on some of the points he raised, particularly in the last few minutes of his speech, which were, quite simply, ridiculous.

I want to go to one area which Mr Jennings refers to in his motion and that is the Auditor-General's *Access to Ambulance Services* report. This report was tabled by the Auditor-General in October 2010, under the previous government. Much is said in this report, which highlights the many issues Ambulance Victoria was facing at that time. It is quite scathing about the administration by and action taken under the former government. Let us not forget who was the Minister for Health at the time. It was the current Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Daniel Andrews, who clearly did a woeful job in that role. That was highlighted by the bungled amalgamation of the metropolitan and rural ambulance services and the risks that posed.

As someone who has an understanding of ambulance response times in regional Victoria, I am aware that the challenges patients and services in regional Victoria face are significantly different to those of metropolitan Melbourne. I am sure my colleague Danny O'Brien will have some comments to make in relation to

Gippsland. He understands only too well the challenges facing his constituency.

I want to quote from the report. The audit summary states:

There is ... a view that this perceived deterioration is linked to the amalgamation of metropolitan and rural ambulance services on 1 July 2008.

That is in direct response to the initiative undertaken by the former government. The summary goes on to say:

The time between the announcement of the merger and its implementation was short and only limited funds were provided to systematically deal with any cultural issues.

... Ambulances are taking longer to respond to code 1 emergencies, with the worst performance since 2004–05 recorded in 2009–10.

...

This points to unfinished work from the amalgamation, particularly addressing cultural issues that have persisted from Rural Ambulance Victoria, and in bedding down more sophisticated resource allocation in regional and rural areas.

The report goes on to talk about the findings in relation to the benchmark data on standard response times, stating that:

Metropolitan areas continue to get a more timely service than rural regions.

...

... AV cannot realistically offer similar response times across the state —

but the Auditor-General says that it does attempt to work towards a similar level. I think that is a very valid and pertinent point to make, because one can understand the differences between regional and metropolitan services.

However, the report also states:

AV is also facing increasing demands from higher caseload numbers. The ageing population and the increase in chronic disease are factors driving demand, with code 1 incidents rising by around 9 per cent across the state in the past three years.

That is a really relevant point. We are facing an ageing population with a corresponding increase in demand. There has been an increase in the incidence of chronic disease, as the report highlights, and that in itself brings challenges as Ambulance Victoria members have to respond to those issues which form part of their workload every day. It really is about that workload. Ambulance Victoria members do a tremendous job every day, but it is about getting an outcome for the

patient they are attending. That is what our health system tries to do each and every day. It strives to get a positive or improved outcome for each patient.

That is exactly what we did. When we came into government in 2010 clearly there was a crisis in the health system, and we needed to fix that. The Auditor-General's report highlights just what we were facing in relation to the botched amalgamation of the metropolitan and regional ambulance services in Victoria. It highlights some of the issues the Victorian public faced.

I am not saying it is easy; it is difficult. It is challenging, as I have highlighted. The previous government, like this government, was facing an increasing and ageing population with those chronic health disease demands on it. Nevertheless the then Minister for Health, Daniel Andrews, the member for Mulgrave in the Assembly, did not provide any data to the Victorian public. As I said, data on the hospital early warning system was never released. Real-time performance data was never released. We know that time and again data was not released.

Members can go onto the government website and see data in relation to median time frames. Earlier I was looking at my iPad to find some of that data in relation to my area, whether that be for the Monash Medical Centre or the Alfred hospital or looking at emergency department status, statewide status, emergency care, activity with ambulance attendances or total emergency attendances. This is all data that is provided by the Victorian health services performance website that we said we would create, which we have done. That is about improving transparency of data and providing the Victorian public with data. It is a vast improvement on what was provided under the Labor government, which did not provide data of this nature and refused to release it time and again.

As I said, when we are talking about ambulance response times and various other elements surrounding patient care it is about getting a better outcome. There is no doubt that the Victorian government is committed to improving transparency in the health system across the board. That is clearly being undertaken. The last few comments Mr Jennings made while winding up his contribution to the debate were just ridiculous. He should think about the capital expenditure this government has undertaken across the state and the number of hospitals that are being built or redeveloped. That means improved services for a growing and ageing population. There are many more things that need to be addressed in relation to our health services, but — —

Mr Leane interjected.

Ms CROZIER — Mr Leane, you would understand that in the area you represent the Box Hill Hospital redevelopment was delivered under budget and ahead of time. That is not something the former government can take credit for because it was absolutely hopeless at managing money and absolutely hopeless at managing projects. We saw that time and again with all its projects. I am not going to list them now, but members have heard the list before. I am just talking about what is really necessary here. The redevelopment of the Box Hill Hospital is a very good example of additional beds being provided through savings from good project management.

To get back to this area of transparency and outcomes for Victorians, in 2011–12 there was transparent planning and consultation for the Victorian health priorities framework and associated plans, including the metropolitan health plan for 2012–22 and technical paper, and, importantly, the rural and regional health plan for 2012–22 and the technical paper associated with that. These are some elements of improving transparency for Victorians. As I have already mentioned, there is also the hospital performance website, which is an implementation of one of the government's election commitments. That has been undertaken, and that data is available live as we speak. That is a far cry from never releasing real-time performance data under the former government.

If you look at that website, as I said, you will see that it covers the domains of access, patient experience, safety, efficiency and capacity. It provides information on real-time hospital emergency department bypass, estimated median time to treatment for non-urgent emergency department patients and elective surgery median waiting times for selected procedures. It provides far more information than has ever been provided.

There are new measures that have been publicly reported for the very first time: rates of elective surgery hospital-initiated postponements; the number of emergency department mental health patients waiting longer than 8 hours for admission; the number of emergency department patients with a length of stay greater than 24 hours; ambulance attendances, which represents arrivals at emergency departments by ambulances; the proportion of ambulance patient transfers within 40 minutes; and the number of hours on the hospital early warning systems or queues. I reiterate that that data was never released under the former government. There is also the median waiting time for non-urgent emergency department patients.

From that list alone members can tell what this government has been undertaking.

In relation to some of the areas covered by Ambulance Victoria, I am pleased that the coalition government has undertaken to provide greater efficiencies and improvements and better outcomes for patients, especially in regional Victoria. One example of that is the thrombolytic, clot-dissolving drug that has been trialled and rolled out across Victoria. This has made an enormous and significant improvement to patient outcomes, and clearly that has been embraced by Ambulance Victoria. In a newsletter Ambulance Victoria speaks about research showing that being in remote locations and having variable access to hospital-based emergency and cardiac services delay potentially life-saving treatment. This initiative alone has resulted in a dramatic improvement in patient outcomes after cardiac arrest compared to what we have had in the past.

Another area I would like to speak about is in relation to the improvements this government has undertaken in terms of the metropolitan area, with additional resources available today. In my area of Southern Metropolitan Region, Bentleigh East has a new peak-period unit with six paramedics. Pakenham and Cranbourne have additional resources. Yarra Junction, Emerald, Mount Eliza, Endeavour Hills, Cranbourne North and Belgrave all have additional resources. There have been capital works in a number of areas. In Healesville a major renovation is being undertaken. It is currently in the design phase and is forecast to be completed next May. Rosebud, Lysterfield and Somerville will all have capital works improvements, and there have been significant ambulance improvements right across regional and metropolitan Victoria. I will not speak about other areas; I will leave them for other members to discuss, as I am sure they know what is happening in their areas.

I also commend the government on its announcement on 26 April of a \$550 million investment in world-class ambulance helicopters. I believe these will be in operation around January 2016. This will be an enormous improvement, and it will bring about improved outcomes and benefits for patients across Victoria. Again I note that there has been a population increase, and clearly response times in regional Victoria are a lot more complex because of the geographic locations. This government has recognised the challenges in regional Victoria and put in place initiatives such as this — and this is just one — which will have enormous benefits to patients in rural and regional Victoria.

This fleet of new helicopters will have the latest in avionic technology. They are faster, bigger and can travel longer distances without refuelling. The new aircraft will be able to fly time-critical patients to Melbourne from communities more than 250 kilometres away in less than 1 hour. To have that ability to get a critical patient from such a long distance away into a major metropolitan emergency department in that time frame will improve outcomes. That is what we are really interested in — better outcomes for Victorian patients and their having greater access. That initiative alone will enable better outcomes.

I will now discuss other data that was released in relation to ambulance transfer times. We know there have been significant improvements to ambulance transfer times. The *Victorian Health Services Performance Report* released in April this year looked at a number of areas, including the work of the task force that was undertaken to look at ambulance transfer times. We knew it was an issue. That is what the task force did. The number of transfers completed within 40 minutes is now 83.3 per cent, up from 78.6 per cent in the previous quarter and 77.4 per cent in the same period in 2012.

Specifically there are various areas — hotspots, if you like — that were having significant issues. A media release I am referring to has some really good examples of how significant the turnarounds have been. The Dandenong Hospital, for instance, improved its 40 minute turnaround from 67.2 per cent in December 2012 to 91.1 per cent in December 2013, and Frankston Hospital went from 59.8 per cent to 84.7 per cent. They are significant improvements, listed in the health services performance report. The report also went on to say that half of category 1, 2 and 3 patients are treated within 11 minutes, an improvement on the 12-minute median in the previous three months, and all category 1 elective surgery patients received their operations within the benchmark 30 days.

We can see from that report alone that there have been significant improvements. We know there is more to do. As I said, this is obviously a challenging area, but that is why we have been committed to providing data to the members of the Victorian public on a website so they can see what is available. In addition to that we are making improvements in enabling regional and rural Victorians to access major metropolitan health services, if required, through the delivery of world-class ambulance helicopters, as we have announced, and an additional 539 paramedics. That is also boosting our very important ambulance service, and that has gone along with a significant resource allocation — \$696.5 million in this year's budget, an increase of

\$132.4 million. This is something we are continuing to work on. We are delivering and increasing those resources.

It is also relevant that in 2009–10 the number of qualified paramedics was around 38.8 per 100 000 people and that in 2012–13 that number increased to 43.2 per 100 000 people. That demonstrates what we are doing — we are putting more paramedics on the ground to address those critical issues for Victorians. That is what this is about; it is about getting better outcomes for the people of Victoria.

The Minister for Health argued the case in terms of delivering increased funding — and I know Mr Jennings talked about that and spoke about the Labor government and the financial impacts and Mr Davis's continued efforts. Let me say that Mr Davis led that charge on behalf of every health minister around the country, and he highlighted just what that federal Labor government did in ripping out \$107 million halfway through a financial year. I am not going to labour the point — pardon the pun — but that had a significant impact on service delivery for those health services which had their budget ripped out from beneath them halfway, as I said, through a financial year. Mr Davis should therefore be commended for his action on that. He led the charge, as I said, on behalf of other health ministers, and that Labor government backflipped. Nevertheless, we are playing catch up on that.

Our health services are doing a tremendous job, as are our paramedics and ambulance services. We are getting better outcomes for Victorian patients, and we are putting data on websites, something the former government never did.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I will be brief because Mr Jennings prosecuted this motion very well in his presentation. The one thing I would like to add is that in all of these debates the Minister for Health — who, as usual, is not here — has refused to negotiate the paramedics enterprise bargaining agreement. He also demonises ambulance officers and their union, and he does not accept that they have a credible and reasonable case. I would have thought that two years into a major dispute with ambulance officers a health minister would use his time to resolve the dispute rather than demonise ambulance officers.

All the points Mr Jennings outlined are credible, and they go to the major problems we currently have with the ambulance service. Rather than resorting to blame,

the government should sort this out quickly, because it is putting people's lives at risk.

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise to make a contribution to this debate and to speak in support of Mr Jennings's motion. I agree with Ms Hartland that the Victorian government's long-running dispute with ambulance officers has not done it any credit. I believe it has led to very low morale amongst ambulance officers and within the ambulance service. In fact it has encouraged some ambulance officers to leave the service and even to leave the state to find employment elsewhere.

This government and the Minister for Health have spent an enormous amount of money — just shy of \$1 million — on full-page advertisements proclaiming that the government has made a wonderful offer to ambulance officers and demonising them for not accepting that offer. This is not a good use of just under \$1 million of taxpayers money. If you asked anyone in the street how they think this money could best be spent in health, they would not choose these full-page advertisements. If you spoke to people who have called for an ambulance and have had to wait an exceedingly long time for it to come, or members of families or communities of the people who have died while waiting for ambulances, they would agree that this money could be much better spent on providing better health services and ambulance services for the people of Victoria.

The public will put up with a lot from the state government, and there are many things that they are unhappy about with this government. However, they will not tolerate substandard treatment for themselves or their loved ones. This includes the delivery of health services, whether they be community-based or hospital services, and ambulance response times.

Why is it that while the member for Hawthorn in the other place, Ted Baillieu, was Premier of this state response time statistics for our ambulances were available to the Parliament and Victorians, but they are not available now? Minister Davis, the current Premier and Ambulance Victoria will not make them available because response times are so bad. They are bad compared to when Labor was in government. My colleague Mr Jennings went through in some detail the Auditor-General's 2010 report entitled *Access to Ambulance Services*, which clearly sets out response times from when Labor was in government, and these can be compared to the most recently released data for this government.

The government and Ambulance Victoria will not release the data because the data is not good. They do not want the public or the Parliament to know what the response times are because they are concerned that if the data on local response times is revealed, subscribers to Ambulance Victoria will no longer subscribe. Ambulance Victoria does not want its ambulance subscriptions to decrease. The government and Ambulance Victoria are also concerned that people will drive themselves to hospital rather than wait for ambulances. I am also concerned that people, in a state of high anxiety and in a medical emergency, will choose to put a patient in a car and drive them to hospital rather than wait for an ambulance because they fear what the response time will be.

It is not good enough for the government and Ambulance Victoria to say that because they have some concerns they will not release this data. The non-release of this data and information makes everybody nervous and concerned about whether an ambulance will be available when they need it. The Auditor-General and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal have recommended that the data should be made public, but Ambulance Victoria and the Liberal-Nationals coalition government have refused to do this. This is just not good enough. As I said, I do not think it would matter who you spoke to in the community, they would all agree with me, Mr Jennings and this side of the chamber that this data is important and should be made available to the public.

Hiding response times simply erodes public confidence in Ambulance Victoria, the minister and the government. It shows that the Liberal-Nationals coalition government and the minister will not share information with the public or disclose it to the Parliament; rather, they choose to blame ambulance officers, the union, the industrial relations environment or the industrial relations system. It is simply not good enough. I believe the people of Victoria are sick of this ongoing dispute with and demonisation of ambulance officers by the Liberal-Nationals coalition government.

Ambulance Victoria is concerned that people will be frightened of using ambulances in areas where response times are the longest. But the Liberal-Nationals coalition government and Ambulance Victoria are simply trying to protect themselves and hide the fact that not enough resources are going into our health system, particularly the emergency hospital system, to deal with the patients who are arriving in ambulances. They are simply failing, and they want to hide this failure from the public. However, the public has a right to know what the response times are and if in fact they are increasing.

The Liberal-Nationals coalition government, the minister and Ambulance Victoria have come under fire for saying that releasing the figures may unduly excite public controversy. It is as if they are saying, 'We're concerned that if we tell people what's going on, people will be concerned, when we know they have every right to be concerned. Therefore the action we take is to do nothing'. That is this government's position: do nothing, do not release the data or give anybody the information because it might be controversial, and it would not want anything controversial, particularly in an election year. It does not want any controversy around response times and certainly does not want people to know and understand that there has been an increase in response times, particularly where they are the longest.

The Liberal-Nationals coalition government, the minister and Ambulance Victoria are very reluctant to provide information to the public. They do not want to give us information so that you and I will know just how long we are likely to have to wait for an ambulance in the areas we live if we should have a heart attack or if someone in our family should have a medical emergency such as a stroke or some other condition; they do not want us to have this information. I believe we have every right to have that information; the community believes it has every right to have that information. The Liberal-Nationals coalition government under the leadership of former Premier Ted Baillieu, the member for Hawthorn in the Assembly, believed we had the right to have this data, and therefore it was released.

What has changed? The only thing we can think of is that ambulance response times have increased — they have got a whole lot longer — and that is going to be of huge concern in the community. The government is saying, 'Let's keep people in the dark. Let's not tell them the truth. Let's not give them the data so they don't know what's going on'. It is not good enough. This is not the way a government should operate. Regardless of what Ms Crozier said in her contribution regarding this government's response to health care and how it compares with that of the previous government, we know that when Labor was in government — and we have seen it through the Auditor-General's report, which Mr Jennings went through in some detail — response times were consistently better. Ambulances met the standards set by Ambulance Victoria consistently better under Labor than under the Liberal-Nationals coalition government. This is proven in the data we received when Ted Baillieu was leader, which is when we last had access to some of it. Now we cannot get access to any of it.

Over the last three years, since the Liberal-Nationals coalition government came into power, ambulance response times across the state have dropped from about 80 per cent to 73 per cent. This has happened in spite of targets of 85 per cent and 90 per cent being set. Those targets are not anywhere near being met. In places with a population of more than 7500, for which the target is 90 per cent, the response times have fallen from 86.9 per cent in 2009–10 to 78.2 per cent.

As I said, the Liberal-Nationals coalition government has spent tens of thousands of dollars — just under \$1 million — in advertising around the enterprise bargaining dispute with ambulance officers. It has taken two years. I do not know what is wrong with the negotiators on the government side. I do not know why they do not get industrial relations or why they cannot negotiate a settlement with the ambulance officers. I worked in industrial relations for many years and negotiated many an enterprise agreement, and for the life of me I cannot work out why this government and this minister cannot reach an agreement and they have resorted to wasting — and I believe it is a waste — just under \$1 million on full-page advertisements in newspapers across this state getting stuck into our hardworking ambulance officers.

Even though the government treats our ambulance officers so badly, I do not believe there would be any member on either side of this chamber who would not agree that they do an excellent job. If you are in a medical emergency situation — if you have a medical crisis yourself or are with someone who is having a medical emergency — by golly, you want that ambulance officer there quickly and smartly. They do a brilliant job, and they are working under enormous pressure and duress under this government.

Ms Crozier said the state government — her Liberal-Nationals coalition government — can say a lot about its performance in the health sector, but ambulance response times and bed waiting lists are signs of a system breaking down. Regardless of what Ms Crozier says, if you look at hospital ramping times — where ambulances are ramped up outside emergency services — waiting lists, the number of beds and ambulance response times, you will know that something is not right in our health system. If you speak to anyone who works in our health system, they will let you know that it is at breaking point.

Premier Denis Napthine cut \$820 million from Victoria's hospitals. He has a lot to answer for with the current crisis right across our healthcare system, including what is happening with ambulances. The Australian Medical Association (AMA) said after this

year's May budget that the Liberal-Nationals government had failed to acknowledge pleas from doctors for substantial and widespread improvements to the state's health system. The AMA's Victorian president, Dr Stephen Parnis, said ambulances were being ramped, hospitals are on bypass, there are not enough beds and the budget fails to consider the increased growth in demand. While Ms Crozier says, on behalf of the government, how much it has improved performance in the health sector, this is what the people on the ground are saying. This is what the AMA is saying about the lack of funding in the budget, and this is what its president has had to say.

Paul Almond, the Ambulance Employees Australia delegate for Shepparton and Mooroopna, the area where my office is, said the argument is simple — the goodwill of paramedics is what carries the organisation forward, yet emergency departments are struggling to take patients from paramedics in a timely manner, paramedics are being worked longer and their workloads are increasing. Ambulances are increasingly being ramped at hospitals until beds become available in emergency departments. This takes ambulances out of circulation, sometimes for hours at a time. Ambulances sit outside emergency departments and are unable to get to their next jobs until the hospitals are able to take the patients. Yet this Liberal-Nationals coalition government determined that it would cut health funding by \$826 million in its last budget.

The Liberal-Nationals coalition government should take the time to check out Code Red, the Value Our Ambos social media web page, because members of the public have expressed very strong opinions in support of our ambulance officers on that page.

This is a motion that deserves support. There is no reason for this data not being made available. It has been made available by previous governments. It was made available by Labor when it was in government, and when Ted Baillieu was Premier his coalition government made some data available. There is no reason for this data not being made available now to both Parliament and the public so that we all know what the response times are across the state and so that we, as the public, are in a position to see just how well this Liberal-Nationals coalition government and Ambulance Victoria is going in terms of response times for emergency patients throughout Victoria.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

ABSENCE OF MINISTER

The PRESIDENT — Order! Before we proceed to questions without notice, I notice that Mr Rich-Phillips is not with us today.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I inform the house that Mr Rich-Phillips is absent on a family matter, and I note with thanks the understanding of the house.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Prisoner safety

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Corrections. I refer to the shipping containers used to house prisoners at the Dhurringile Prison, and I ask: can the minister advise the house whether these containers are designed in a way that is consistent with the recommendations of the Muirhead inquiry into Aboriginal deaths in custody?

Hon. E. J. O'DONOHUE (Minister for Corrections) — I thank Mr Tee for his question. In their questions to me as Minister for Corrections over a significant period opposition members have demonstrated their complete lack of understanding of how the corrections system works. Maybe that is because no-one from the opposition has bothered to visit Dhurringile Prison since the shadow cabinet reshuffle in December last year. Mr Jennings and Mr Pakula, the member for Lyndhurst in the Assembly, have criticised this additional capacity in the corrections system, but I note that neither Mr Jennings nor Mr Pakula, the shadow minister, has bothered to visit Dhurringile Prison near Shepparton.

Let us be very clear about this. As a result of our reforms to the parole system, as a result of Labor's failure to add additional capacity to the prison system, the government moved swiftly — —

Mr Tee — On a point of order, President, again as we saw yesterday, the minister is debating; he is not being relevant. The question I asked was in relation to the findings of the inquiry into Aboriginal deaths in custody and whether the containers used to house prisoners are consistent with the recommendations of that inquiry. It is narrower, and I ask you to ask the minister to desist from debating it.

Hon. E. J. O'DONOHUE — On the point of order, President, I am giving context to how the corrections system operates here in Victoria, which goes directly to Mr Tee's question.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The point has been made that perhaps members of the opposition who have raised some issues have not visited the prison. That may be context, but I think the minister is moving towards a debate of the matter rather than addressing the specific question that Mr Tee has asked, which was about the conformity of the facilities with recommendations and standards that have been put forward. We already understand that perhaps some members of the opposition have made comments without having visited the jail, but I do not think that is what the question was about.

Hon. E. J. O'DONOHUE — I am giving context to the opposition about how the corrections system operates, and within that how a minimum security prison operates and the sorts of requirements that are appropriate in a minimum security environment.

The government is delivering, and has substantially delivered, approximately 300 additional beds to the corrections system in minimum and medium security environments through transportable accommodation: 100 beds at Dhurringile, 50 beds at Langi Kal Kal, 50 at Beechworth and approximately 100 beds across the medium security prison estate throughout Victoria.

It is important to understand — it is important for Mr Tee to understand — the context of a minimum security prison environment. The prisoners who are placed in a minimum security prison environment are those who have demonstrated their ability to behave appropriately in a higher security classification. When prisoners come into the prison system, they are receipted into a maximum security environment. Subject to their behaviour in prison, subject to their completion of appropriate behavioural change programs and subject to the risk assessment matrix that Corrections Victoria operates, prisoners are moved between the different security classifications.

When this government delivers additional capacity in the maximum security environment — in the cellular accommodation environment — it is delivered in a way that has no hanging points and which reflects that additional security environment. When prisoners are housed in minimum security environments they are being prepared for life in the community. Often they live in cottage-style accommodation where they do cooking. As a result of doing their own cooking, they have access to cutlery and other types of equipment. In the farm-style accommodation there are trees and they use farm equipment. I think Mr Tee's question is premised on a lack of understanding of how the system here in Victoria operates.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Thank you, Minister.

Supplementary question

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I pick up the minister's reference to there being no hanging points, and I ask: given that the shipping containers were not installed until 2013–14, can the minister confirm that they do not contain any potential hanging points?

Hon. E. J. O'DONOHUE (Minister for Corrections) — At the risk of repeating myself, Mr Tee is demonstrating a complete lack of understanding of how the prison system operates. If a prisoner at Dhurringile Prison or at Beechworth is looking to self-harm, there are multiple opportunities, whether that is in the functioning kitchens where prisoners are being taught to cook and to prepare themselves for life in the community or whether it is in the forest of trees that exists at a place like Dhurringile. The opposition demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of how our corrections system operates. I invite Mr Tee and Mr Pakula, who is yet to visit a minimum security prison since becoming the shadow Minister for Corrections, to come and have a look at the minimum security environment and what that entails.

Hazelwood mine fire

Mr RONALDS (Eastern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Health, the Honourable David Davis. Can the minister update the house on steps taken by the Napthine government in response to recommendation 6 in the report of the Hazelwood mine fire inquiry?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I thank the member for his question and for his strong advocacy for Morwell and Gippsland but for Morwell in particular in the context of the very difficult mine fire that occurred there earlier this year.

I will respond to the tabling yesterday of the report of the Hazelwood mine fire inquiry. I begin by indicating that the inquiry made 12 recommendations. The government accepts in full all those recommendations bar one, and that one only in principle because there is a bit more work to do on that. Nonetheless, by and large the government accepts the recommendations that have been made by the board of inquiry members.

I place on the record our thanks to the board of inquiry members, led by former Justice Teague, and indicate that this was a large and complex inquiry. The government thanks the members of the board of inquiry and those who submitted to the inquiry. This is an

opportunity to get better outcomes. Mr Ronalds's question particularly goes to recommendation 6:

The state takes the lead in advocating for a national compliance standard for PM2.5 —

that is, particle standards. That is an important recommendation. I indicate to the house that I have written to the secretariat of the Council of Australian Governments health ministers conference and that will be on the agenda for the next meeting of health ministers. There has not been a national standard that we could draw clearly upon. It would be the role of health ministers to advise that we adopt such a standard at a national level. Obviously the environment ministers will make the final decision, but it will be with some advice from health ministers. I can indicate to the chamber that the government accepts that recommendation in full, and actions have been taken to put steps in place with respect to that standard.

As I said, this was a very difficult mine fire that impacted significantly on the town, and the government and its agencies responded at the time. The government has examined the report and is responding to the recommendations carefully and thoroughly, in particular recommendation 6 regarding the PM2.5 standard. Victoria will take the lead in establishing a national standard.

Casey Inspection Services

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 former Plumbing Industry Commission Victoria to provide a plumbing audit and inspection service. In this chamber in February 2013 I asked if the minister was aware that Casey Inspection Services was not meeting its contractual obligations to inspect water recycling facilities to ensure that water was not being contaminated by sewage. Some 18 months later, on 27 August, the Casey Inspection Services contract was terminated because of serious irregularities. I ask: why did it take 18 months before any action was taken?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — It is a part of the operation of the Victorian Building Authority (VBA), which is an independent statutory authority that manages its remit according to its legislative obligations. If there are issues with Casey Inspection Services that the VBA has come across, then it will make those decisions — which it has done — and it will do that without ministerial interference.

Supplementary question

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — When I raised this issue in Parliament 18 months ago I asked if the minister or the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure would investigate this issue, because 100 families a day are getting water recycling systems installed. I asked the minister then if he would consider an investigation of this issue, either by the department or through a request to the VBA. As I said, this is a serious issue and I think the buck stops with the minister. My question is: when I raised those allegations, to the minister's knowledge, was any investigation conducted?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I thank the member for the editorial. The sites that were inspected by Casey Inspection Services were reinspected by the VBA, as you would expect, and on my understanding they were found to be in good order.

Simonds Stadium

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — My question without notice is to my colleague and friend the Honourable Damian Drum. Could the Minister for Sport and Recreation inform the house of the Victorian coalition government's recent important announcement of \$5 million to support continued redevelopment of Simonds Stadium in Geelong?

Hon. D. K. DRUM (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — It was an important announcement last Thursday. The Premier, the Deputy Premier, Mr Koch and I were there, and some election candidates, including Paula Kontelj and Tony McManus.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — Yes, they were all there. It was a great day. It was a day for which the town of Geelong and the Geelong Football Club have been waiting for many years. At the moment the project is three parts built. There has certainly been a very strong push, not just from the football club but also from the community, to get this stadium finished. It was great to have Chris Scott there, playing an active role in the development of this stadium. Joel Selwood was also there, as was Julie Hope, the Deakin University community liaison officer. The role that the university plays with the Deakin Cats Community Centre and the SEDA sport and education program that is run out of the existing buildings is a very important part of why community members want to make sure that the project at Simonds Stadium continues to go forward.

After months of consultation with the club and community groups we have committed \$5 million, which the club is calling ‘momentum money’, to enable a full feasibility study to be done and a full business case put around the detailed design work that needs to be done at Kardinia Park. The costings will need to be worked through, and the club is doing a master plan for the entire precinct. This will build on the \$26.5 million that we have invested in stage 3 of the redevelopment. It will give the Geelong Football Club an opportunity not only to make a strong return to the community through the AFL home games it plays, but also to chase other events, including the A-League soccer matches that are pencilled in for 2 January to coincide with the bumper crowds that will be at the beach over that time. It could also be Melbourne Rebels games —

Mr D. R. J. O’Brien — A music performance.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — It might even be a music performance by Mr David O’Brien’s group, Loin Groin. It may be bit of a struggle to get that band back together again.

Over the next 12 weeks a lot of work will need to be done to ensure that stage 4, an important part of this project, is planned appropriately. Part of stage 4 will be working out how the community will benefit. It is not good enough that \$3 million will go into the economy. Most people understand that greater patronage of hotels, restaurants and eateries as well as more people filling up their cars with petrol provides a huge injection into the Geelong economy every time Geelong has a home game. It is about bringing more events to Geelong, growing the economy via improvements to the stadium but also working out what other community groups will benefit from an improved Simonds Stadium, and that may have something to do with the National Disability Insurance Agency.

Casey Inspection Services

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. I refer to the minister’s previous answer in which he stated that the sites investigated were in good order. I refer to a media release which states that the Casey Inspection Services contract was terminated because of ‘serious irregularities’, and I ask: what were those irregularities?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I think Mr Tee is getting mixed up about a range of issues, but I understand that because it is a complex issue that the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) is dealing with.

Mr Tee — What are the serious irregularities?

Hon. M. J. GUY — I am trying to answer the question, if Mr Tee would let me have a go. I have just stood up. My understanding is that there are issues that the VBA board is looking at around the details of the contract in relation to Casey. That is a matter for the VBA board; I stress it is not a matter for government. The VBA board and the CEO can deal with those matters appropriately. My understanding around the quality control, which you would expect for the services audited, is that they were rechecked and that the material that was rechecked was found to be in good order.

Supplementary question

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — It really is about an understanding of what is happening in the minister’s portfolio. Is the minister able to confirm that the irregularities included Casey Inspection Services certifying that it had conducted inspections when in fact it had not done any inspections?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — No, I am not aware that that is the case. My understanding is that it was in relation to someone who was signing off on some of the material, but again that is a matter for the VBA. It will go through a proper process, as it would be expected to do, to ensure that the material that was audited is in fact correct. As I said, the VBA board will handle it correctly. I have a lot of faith in it. It is a good board, and this is a good structure. It has been put together after the 10-year disaster of the Building Commission —

Mr Tee interjected.

Hon. M. J. GUY — It is actually, Mr Tee. It is going a lot better than the 10 biggest builders that the Building Commission used to pay to take the people it was regulating out to get drunk at the top end of town. It is running a very different shop now. It is a regulator that is operating to standards, and the proof of the pudding that it is operating to standards is the fact that Mr Tee is able to ask these kinds of questions, because one was not able to under his regime.

Melbourne development

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My question today is to my mate and Northern Metropolitan Region colleague, the Honourable Matthew Guy. I start by thanking him for his outstanding service to Northern Metropolitan Region over such a long period. My question to the minister is in his capacity as Minister for Planning. Could he inform the house of what action the Napthine

coalition government has taken to grow investment and construction industry employment in Melbourne's central city?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — It is a pleasure to be asked a question by my good friend and colleague Mr Ondarchie, who gets it when it comes to providing jobs for people in Melbourne's northern suburbs and who understands that providing a strong and vibrant building industry to our state is one of the hallmarks of running a good economy, managing a good budgetary position and building for our future in residential supply, housing affordability and a good level of job growth in our economy.

The fact is that we are going through a substantial building boom in Victoria. Last week Australian Bureau of Statistics figures showed that the value of building work in Victoria was at the highest levels in Australia. It was our best year on record with building work of around \$24.9 billion being recorded in Victoria. That is reflected in population growth and confidence in this industry. People want to invest in Victoria and our economy, and this section of our economy is doing exceedingly well.

Despite what some people believe around approvals in our central city area, not all our central city area is an area for high-rise. Part of the area is for medium-rise dwellings providing a mix of accommodation through our central city area. Today I can inform the house that I have approved three permits for our central city area; one at 9 Mackenzie Street in the city, one at 28 Dorcas Street in South Melbourne and one at 605 Lonsdale Street in Melbourne. All those projects will invest jobs and confidence in the Victorian economy in a way that the rest of this country is envious of, because this government is doing its best to ensure that we are getting population growth in defined areas. We are ensuring that planning applications, which all go to the City of Melbourne first for its analysis, if they are in the central city area, come back to the government with a level of comment that is certainly robust and that leaves previous regimes for dead in relation to accountability and transparency.

Let me be very clear. One of these three projects will be \$120 million worth of investment. The one in Dorcas Street will be \$95 million worth of investment, and at 605 Lonsdale there will be \$110 million worth of investment. This is all about job growth in our central city area; a strong construction industry in Victoria — the strongest in Australia; matching population demand; and growing our central city area and taking pressure off existing suburbs.

There is no use having areas designated for high density, where people can walk to the supermarket, walk to the park and walk to their place of employment, if you do not allow high density in areas where people can have a walkable style of life. There is no better example I can give than the central area of Melbourne, which is Australia's second-largest jobs precinct. Within 12 years it will be Australia's largest jobs precinct, and that is a reflection of the confidence in our city. It is not faux confidence; it is confidence that has come about in this city, in particular from the last four years of hard work and clear policy, which is clearly building a better Victoria.

Casey Inspection Services

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. I refer to the minister's previous answer to my question, in which he stated that the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) was the regulator of standards. One of those standards was the audit that Casey Inspection Services was contracted to do, and that was the audit of the installation of gas heaters in the homes of Victorian families. Can the minister give an assurance to those families that Casey Inspection Services conducted the inspection of those gas heaters in accordance with its contract?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I do not know if Mr Tee was listening to me, but I said that audits that were conducted by Casey have been checked again by the VBA, so the VBA has gone back and rechecked those areas that were audited by Casey. In theory that now means they have been audited twice. I would expect that that level of scrutiny is certainly a lot better than was afforded for the last six years under the building authority.

Supplementary question

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — Can the minister confirm then that every audit undertaken by Casey Inspection Services in the last 18 months, since I raised these allegations with him, has been rechecked by the VBA so that Victorian families with gas heaters can be assured that every one of the audits that have been done have been rechecked by the VBA or indeed by some other authority?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am not sure that that supplementary question is not simply a rewording of the substantial question or that it actually goes anywhere new.

Mr TEE — It is my understanding that there has not been a full audit and that every job the inspection

services has done has not been reaudited. That is essentially my supplementary question. Can the minister confirm that over the last 18 months every audit that has been done by Casey Inspection Services has been reaudited? If the answer is yes, then I am happy to accept that. I just wanted to be clear about that.

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — I am not really sure how any of Mr Tee’s question is different — —

Mr Tee — Just say yes and sit down. I will be very satisfied if you say yes.

Hon. M. J. GUY — I am not here to satisfy Mr Tee, I can guarantee him about that. I am not a monkey on call to satisfy him. I will not jump through hoops. The only thespian in this chamber is on Mr Tee’s side of the house. I am happy to take Mr Tee’s substantive question on notice to get him a written reply from the VBA so he can be fully satisfied with the outcome from the VBA in terms of what he is actually asking.

Mr Tee interjected.

Hon. M. J. GUY — I cannot actually hear Mr Tee; there is just a bit of a drone coming from him, which is regular. Whether Mr Tee is genuine or whether he is just trying to outdo Mr Jennings on grandstanding, I am happy to get him a written reply from the VBA.

Heidelberg West digital business incubator

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question without notice is to the Honourable Wendy Lovell in her capacity as the Minister for Housing. Can the minister update the house on any recent investments that will provide employment opportunities for public housing tenants?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — I thank the member for his question, his ongoing interest in those less fortunate than ourselves and particularly his interest in improving people’s lives through employment opportunities. Last week, together with Mr Dalla-Riva and the Liberal candidate for Ivanhoe in the Assembly, Carl Ziebell, I attended the launch of the digiDECL digital business incubator in Heidelberg West. The prime objective of the business incubator is to increase employment opportunities in Heidelberg West and encourage economic participation by vulnerable Victorians, particularly public housing tenants.

I acknowledge the partners who contributed to the project, particularly Australia Post and the Banyule City

Council, on their hard work in developing it over the past two years. They are both contributing funding as well. Australia Post has donated the first floor of its Heidelberg West property at peppercorn rent and also \$95 000 for office equipment and refurbishments. Banyule City Council has provided \$40 000 towards building refurbishments. Local philanthropists have contributed \$50 000, and the Naphthine government has also supported the project with \$30 000 of community infrastructure grant funding.

This venture complements other initiatives funded by the Naphthine government that are being undertaken in the Heidelberg West area by E-focus, including the Learning2Work project and the women’s pathway into employment initiative. E-focus and the digiDECL digital business incubator formalise clear links and pathways between their services to benefit the local community over the duration of the project. Participants will be able to access both services concurrently, accessing support through E-focus while utilising the incubator space to develop their business ideas. Investment by the Victorian coalition government and local organisations in local projects such as digiDECL is further improving opportunities for public housing tenants and other vulnerable Victorians living in the community, building a better and more sustainable community for residents in the Heidelberg West area.

When we first arrived at the launch everyone was a little bit perplexed about the pronunciation of the name ‘digiDECL’. I was standing with Craig Langdon, the mayor of Banyule, and we were trying to work out how to say it. Was it ‘digi-deckle’ or ‘digi-desal’? How was it pronounced? We were very relieved when the manager of the centre stood up and said it was pronounced ‘digi-deckle’, because as we all know, projects that are named ‘desal’ in this state are not very successful. We want the digiDECL project to be hugely successful so that those in the Heidelberg West area who are less fortunate than ourselves will be provided with opportunities to get into economic participation, to get into employment and improve their lives.

Problem gambling

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — My question this afternoon is to the Minister for Liquor and Gaming Regulation. Can the minister update the house about any recent initiatives of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation to respond to problem gambling in our community?

Hon. E. J. O’DONOHUE (Minister for Liquor and Gaming Regulation) — I thank Mrs Coote for her question and her longstanding interest in this important

issue. As the house is aware, the coalition came to government with a clear mandate and a clear commitment to set up the independent Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. We have resourced that to the tune of \$150 million over four years — a 41 per cent increase on comparable funding provided by Labor. Equally importantly, the foundation has a remit to be nimble, agile and responsive to the changing marketplace and the emerging and changing issues when it comes to people who may have a problem with their gambling. I am very pleased that the foundation is establishing itself and has established itself as a leader in tackling problem gambling.

The foundation is focused on delivering services where they are needed and has developed a new service model to do just that. The new service model includes three very important elements: integrating services with the broader community sector, providing tailored services to culturally and linguistically diverse communities where there are particular needs and emerging issues, and funding prevention programs.

I was recently honoured to officially launch the foundation's new service model at its offices in North Melbourne. The new model aligns with the broader reforms within the Victorian health and human services sector. It includes streamlining of referrals and appointment booking processes, and we know some people with gambling issues may also require support with alcohol or drug addiction, financial counselling, housing, social security or indeed the justice system.

This builds on the Services Connect model driven by Ms Wooldridge, the Minister for Community Services, to connect people with the right services, and importantly in the right way — whether that be face to face, online or by phone — and providing information and services in a multitude of ways. It is not just about providing services to those who may have a problem with their gambling but also about providing information and services to family and friends who are concerned about a member of their family, a partner or someone else they know who may have an issue with their gambling.

The foundation also announced a new partnership with six organisations to deliver services to culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including Vietnamese, Chinese and Arabic-speaking communities. These services are tailored, including multilingual counselling and community education. This will help reach those who may not know how or where to seek help in their language due to cultural barriers. The foundation is also providing funding of \$2.2 million for local prevention projects. These

projects will target communities where risk factors for developing issues with gambling are the highest, such as young people, older Victorians, prisoners and other groups.

I congratulate the foundation as it continues to respond to the needs of the ever-changing gambling environment. Let me take this opportunity to acknowledge those who are at the coalface, the deliverers of these services — the people who answer the phones and the people who provide the face-to-face counselling. They are a dedicated group of people. They are committed to helping people. They are committed to working with people to overcome the issues that they may have. They are inspirational in their dedication to the community. Let me conclude by acknowledging all the work they do, helped by the financing that the government has provided to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

Moonee Valley Racecourse development

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. On 23 August the minister released a press release that says:

Moonee Valley Racecourse on the right track

...

The planned redevelopment of the Moonee Valley Racecourse has moved a step forward following the rezoning of the site by planning minister Matthew Guy.

The problem is that the minister has not rezoned the site; these planning scheme amendments have not been gazetted. The community is asking us to ask the minister: in relation to the key issues which the minister is aware were the key issues for the development — things such as the traffic plan, the extent of the heritage overlay and the controls themselves in relation to later rights to objection, notice and appeal — what is the detail, because it is not in this press release and it has not yet been gazetted?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — Gazetted will be very soon. Mr Barber would certainly know that any structures on that site will need to go through a permit process. That permit process will obviously go through the council as the responsible authority and then run a normal process, as any permit process would, once a rezoning is complete. I have said for a long time that I do not want to be the responsible authority for the site. I do not intend to be the responsible authority for the site. Rezoning, as Mr Barber knows, after a long period of consultation allows a proponent to put in an application, and that

application will go through the normal, merit-assessed process through the City of Moonee Valley.

Supplementary question

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — Okay, but the minister’s press release says he has rezoned the site, and then at bottom it says it will be gazetted shortly. The minister has just said it will be gazetted soon. Does ‘soon’ mean prior to the election?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — As Mr Barber knows, gazettal does not take two months. There has been a standard wording for gazettal timing for about the last 15 years. But I understand the gazettal will be either next week or the one after that, so it should not be too long. As I said, after that, any application that goes on that site will need to go through a merit-assessed process through the City of Moonee Valley. I hope I have answered Mr Barber’s question to his satisfaction.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I have answers to the following questions on notice: 10 065, 10 068, 10 080, 10 112, 10 113, 10 464 and 10 473.

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — Last sitting Wednesday I asked the Assistant Treasurer — and I will not ask him today — but I also asked the Minister for Sport and Recreation about responses to 18 questions on notice of mine to his colleague the Minister for Water, Mr Walsh, reaching back to August and October last year. The minister undertook to get back to me on the progress of those questions, so I ask today: how is it going?

Hon. D. K. DRUM (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — It is going really well, thanks. I have passed on the member’s concern to the Minister for Water and he has assured me he will be acting on these questions as soon as he possibly can.

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — To paraphrase the words of Mr Barber: will that be before the election?

Hon. D. K. DRUM (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I have no idea. I imagine that all the ministers in this Parliament are probably following the lead of ministers in previous Parliaments.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — That is how I would like to leave it.

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — President, as is my right under the standing orders, I move:

That the house take note of the explanation.

I will be very brief. I take note of the minister’s answer when he said ‘like ministers in the previous Parliament’. I will just put a couple of things on the record for Mr Drum’s benefit. Firstly, in 2011 when we had a similar debate in this place his predecessor as Leader of The Nationals, Mr Hall, said to this house — and he was correct — that there were a lot of multiple questions on notice in vast numbers put in by the opposition. We on the opposition side of the house then undertook to not put questions in simultaneously in both houses and undertook to put in small and reasonable numbers of questions on notice so ministers could actually answer them.

There are 18 questions on notice for the minister’s colleague Mr Walsh which have been outstanding now for almost a year. In taking note of his answer, I point out that if the defence is that in a previous government ministers took a long time to answer questions, it is a fairly pathetic response when those opposite held the previous government — correctly — to account when ministers did that. If Mr Drum wants to repeat history, he will find there is a step —

Hon. D. K. Drum interjected.

Mr LENDERS — As I said, I will take up Mr Drum’s response on two points. Firstly, his predecessor as leader, Mr Hall, got up in this house and said to us, ‘You cannot expect ministers to answer questions’ — and he was correct — ‘if there are 1200 lodged in this house and 1200 similar questions in the other house. Why should a minister do it?’. Mr Hall’s point was correct. We on this side of the house undertook, in good faith with Mr Hall and the house, that we would not be putting in frivolous hundreds of questions on notice and we would limit them to small amounts.

There are 18 questions here to Mr Walsh, and one to Mr Michael O’Brien which I will not pursue because Mr Rich-Phillips is not here today. Nineteen questions last year is not excessive. It follows the Hall doctrine if that is what we wish to use. If Mr Drum wants to hold the opposition to account, he is welcome to do so. But when those opposite spent the best part of 11 years condemning ministers for not answering questions on notice on time and their sole defence is that four years

ago another minister did not do it, it is a little bit rich. And then to flippantly say the answers may not be back in time for the election is I think, to quote the Premier today, contempt of the Parliament. But let us put that aside as a separate debate.

The issue here is that I take note of the minister's answer. If it is not good enough for 11 years for one lot of ministers to take a while, it is very strange that that is suddenly a defence for a new lot of ministers not to answer, particularly when we have responded to the Hall doctrine of putting in small, targeted amounts, so that ministers can reasonably respond. Having taken note, I will sit down at this juncture, saying this reeks of hypocrisy.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — On the motion moved by the member, I will agree with him on some things and disagree with him on others. I agree that there was a practice developing earlier in this Parliament of large numbers of copy-style questions being tabled in both houses, which frankly got out of control. Both Peter Hall, the Leader of The Nationals in this place at the time, and I were thankful that the opposition recognised that this was becoming ridiculous. I am happy to put on the record that a collaborative response was adopted and a more sensible practice has ensued.

Equally I agree with the Leader of the Opposition on this point. Some years ago he was in the position I am in now, when this conversation could have been flipped. The truth of the matter is that it is difficult from time to time to have lower house colleagues move at the same pace and with the same urgency as ministers in this house generally do with respect to questions on notice. That is true across governments of all political colours. Having been here since 1996, I can say it is a truism across all those governments.

But I do not agree with Mr Lenders on his point that in some way this government has not responded generally well in this area. Picking up the links to the other chamber, I refer to one of the people who moved from the Legislative Council to the Legislative Assembly, Mr Pakula, because he has had a foot in both chambers in this recent period. He was one of the outstanding people who hit some sort of world record of more than three years for not answering a particular question. To give an example there — —

Mr Jennings — It wasn't good enough, so we sent him down.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — Whatever it was. I think Mr Pakula, the member for Lyndhurst, has pretensions

to be the next leader. Whenever I greet him, I say, 'I know you're the next leader of the Labor Party'. I can say one thing very clearly: he would be a very good leader of the Labor Party compared to the current leader of the Labor Party, who has Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union links and all of that, and who clearly is a very unsuitable person to run for Premier for any party. My broader point is that — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — My point is very clear. It is the simple matter that we are not going to be lectured by the opposition about responses to questions on notice when those in the opposition hit world records for the non-answering of questions on notice.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I do not know about the particular colours of Mr Davis's party, which he referred to, but from the point of view of the Greens in relation to taking note of a minister's answer, I remember very distinctly at about this part of the cycle last time getting a response to a question on notice from Daniel Andrews, then Minister for Health, which informed me that due to the vast number of questions that had been asked by the opposition he would not be answering my question.

That had very little to do with the Greens, whose members of course do not ever apply a scattergun approach to the asking of questions on notice. I would hope that in taking note of the Minister for Sport and Recreation's answer today that we do not see that practice adopted by this government and another round of arguments ensuing about who is being hypocritical. We should all be able to agree that accountability of the Parliament in the answering of questions on notice is a very important and essential function of why the Parliament exists.

Motion agreed to.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Debate resumed.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak against the motion moved by Mr Jennings in relation to ambulance services. Mr Jennings is attempting to be clever and drill into a lot of detail, but at the heart of the motion is the issue of transparency and accountability within our health system. The Victorian coalition government certainly has a very strong record of improving transparency within the health system, which did not exist under Labor, including with Mr Jennings's own significant involvement as well as that of the Leader of the

Opposition in the Assembly, the Honourable Dan — perhaps Daniel, I am not sure — Andrews.

Mr Finn — Dictaphone Dan.

Mrs PEULICH — I would not call him Dictaphone Dan, because it would be unparliamentary. We have introduced transparency measures since we came into government. The previous government was a very secretive Labor government that manipulated and hid data, hid the facts, withheld reports and fudged things. By contrast we have been open and transparent every step of the way.

This government's transparency measures included planning of and consultation on the Victorian Health Priorities Framework 2012–2022 and its associated plans. That included the metropolitan health plan 2012–22 and its technical paper, and the rural and regional health plan 2012–22 and its technical paper. Another measure involved providing \$4 million to implement the government's election commitment to deliver a hospital performance website by 30 June 2011. Importantly, the government implemented 23 new budget performance measures and 7 replacement measures in budget paper 3 to provide a greater level of information and reporting to the Victorian public. An enhanced performance monitoring program across clinical mental health and alcohol and other drugs services has also been implemented.

We have expanded the existing Victorian health services performance monitoring framework to include all rural health services. There has been an unprecedented improvement in the accountability and transparency of reporting on our health service provision and planning to the Victorian public, unlike what happened under the Labor government and in particular under the former Minister for Health, Daniel Andrews.

I will highlight some of the coalition's initiatives, in particular the Victorian health services performance website. As I have already mentioned, this was a \$4 million commitment in the 2011–12 state budget. The website was launched on 30 June 2011 and we saw an upgraded version in early 2012. The information reported on the site covers the domains of access, patient experience, safety, efficiency and capacity. The website provides information on hospital emergency department bypasses in real time, which is important when there is a critically ill patient in the ambulance. Time cannot be wasted, and the ambulance must get to a destination where the patient can be treated within a desirable response time, rather than the ambulance

joining the shuttle we commonly saw under the former government with critically ill patients being moved from hospital to hospital because hospitals were on bypass, resulting in ambulances missing those critical response times which are necessary in order to maximise patient treatment.

In addition, the hospital performance website reports on the estimated median time to treatment for non-urgent emergency department patients when the hospital early warning system is activated. Elective surgery median waiting times for selected procedures are also detailed.

New measures publicly reported on for the first time are expansive. They include rates of hospital-initiated elective surgery postponements, the number of emergency department mental health patients waiting longer than 8 hours for admission, the number of emergency department patients with a length of stay greater than 24 hours, and ambulance attendances — that is, arrivals at emergency departments by ambulances. Other information that is reported includes the proportion of ambulance patient transfers within 40 minutes, the number of hours on the hospital early warning system — or HEWS, the commonly used acronym — as well as the median waiting time for non-urgent emergency department patients.

There has been an expanded range of indicators on which to report, and that adds to the scrutiny of health performance under this government, which is in stark contrast to the secret, manipulated, unreliable data provided by the previous government under the former Minister for Health, Daniel Andrews. Mr Jennings also has a very keen interest in health, and as the mover of this motion I did not hear him applauding many of those measures. He should have been instigating, touting and advocating for these measures when he was in government, but there was none of that.

The coalition has delivered 539 additional paramedics. There has been a massive boost in the number of paramedics employed across the state, and they have worked a record number of shifts. That all helps the Victorian coalition government to build a healthier Victoria. There have been significant improvements to ambulance transfer times with 100 per cent of the most seriously ill emergency patients treated immediately. This is critical to maximise treatment and lifesaving procedures. In addition, \$550 million has been dedicated for world-class ambulance helicopters. They are upgraded helicopters which are bigger, faster and can travel longer distances without refuelling, delivering the highest level of care and rapid transport to Victorians across the state.

In terms of ambulance performance data for the metro east area, which captures a significant part of my electorate, additional resources available today that did not exist under Labor include: at Cranbourne North, or Lyndhurst, an upgrade to a 24-hour service with 6 paramedics available; at Belgrave, an upgrade to a 24-hour service with a further 6 paramedics; at East Bentleigh, a new peak period unit (PPU) with 6 paramedics; at Pakenham, an added night shift with 6 paramedics; at Cranbourne, a new PPU with 6 paramedics; at Emerald, a conversion of on-call to night shift with 4 paramedics; Mount Eliza, a new 24-hour branch with 12 paramedics; and at Endeavour Hills, a new 24-hour branch with 12 paramedics.

These are additional resources that were not made available under the Labor government. There has been a substantial injection into the ambulance capital works program with a major renovation at Healesville. This is currently in the design phase with completion forecast for May 2015 and a service upgrade scheduled for 2014–15. At Rosebud a new building is currently in the design phase with completion forecast for January 2015. At Lysterfield there will be a new building, and this is currently in the land procurement phase; and at Somerville new land has been allocated with a new building currently in construction and forecast for completion in September 2014.

In conclusion, I will not be supporting the motion from the shadow Minister for Health who failed, along with his government, to be open and transparent about the full breadth of health services that are important to Victorians, unlike this government which has improved the framework, the accountability and the transparency and is improving the performance of health services for all Victorians no matter where they are. With those few words, I advise the house that I will be voting against the motion.

Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.05 p.m.

AGED-CARE SERVICES

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house condemns the Napthine government for —

- (1) cutting \$75 million of funding from public sector residential aged care, with \$25 million cut this financial year and \$50 million to be cut in 2015–16;
- (2) moving to privatise 1000 metropolitan public sector residential aged-care beds;

- (3) closing public aged-care facilities in Ballarat, Castlemaine, Flemington, Koroit, Kyneton, Melbourne, Melton South and Williamstown, as well as the privatisation of Rosebud Residential Aged Care Services, despite an ageing population;
- (4) closing 410 public sector aged-care beds since coming to office;
- (5) limiting aged-care choices for Victorian families;
- (6) failing to address the increasing cost-of-living pressures by slugging Victorian pensioners more for car registration, public transport, the new fire services property levy and public housing rents;
- (7) neglecting the provision of essential services that Victorian seniors rely on, such as our health system, by ripping \$826 million from Victorian hospitals;
- (8) failing to stand up to the Abbott government's attacks on seniors including the \$7 GP tax, changes to pension indexation and retirement age; and
- (9) failing to stand up to the Abbott government's decision to cease providing the dementia and severe behaviours supplement and aged-care payroll tax supplement;

and calls on the Napthine government to stop the attacks on Victoria's seniors and, in particular, to stop its privatisation of public aged care.

When it comes to this government's record on aged care, what is very clear is that this government does not value senior Victorians. We just need to look at its record over the last four years. Since coming to government in 2010 the coalition has closed — —

Hon. W. A. Lovell — Spare us the crap.

Ms MIKAKOS — 'Spare us the crap', the minister says. I beg the minister's pardon. If Ms Lovell wants to participate in the debate, I look forward to her getting up and participating.

Since coming to government in 2010 the coalition has closed 410 public sector residential aged-care beds. Of these, 240 beds have been lost in metropolitan Melbourne and 170 have been lost in rural and regional areas. Beds have been lost in Sebastopol, Boort, Echuca, Trentham, Kilmore, Sea Lake, Rochester, Yarram, Castlemaine, Colac, North Geelong and Cheltenham. Under this government eight public aged-care facilities have closed today, including 42 beds lost with the closure of Jessie Gillett Court Hostel in Sebastopol, which is part of Ballarat Health Services, 30 beds lost with the closure of the nursing home in Koroit which is part of Koroit health services, 19 beds lost through the closure of Castlemaine Health's Renshaw House in Castlemaine, 30 beds lost through the closure of the Thomas Hogan Centre aged-care nursing home in Kyneton, which is part of

Kyneton District Health Services, 40 beds lost through the closure of Western Health's Hazeldean Nursing Home in Williamstown, 30 beds lost with the closure of Western Health's Reg Geary House in Melton South, 50 beds lost through the closure of Melbourne Health's Parkville Hostel in Parkville and 30 beds lost through Melbourne Health's recent closure of Weighbridge residential nursing home in Flemington, the first aged-persons mental health facility to be closed by this government.

The minister still says he supports aged care in country towns, yet four of the eight facilities that have closed under his watch have been in regional Victoria. You have to ask what members of The Nationals are doing whilst this is happening. They are sitting silently, and they are complicit. This government has overseen the privatisation of Peninsula Health's Rosebud Residential Aged Care Services, which consisted of 50 beds at two facilities, the Jean Turner Nursing Home and Lotus Lodge Hostel. This decision has left the Mornington Peninsula with no public sector residential aged-care facility and has severely limited aged-care choices for those local families.

What lies at the heart of this motion is that we are seeing a government that is pursuing its ideological agenda of cost cutting and privatisation above the interests of Victorian families. We are seeing the limiting of aged-care choices for Victorian seniors. As Victoria continues to experience an ageing population, this motion provides a clear view of what the Napthine government stands for — cuts, contracting out and neglecting seniors.

To understand why Labor has always been suspicious of the government's agenda in respect of aged care, we need look no further than what happened when the coalition was previously in government. The Kennett government privatised aged-care services in Bairnsdale, Paynesville, Warrnambool and Mildura, with many other areas sitting on its hit list. Its 1999 election policy document even lists the transfer of 2300 nursing home beds to the private sector as an achievement; coalition members were proud of their privatisation agenda. The Minister for Ageing, Mr Davis, must be very proud of his record today — 410 beds have been lost, eight facilities have closed and there are countless other bed vacancies across the state at the moment. One facility has been privatised, and other sell-offs are on the cards as we speak. It is clear that the Premier, a former Kennett minister, is determined to continue Jeff Kennett's legacy of privatisation and outsourcing. There is no need for Jeff to make a comeback in the lower house seat of Hawthorn; his protégés are

continuing the slash-and-burn policies Jeff Kennett was famous for.

In the case of Minister Davis, he is very fond of stretching the truth. Actions really do speak louder than his words. The government's aged-care privatisation is happening despite the minister's earlier vehement denials that this was even on the cards. At the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) budget estimates hearing in 2011, Labor members asked the minister to rule out the sale, outsourcing or privatisation of Victoria's public sector residential aged-care beds. His response at that time was, 'We have absolutely no proposal or focus on doing that'. That is what he said on 11 May 2011 to PAEC.

In a question time debate in August 2012 I asked the minister whether he would rule out the sale, outsourcing or privatisation of an existing publicly owned residential aged-care facility and he replied:

The government is committed to supporting aged-care services ...

He refused to reiterate his previous categorical denial that it was even on the cards.

At that time there were media reports that the government had commissioned a secret Vertigan report that had spelt out the government's agenda to privatise and outsource a wide range of government services, including public aged care. We are yet to see that Vertigan report. It has been put in the bottom drawer of a locked safe somewhere — —

An honourable member interjected.

Ms MIKAKOS — It's in Mr Davis's man safe. We are yet to see the details of that report.

Less than four months later, in December 2012, the government released its 2012–13 budget update, which foreshadowed cuts of \$75 million to Victoria's public aged-care sector — \$25 million in cuts in that financial year and \$50 million in cuts in the next financial year. Victorians need to understand, in case the Premier and the coalition are re-elected, that the Minister for Ageing is planning on making these further cuts to public aged care as well as planning to continue to close and sell public aged-care facilities.

The 2012–13 budget update described these cuts as:

a measured reallocation of government-managed aged-care places to non-government providers in the metropolitan area, to provide responsive and innovative delivery of aged care.

I have heard a lot of Orwellian speak from members of this government, but this takes the cake. The government is very fond of springing announcements such as this one on us just before Christmas when its members think no-one is watching. We had that particular privatisation announcement just before Christmas in 2012, and in 2013, again just before Christmas, the minister cynically put out to tender 1000 of metropolitan Melbourne's public aged-care beds. The government invited non-government aged-care providers to register their interest to be part of a provider panel. Page 4 of the document the Department of Health put out states that:

The department intends to select a prequalified panel of service providers that will have the opportunity to:

work in partnership with the department to develop options for reallocation of places and investment in capital developments or redevelopments ...

Page 2 of that document sets out a number of dot points relating to the reallocation of public aged-care places, including dot points saying that the reallocation of these aged-care places:

will involve the transfer of PSRACS places to alternative service providers

may or may not involve the transfer of land and buildings, and other vacant land held by the department —

and that it —

may involve the transfer of accommodation bonds ...

It is very clear from this document that the government has put everything up for sale. It has put bed places up for sale, it has put land up for sale, it has put buildings up for sale and it is talking about transferring accommodation bonds.

This document also makes it clear that all the public aged-care facilities managed and operated through each of Melbourne's nine health services are up for grabs. To see this, members need just to look at page 5 of the document, which lists the number of places currently run by Eastern Health, St Vincent's Health Australia, Alfred Health, Peninsula Health, Monash Health, Austin Health, Melbourne Health, Northern Health and Western Health — a total of 1030 places, as I said, set out on page 5. The government put this document out just before Christmas last year without drawing any public attention to it but it indicates that these 1030 beds are up for sale. They include 500 specialised beds, including aged persons mental health beds and specialist beds for young people suffering from acquired brain injuries or strokes or multiple sclerosis.

Together with other Labor members, I have visited a considerable number of these facilities across our state, including a number of these specialist facilities, and I take this opportunity to thank the dedicated staff who work in them, who provide a very high standard of care to residents. I have spoken to a number of residents at these facilities and their families, and many have expressed concerns about the government's plans.

The government's plans make it clear that the 500-odd specialist places that exist in our specialist public aged-care system are not going to be excluded from this process. In June this year the first aged persons mental health facility — the Weighbridge residential nursing home in Flemington — closed down. Incredibly, attempts were made to move residents out of that home in the same week they were informed the home was closing. This was a particularly distressing situation, and many residents refused to be moved so suddenly. It was an absolute disgrace and absolutely disrespectful of these very vulnerable senior Victorians, some of whom had lived in this home for many years. This was their home, yet they were being moved in the dead of night with next to no notice. I am concerned that this process is going to be repeated in future closures. It is very clear from my discussions with community members that they value our public aged-care system.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms MIKAKOS — If members of the government have a view, I look forward to them contributing to the debate, and I particularly look forward to them standing up for their local communities and defending their local public aged-care facilities remaining in the control and ownership of their local communities.

I point to the concerns that have been expressed to me. For example, Ms Denise Natoli has spoken to me. Her 83-year-old mother, Eileen, is a resident at Merv Irvine in Bundoora. She requires 24-hour care to manage her high-level dementia and behavioural problems. Ms Natoli explained to me that her mother came across to this facility from a private facility, and she is concerned about the changes to nurse-patient ratios once the system changes hands. As the minister is well aware, public residential aged-care facilities have mandated levels of nurse-patient ratios to ensure quality care, ratios which do not exist in the private sector.

Mr Phillip Wynn is another concerned family member. His wife is also a resident at Merv Irvine, and he has expressed concerns about a potential closure or sale. He was quoted in the *Herald Sun* of 19 January as saying:

These people in here have been thrown out of the normal nursing homes because they can't be managed ...

How would any of the politicians feel if it was their loved ones in this situation?

Government members need to understand the great distress that this issue is causing to members of the community, particularly families who have a loved one in one of these facilities.

These specialist beds do not only cater for older residents with complex behavioural or mental health issues, such as high-level dementia. There are also young people in some of these facilities. Facilities such as Cyril Jewell House in Keilor East, Gardenview House in Parkville and Boyne Russell House in Brunswick cater for young people who suffer from acquired injury, stroke or multiple sclerosis. I have spoken to the national director of the Young People in Nursing Homes National Alliance, Bronwyn Morkham, about this issue on many occasions. She was quoted in the *Age* of 3 February this year as saying:

On their own, standard nurse centres cannot provide for young people who have very complex health needs.

The same article also reports the acting Victorian branch secretary of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), Paul Gilbert, as saying:

... evidence from recent Fair Work proceedings showed that hospitals refer special-needs patients to publicly run centres because of the better skill mix and staffing levels.

Private nursing home staffing is made up predominantly of personal care workers who are not required to have any formal training.

He made these comments in a letter to the CEO of Melbourne Health on 19 August this year.

While the government's tender process closed in February this year, it has remained silent on which facilities it intends to sell. Instead, beds are being closed by stealth. For example, the ANMF recently raised concerns about a number of bed closures at Melbourne Health facilities, which Melbourne Health staff are reporting have to do with funding issues. In today's *Moonee Valley Weekly* the ANMF has provided details of a number of bed vacancies across Melbourne Health facilities. I share the ANMF's concerns that public aged-care facilities are being closed by stealth.

We know for a fact that there are more closures and privatisations on the cards. In the past few months Alfred Health has stepped up its restructure proposal to contract out its three aged-care facilities in Caulfield — Montgomery Nursing Home, Namarra Nursing Home and Caulfield Hospital Nursing Home — a total of 150 beds. Lee Nahmias, whose 88-year-old father,

Victor, is a resident at the Caulfield Hospital Nursing Home, called this a 'silent sell off' in the *Caulfield Glen Eira Leader* of 1 April is reported as saying:

All the government seems to want to do is divest itself of looking after Victorians.

I have previously called on the minister to ensure that the local community that uses Alfred Health is consulted about these proposals — for example, I have asked the minister to ensure that the local community is invited to public meetings. On 19 May I wrote to the minister about the ANMF, which represents the workforce at Alfred Health, being advised that it would be inappropriate for it to attend a forum on 22 May about this restructure proposal. The local community was also not informed about this forum, and it has not been invited to any subsequent forums. Labor's candidate for the Legislative Assembly seat of Caulfield, Josh Burns, was also excluded from participating at this forum.

On 10 December 2013 the minister was reported as saying in Parliament:

... if Alfred Health were to progress down this path, it would look closely at consulting with the community.

However, despite this, I received a letter from Minister Davis, dated 14 August, in which the minister effectively washed his hands of this matter, saying that each health service will make its own decisions about communication with affected residents, families, staff and the broader community. Despite his previous commitment in December last year about ensuring consultation, he is now washing his hands and saying it has nothing to do with him.

There have also been moves by Peninsula Health to privatise its remaining two facilities: Carinya Nursing Home in Frankston and Michael Court Hostel in Seaford. Together with Lee Tarlamis, I joined a number of staff members, family members and supporters at a rally outside Carinya Nursing Home in June. All those present voiced their concerns about the plans to transfer operation of the facilities to private operators. Once these facilities are privatised, Peninsula Health will not run a single public aged-care facility.

It is interesting to note that the documentation released by Peninsula Health identified the reasons this privatisation is occurring, stating:

... public health services are required to have higher staffing levels and skill mix than the not-for-profit and non-government sectors because of our public sector EBAs ...

That is a telling admission. It is very clear that the reason the coalition is so determined to sell off public aged-care facilities is that it does not support nurse-patient ratios. There was a protracted campaign by the government and this minister in 2012 to remove nurse-patient ratios in hospitals. The ANMF stood its ground, and ultimately the government backed down on that issue. Now it is trying to achieve the same thing in aged care.

The minister has sought to deflect responsibility for all these closures. He claims they were all decisions made by the relevant health boards. Labor has obtained a number of documents through the FOI process that are very telling in this regard. How does the minister explain the briefing notes he received as minister? For example, a briefing note from the health department to the minister regarding the closure of Jessie Gillett Court Hostel in 2011 even stated:

Current departmental practice is to seek ministerial approval of any proposed service closure ...

Yet the minister indicated his approval of the closure of these facilities by circling the word 'approved' next to his signature. Can it be any more blatant than that? I query whether the policy has been changed so that the minister can try to deflect responsibility from those closures and sell-offs.

The minister is well aware that his funding cuts to aged care are what is driving the decisions by these health boards. His policy and his government's actions in starving health services of funds are directly responsible for what is happening under his watch. On a number of occasions the minister has sought to wash his hands of these decisions and feign ignorance. Apparently we are to believe that his role as a minister is to be but a rubber stamp for every decision by a health service. If a health service were to announce it was going to sell a public hospital tomorrow, would the minister express a view? Would he take any steps to stop it? Why are public aged-care facilities any different?

The minister likes to have a bob each way. He likes to say that Labor did certain things in government that he claims are Labor's responsibility, and yet when it comes to what is happening under his watch, it is never his responsibility. While it may be disappointing to see the government take this route, it is not surprising. As we know, the Liberals have form on this issue.

As I said earlier, this is why Labor is suspicious of the government's agenda in aged care: it says one thing but it does another. It has started the privatisation process in relation to metropolitan aged-care beds. Why would Victorians living in regional Victoria believe their

aged-care facilities will be treated any differently? As I said earlier, we have already seen four regional aged-care facilities close. How can Victorians living in regional Victoria be confident that if the coalition is re-elected in November, their aged-care facilities will not be next on the chopping block?

Labor understands how important it is to maintain high-quality residential aged-care facilities. In stark contrast to the Napthine government, in Labor's last term in office it invested \$471 million upgrading 48 public aged-care facilities across the state. Of these 48 facilities, 45 are in rural and regional Victoria.

I was proud to visit with Luke Donnellan, the member for Narre Warren North in the Assembly, the 100-bed Chestnut Gardens aged-care home in Doveton. Following a \$27.7 million major redevelopment under the Brumby government this facility became Australia's first teaching nursing home. Labor opened more than 432 beds. We are proud to say that during our time in government Victoria had the highest number of residential aged-care beds of any state or territory in Australia. By contrast the coalition prides itself on selling aged-care beds.

Labor recognises that those needing specialised care want to remain close to their local communities, with the best possible care available to them. We believe that families and seniors in our community should have a choice about the facilities in which they live. It is clear that these things do not matter to the coalition, which is all about removing choice. That is why Labor is very much opposed to the privatisation agenda on which the Napthine government has embarked. That is why this motion calls on the government to listen to the community's concerns and stop its privatisation of public aged care.

This motion also deals with other issues in relation to seniors, which I will just touch upon very briefly, in particular the lack of advocacy to the federal government around the implications of the federal budget on the aged-care system and on senior Victorians. In another blow to the aged-care sector, the Abbott federal government has made a decision to cease the dementia and severe behaviour supplement payable to all aged-care providers who care for people assessed as having complex dementia needs. This will make it harder for aged-care providers to provide that high level of care for people with dementia at a time when the Napthine government is closing and selling aged persons mental health facilities. You have to really wonder where those people with complex behavioural needs and challenges are going to go if they cannot use

the public system and if not-for-profit and private providers are less likely to take them as residents.

The Abbott government is also ceasing to provide the aged-care payroll tax supplement. All these things provide additional challenges to the aged-care system more broadly. We have an ageing population and need more aged-care beds, yet we have a shrinking of the public system.

This year the Abbott government's budget declared war on seniors. It did this by increasing the retirement age to 70. It has reduced the way the pension will increase in the future through indexation so that its value will decrease over time. It has done a number of things that are intended to make pensioners' lives even more difficult. As it is we know that many pensioners are already struggling.

The federal government is also hitting patients, including seniors, with a new GP tax which has the sole purpose of stopping vulnerable Victorians going to the doctor. This tax represents Joe Hockey's hands in the pockets of every Victorian pensioner every time they visit the doctor or have a blood test or medical scan. We all know that GPs are at the front line of our healthcare system, and fewer visits being made to doctors will mean more serious illnesses and hospitalisations will occur in the long term.

Changes to the cost of petrol will make it even harder for pensioners to afford to use their vehicles. It might be news to Joe Hockey, but poor people do drive cars.

The Abbott government is not only putting its hands into pensioners' pockets but it is attacking the essential services on which Victorian seniors rely. We have seen it slash \$50 billion from the state's health systems. This comes on top of the Napthine government and the Minister for Health ripping \$31 million from Victoria's health budget. We know that it is our seniors who most rely on what up to now has been a universal public health system that is absolutely worth fighting for. The current crisis in Victorian hospitals includes long waiting lists for elective surgery, long waiting periods in emergency departments and ambulance delays that are causing anxiety in the community and putting people's health at risk.

Prior to the 2010 election the coalition had a lot to say about cost-of-living issues and promised to fix the so-called problems. Over the past four years the Napthine government has failed to address the increasing cost-of-living pressures faced by Victorians, including our seniors. They have been slugged more for car registration, more to use public transport, more for

public housing rents and more for the new fire services property levy.

The Napthine government has scrapped the Home Wise program, which was an initiative established by the Labor government to support low-income seniors to replace broken appliances. It has scrapped the Victorian energy efficiency target, which had been shown to have a good take-up rate in low-income postcodes. Most importantly the concessions on which pensioners and low-income families in this state rely are now at risk. In this year's federal budget Tony Abbott cut \$75 million in concession payments from Victoria's pensioners and seniors. The Premier has committed to only one year's funding for these payments, in order to take him just beyond the coming state election.

Minister Davis had a lot to say yesterday about the year-round energy concessions. He made a number of absurd claims, conveniently forgetting that Labor took a commitment to the 2010 election to introduce a new summer electricity concession, effectively providing a year-round concession. The minister also crowed about a new program for Seniors Card holders through AGL, a program that costs the government nothing to promote one particular energy provider. There is nothing to prevent other energy providers from offering similar discounts and deals, as they do at the moment, and I hope that Victorian consumers will continue to look for the best deal available to them.

This government is scaring those large low-income households which due to their size use more electricity and gas by imposing caps on their concessions. With gas prices going up significantly, it will not come as a surprise if some seniors hit the cap later this year after their winter bills come through. The Premier will cut your power but he will not cut your power bill. There are many challenges facing Victorian seniors. The Napthine government has only made things harder for them.

I say that the choice for Victorian seniors come November is pretty clear: the cuts and closures they have seen under the current government or greater choice and certainty under an Andrews Labor government. Labor has made its opposition to public aged-care privatisation very clear. We are very concerned about what the government is doing in relation to these closures and the sell-off agenda. We are concerned about the targeting of 1000 beds in metropolitan areas. As I said earlier, we are also concerned that public aged-care facilities in regional Victoria will be next. We have already seen regional aged-care facilities close under this government.

This motion calls on the government to listen to the community's concerns and to stop the attacks on Victorian seniors and its privatisation of public aged care. I look forward to government members getting up and defending their local public aged-care facilities and the interests of the seniors in their electorates by supporting Labor's motion to stop the privatisation of the public aged-care system by the Napthine government.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I will be very brief because I believe Ms Mikakos has prosecuted this motion very well. I have very similar concerns to the ones she raised. Having previously worked in an office of housing high-rise building which housed 90 older people, I know the dilemmas they face.

I am particularly concerned about the privatisation of aged care because we all know that standards in public aged care are always higher than they are in private aged care. We must consider that many low-income people cannot afford the kind of money needed to reside in a private facility.

We have to make sure we protect older people in their declining years so they have adequate accommodation, medical care and food. All of these things are what a caring society is about. Privatising aged care is not what a caring society does.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — Ms Hartland did say she was going to be brief, but I see she caught you by surprise too, Acting President.

I am pleased to rise to speak this afternoon on Ms Mikakos's motion — —

Mr Lenders — I don't think you're really pleased.

Ms CROZIER — I am really pleased, Mr Lenders, because there are some points that I would like to make in relation to this important — —

Ms Mikakos — The minister should come in and respond.

Ms CROZIER — Ms Mikakos might doubt my capabilities, but I will have something to say about — —

Ms Mikakos interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem) — Order! Ms Mikakos is not in her place. Members should speak through the Chair. Ms Crozier, to continue without assistance from anyone.

Ms CROZIER — As I was saying, I am pleased to rise to speak on this motion on behalf of the government. I have listened to the highly emotive language Ms Mikakos used throughout her contribution, and I have to say it was complete scaremongering. The Minister for Health is now in the chamber. The government takes very seriously indeed the needs of Victorian seniors. They are among the most vulnerable members of our community, and they need assistance in many situations. There is no doubt that we want to provide high-quality residential care right across the state for Victorian seniors. That is something this government is very focused on. As Ms Mikakos very well knows, under the federal Aged Care Act 1997 it is the responsibility of the commonwealth government to regulate all residential aged-care services across Australia. That means that no matter how a residential aged-care facility is run, all aged-care services must comply with the same national standards of quality care — —

Ms Mikakos interjected.

Ms CROZIER — I will get to your record in government, which was only three and a half years ago — let us not forget that. Before we came to government in 2010 we said we would fix the problems, and one of the problems was the healthcare system. We are doing that.

Ms Mikakos — How is that going?

Ms CROZIER — Exceptionally well, actually; it is far better than when you left it. We are fixing the problems and getting on with it.

In many instances aged-care facilities in rural and regional Victoria are quite isolated, and they play a unique role in terms of what they do in local communities. The government is looking at supporting the various facilities in those areas. In her contribution Ms Mikakos talked a lot about choice. There is no doubt that we want to give people as much choice as possible in relation to a whole lot of services that we provide. In the last budget the government committed \$14 million to a hospital for Boort, including an aged-care facility — —

Ms Mikakos — Yes, one — one facility.

Ms CROZIER — I am just using that as an example. In the overall budget we gave a record amount of funding to health services. That is just one aged-care facility in a regional area that I wanted to highlight. I will not go through them all, but regional facilities right across the state — in Heathcote, Creswick, Wangaratta, Omeo, Inglewood, Red Cliffs,

Ballarat, Tallangatta, Maldon and Warragul — are sharing in targeted aged-care funding.

Since coming to government we have committed more than \$90 million to support country residential aged-care services, and we have delivered on that. I want to highlight some of our other investments in country aged-care facilities, because they are often overlooked — and they were certainly overlooked under the previous regime. They include: \$4 million in capital support under the government's Rural Capital Support Fund, more than \$12 million in minor capital and equipment grants, \$18 million for the Swan Hill District Health aged-care redevelopment and more than \$40 million for redeveloping health services with aged-care facilities at Kerang and Charlton.

Ms Mikakos espoused that she wanted to give people more choice. The government wants non-government service providers, including not-for-profit organisations, to have the opportunity to play a vital role in providing services in this important area. It is completely false to say the state government has been limiting aged-care choices for Victorians, including those who have been involved in making those choices on behalf of their elderly parents. In fact it is quite the opposite: we want to have those facilities expanded and revitalised, and we have been undertaking that process. Indeed in the case of a number of government-run places, particularly on the Mornington Peninsula — and Ms Mikakos mentioned Peninsula Health in her contribution — the transfer of government-run places was successfully undertaken. The transfer of places at the Rosebud residential aged-care facility between Peninsula Health and Southern Cross Care was negotiated, and as a result the number of beds was increased from 50 to 120.

I point out to members just what Ms Mikakos's government did. Labor has a track record of closing aged-care beds, and I will highlight some examples. I just mentioned Peninsula Health. In 2009 Peninsula Health's Lotus Lodge was reduced from 80 to 60 beds. A Ballarat Health Services facility was closed in 2007. In October 2006 there was a reconfiguration of an Alfred Health aged-care facility, resulting in reduced beds. There was another closure of a Ballarat Health Services facility in September 2003 —

Ms Mikakos interjected.

Ms CROZIER — I am going through the closures of beds, so to say that your government did not do any of this is ridiculous. I am pointing out your hypocrisy in the contribution you just made.

The list continues: Ballarat Health Services — again — June 2002; Peninsula Health, April 2002. There is a track record of Ms Mikakos's government — the 11 years of Labor — closing beds.

Ms Mikakos interjected.

Ms CROZIER — Labor closed beds. To say that it did not is complete and utter hypocrisy.

Hon. D. M. Davis interjected.

Ms CROZIER — I will take up Mr Davis's interjection as he is correcting the record.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem) — Order! If Mr Davis wants to make a contribution, I can put him on the speakers list.

Ms CROZIER — Thank you, Acting President. I reiterate that Mr Davis is correcting the record for Ms Mikakos. Nevertheless —

Hon. D. M. Davis interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem) — Order! Mr Davis has been warned. If he wants to make a contribution, he can put his name on the list.

Ms CROZIER — I will continue because I want to take up the point of Ms Mikakos moving a ridiculous motion that says the government does not value Victorian seniors. That is so far from the truth; we only need to look at what this government has done to support Victorian seniors.

I note that Mrs Coote is in the chamber. In this government's first year in office the Family and Community Development Committee (FCDC) undertook an inquiry into opportunities for participation of Victorian seniors. A recommendation of the FCDC's report was that a seniors commissioner be appointed, and Gerard Mansour was appointed to that role, the first of its kind in Australia. The seniors commissioner is doing a tremendous job. He is providing wonderful support to seniors right across the state and is showing great leadership in this very important area. That is just one area.

As I speak I am opening a copy of an article I have been reading that Mr Mansour contributed to *Seniors Card Magazine 2014*. This magazine highlights many good things that are happening to support seniors right across Victoria, including some of the concessions that have been applied and supported by this government. I will run through some of those initiatives the

government has undertaken to support Victorian seniors.

We have heard a lot about energy costs and cost-of-living pressures — all of those elements. There is no doubt that those who are on our side of politics want to reduce the cost of living in whatever way we can. Many vulnerable Victorians, including many senior Victorians, are coming under pressure in terms of utility costs in particular. Utility costs have increased over a number of years, and no-one can forget the desalination plant that was commissioned by Ms Mikakos's government and which will cost Victorians \$1.8 million each day for the next few decades. That is a direct cost-of-living pressure, and Minister Walsh should be congratulated for the work he has undertaken to reduce water costs for Victorians right across the board. This government has undertaken many initiatives to support Victorian seniors, including the introduction of year-round reductions in electricity bills for concession card holders. Some 800 000 households will benefit from lower electricity bills all year round.

This government has also halved the cost of ambulance membership for Victorian families, including Victorian seniors — a subject we debated earlier today.

Ms Mikakos — How did that go?

Ms CROZIER — Very well actually. The debate highlighted that this government supports people taking out ambulance membership. We support seniors and the most vulnerable people in our community — people who were completely ignored by Ms Mikakos's government. Labor ignored the fact that the population of this state is growing and that as people age they have to deal with chronic conditions and have complex needs. Our health services do a tremendous job, and a great deal of money is spent on addressing healthcare issues. The Minister for Health and this government should be commended for their work. In 11 years Ms Mikakos's government did very little.

I return to putting on the record what this government has done to support seniors. We have provided \$42.1 million in stamp duty relief for eligible seniors, including self-funded retirees who are entitled to a commonwealth seniors health card. Self-funded retirees are a tremendous support to our community and do an enormous amount by managing their own affairs. This government has also provided seniors with a \$50 concession for the fire services property levy, which has applied since 1 July last year. In addition, it has increased the cap on senior Victorians' concessions for municipal water and sewerage rates by 18.5 per cent since 2011.

This government made an election commitment to improve participation for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) seniors, and it is continuing to enhance the participation of senior Victorians through a grants program to support CALD community organisations and enable senior Victorians to participate further in those programs. This government is also supporting the University of the Third Age. Last Thursday I attended a U3A luncheon in Melbourne. The luncheon was very well attended, and I commend the U3A on the work it does and the activities it provides for senior Victorians so they can participate in the community. Those people should be congratulated and commended for the work they do.

In October each year the Victorian Seniors Festival involves events being held right across the state. The coalition government provides grants so that the 79 local councils can support those festivities and events can be conducted throughout the Seniors Festival period. This funding enables many seniors to be engaged in their communities more broadly and provides them with relevant information that can assist them with many of the issues they face on a regular basis.

I have been closely involved with the area of elder abuse. This government has done much to address the complex and sensitive issue of elder abuse by increasing community awareness. I congratulate everybody involved on the work they have undertaken to provide the government with recommendations and suggestions. The government has taken up those recommendations, and the work of the government is having a huge impact on many vulnerable Victorians who are affected by elder abuse. We should do anything we can to raise awareness of elder abuse.

An important initiative of the government was the introduction of the Carers Recognition Act 2012. That legislation is at the heart of the issues faced by many carers in their senior — indeed their elderly — years. Those people take a huge burden off government facilities and organisations through the work they undertake. Many members of this chamber will agree that the Carers Recognition Act was long overdue.

I reiterate that this government has undertaken many initiatives, including the development of the *Seniors Card Magazine*, which contains many tips and a great deal of information so that senior Victorians can get the most out of their Seniors Card in their everyday living and on such matters as concession deals and contact details for information lines. This is an important initiative that will help senior Victorians get the best value for their dollars. The government has also been

responsible for initiating a historic deal between Victoria and New Zealand so that senior Victorians will be able to enjoy discounts made available by the New Zealand government. That is a terrific initiative for seniors who want to travel to New Zealand in their later years.

I return to the subject of choice. It is this government which has brokered discounted energy plans for seniors through a partnership with the energy retailer AGL. Seniors can now go online to compare energy prices and examine the market. They will be able to find the deals that best suit them and their circumstances. That initiative will provide great savings for seniors, particularly for their energy usage but also for bills in general.

I commend the Minister for Public Transport, Mr Mulder, on the government's initiative to provide free tram travel in the CBD and Docklands, and on reducing zone 1 and 2 fares from 1 January 2015. This initiative will benefit the many people, including many seniors, who travel on our public transport system.

In her motion Ms Mikakos claims that this government does not support Victorian seniors, but that claim is debunked by the facts I have listed in my contribution to this debate. This government has done a great deal. As I have said, Victorian seniors are some of the most vulnerable people in our community, and government should be there to protect and look after them. Of course there are people who will be more impacted on by certain events than others. However, this government is very focused on doing what it can to see aged-care services provided for the future growth of our ageing population and ensuring that aged-care providers and residents have a choice. Ms Mikakos, with her government's record, cannot say that —

Ms Mikakos — We have a very good record. We invested in public aged care, unlike you.

Ms CROZIER — That is not to say that we are not investing in a whole range of areas. If I were to move an amendment to Ms Mikakos's motion — and I will not be circulating this — I would substitute some of her points and instead propose that this house:

- (1) congratulates the Napthine government on its management of public hospitals, healthcare and aged-care services in Victoria;
- (2) notes that under Labor aged-care services were sold or privatised in Rosebud, Ballarat, Ballarat North, Caulfield, Wendouree and Frankston;

- (3) further notes that saving measures worth more than \$1 billion annually were introduced by the Honourable Daniel Andrews, MP, as health minister;
- (4) welcomes the steps taken by the government to address cost-of-living pressures faced by Victorian pensioners, including concessions on their electricity (year round), gas and water bills, municipal rates, fire service levies and half-price ambulance membership;
- (5) congratulates the government on its successful reduction of elective surgery waiting lists and the positive impact of this on the quality of life of many Victorian patients; and
- (6) affirms that the government stood up for Victorians, unlike Labor MPs of the Legislative Council, who refused to support Victorian health care in the face of Ms Gillard and Ms Plibersek's cuts of \$107 million to Victorian hospitals in December 2012.

The government will not be supporting Ms Mikakos's motion.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I have a couple of things to say in response to Ms Crozier's contribution. I am sure that no member of this chamber would have any doubt about Ms Crozier's ability to defend the failed Minister for Ageing. Some of us might question her passion in doing so, but I suppose that is another thing altogether.

Ms Crozier outlined a number of initiatives that she said her government has implemented which will assist seniors as far as travel, council rates and a number of other things are concerned. The last thing the people in the aged-care facilities that Ms Mikakos and I visited in Kilsyth and Forest Hill and their families are concerned about is cheaper tram fares and council rates. They are very dependent on the health experts and the facilities they are in for their day-to-day existence.

As we know, these matters are of great concern to people with elderly parents and family members in aged care. It is a stressful thing for the family in any event. Often when close family members end up in aged-care facilities, unfortunately that is the place they will spend the rest of their lives. They need quite intensive care and, as I said, it is quite a stressful thing for the person who is in aged care and for the family members of that particular person. This government has done nothing to decrease the concerns that people have when their family members are in aged care; it has actually made things a lot worse. Family members are concerned about whether their elderly loved ones can stay in a stable environment or whether facilities will be closed or privatised, which would change the nature of care given.

Ms Mikakos's motion, which I wholly support, notes that the government has cut \$75 million from funding for public sector residential aged care. That can only add to these concerns. Privatising 1000 metropolitan public sector residential aged-care beds could only add to the angst and concern that is already there for people who have elderly loved ones living in these facilities.

Despite all its rhetoric, since 2010 the coalition government has closed 410 public sector residential aged-care beds. When you look at the facilities that have been closed, you see that no part of Victoria has been untouched by this government's closures. Ballarat, Koroit, Castlemaine, Kyneton, Williamstown, Melton South, Parkville and Flemington are just some of the suburbs in which aged-care facilities have been closed. Taking into account that when you have an elderly family member in aged care you try to get that member into a facility that is close to where the rest of the family resides so that it is easy to visit them, this government has added a great deal of angst for elderly people in aged care and their families.

The government can talk about cheaper trams, cheaper council rates and all that sort of stuff, but in relation to aged care this government has really dropped the ball. There will need to be a lot of attention given to aged care if this government is re-elected. For an incoming government this area will need a lot of attention post 29 November. I am very grateful that Ms Mikakos has brought this motion to the house, and I fully support it.

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to stand up to speak on the motion, because it gives me an opportunity to talk about aged care and the positive results we have achieved as a coalition government but also to look at aged care in a broader context. In the debate today we have talked about the nitty-gritty, and there has been an enormous amount of scaremongering from Ms Mikakos. I know she has to play the political trump card, but it was unnecessary given we are dealing with frail aged people who will be concerned when they read her contribution to the debate.

I want to remind the chamber about aged care in this country. I refer to an aged-care briefing given in Melbourne on 31 March to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia by Senator Mitch Fifield, who is Assistant Minister for Social Services, Manager of Government Business in the Senate and a senator for Victoria. It is interesting to reflect on where aged care sits in the Australian community, and then I will drill down into the motion to see how it affects us here in Victoria. I remind members, as Mitch Fifield did in his speech, that when Peter Costello was

Treasurer he commissioned an intergenerational report. That was the first time Australians had stopped to look at the empirical data and understand that we have an ageing population and the ramifications of that information.

We have to be very careful with our terminology when we speak about aged Australians. I have said in this place many times that when the Family and Community Development Committee conducted an inquiry into issues affecting senior Victorians the sector told us that a senior Victorian is anyone over the age of 45 years. However, I believe Ms Mikakos is talking about frail aged people, and it is important to get the terminology right as we go through the debate.

Peter Costello's intergenerational report talks about putting the p's on our economic and social agenda. They are proactivity, participation and population. Mitch Fifield said:

It's sobering to read what the original report saw as our key challenges. And the same pressures exist today as they did back then:

- demographic pressures;
- funding pressures;
- financial and capital pressures for the sector;
- the need for greater choice, innovation and efficiency;
- inadequate information for older Australians, their family and carers; and
- workforce pressures.

Much of this has been touched on in the debate this afternoon, not always with a lot of accuracy. There has been a lot of scaremongering, misinformation and not enough properly thought through empirical evidence to back up the case presented by Ms Mikakos. The aged-care system comprises 1.1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), 2.5 per cent of the Australian workforce and 3.5 per cent of federal government expenditure. The Australian government's contribution accounts for \$13.3 billion. Consumers also make a considerable contribution outside taxation to the costs of their living expenses, care and accommodation. People needing aged care paid around \$4.6 billion in the last financial year.

Providers hold over 65 000 resident bonds with a total value of \$14.2 billion. The sector totals \$32 billion. It is a significant part of our economy. As Mitch Fifield said, the aged-care sector will double as a percentage of GDP by 2050, and our aged-care workforce will need to double to around 827 000 people by that time.

What are we looking at as we talk about aged care into the future? What is it that the frail aged and the aged want? Why is this motion important in the scheme of where we are going, and why is it so important to get the facts right? It is important because we have to deal with this in a strategic manner. Given all the political imperatives, many of which I have outlined, it is important that we look at where each one of the decisions fits. On 1 July Mitch Fifield said:

Currently providers seek lump sum payments — accommodation bonds — from low-care residents and are restricted to only capped daily payments in high care.

From July 1 restrictions on high-care prices will be removed so that providers will be able to receive both lump sums and daily payments in high care and the capping on daily payments will be removed.

All residents of aged-care facilities will have the choice to pay either a lump sum payment:

a refundable accommodation deposit; or

an equivalent daily accommodation payment.

If they elect to pay an accommodation deposit it is fully refunded when the person leaves the residential care facility.

Providers have the flexibility to set their accommodation prices at a level which will give the same income flow they currently receive.

This is a very important point. We are in a state of change and of recognising where aged care is going in this country and the economic pressures that will be put on governments, service providers and the aged community. Mitch Fifield said:

KPMG modelling conducted for the Aged Care Financing Authority has predicted the reforms will have a significant positive impact for providers in aggregate, with a net increase of \$3 billion in lump sums for providers in the first year.

This is about providing greater choice for consumers while ensuring a viable industry.

It is really important to have a viable industry. If we reflect on the industry — and Ms Mikakos has been here since 1999, as have I — we realise we have seen enormous changes in the aged-care area in those 15 years. We have seen it go from being a cottage industry. We have talked about a range of federal-state agreements, and we have talked about there being a disparate group in the past. We now see the aged-care sector as a cohesive sector which works collaboratively. It is a powerhouse of our economy. As I have said before in this place we are seeing some really big changes in the sector, because the baby boomers are getting older and realising that they are heading for aged care, and they want to make certain their governments get it right. I congratulate the federal

government on being very tough in looking at the direction for and ramifications of aged care. Mitch Fifield has said:

Make no mistake, the consumer voice will be heard. There will inevitably be a rebalancing from residential care to home support and fewer low-care residential settings. And some providers will look at what is their core business. Will they provide both care and accommodation or decide their strengths lie in one area.

In this state, home and community care (HACC) is structured differently from every other state, where there is a deal between the service providers in health and the federal government. In Victoria HACC has an intermediary, which happens to be the state government. We are slightly out of kilter with the rest of the country. This causes challenges at times, but it is important to take a holistic approach to aged care in our state.

The federal changes are going to have huge ramifications for us in Victoria. Rightly Ms Mikakos is championing for particular people and particular areas, and it is always important for oppositions to come up with those points and to hold governments to account. I do not think any of us in this chamber wants to see an aged-care sector that does not work. We need to get this right and to work collaboratively across the country. We are doing this with the national disability insurance scheme, and it has been fascinating to see how its rollout has worked in the trials across the country. The thrust behind the national disability insurance scheme is for a collaborative Australia-wide program.

I think the aged-care sector is largely ahead of this. We look at the federal government, which has major control, and then we look at where the states are, which brings me back to this motion today.

Before I get on to what we do here in Victoria I would like to pick up on a comment Ms Mikakos made about personal care workers. I think personal care workers are going to be enormously in demand, not only in the aged-care sector but also in the disability sector. Within a very short time, perhaps the next five years, we will be talking about a huge shortage of personal care workers. If we want flexibility in our disability and aged-care systems, we need to have trained personal care workers who can come into our homes and perform the sorts of duties needed to enable many frail aged Australians to live in their own homes. Not all frail Australians are going to want to live in aged-care facilities. Many are going to wish to stay in their own homes and to modify their homes and services accordingly, but they are going to need staff to be able to do that. It is incumbent upon us as a government, and

on any future government, to make quite certain that we have highly trained personal care workers who can do this very important work.

Here in Victoria, as Labor well knows, the commonwealth government, under the commonwealth Aged Care Act 1997, regulates all residential aged-care services. As I said at the outset of my contribution, it is very important to understand that balance. Therefore it is important that in any debate we have in this place we remember whose responsibilities lie where.

It is very pleasing for me to be able to talk about what the coalition has done for older Victorians in this state. I would like to refer to a number of points in detail to outline the enormity of the programs we have put in place and the money we have put behind them so that our senior Victorians can live as they wish to — that is, with choice, flexibility and control over their lives. Quite frankly, that is something we all aspire to, especially as we get older.

I would like to talk about some of these achievements. We have eased cost-of-living pressures for older Victorians by introducing a year-round reduction on electricity bills for concession card holders. This enables more than 800 000 households to benefit from lower electricity bills year round.

We have had many debates in this place. I can remember a debate which seemed bizarre at the time, and in retrospect it is even more so, about collecting firewood from Victorian forests. I am pleased to note that it was a coalition government that reinstated the opportunity to collect firewood from state forests. I can see Ms Mikakos looking very quizzical. In that debate we spoke about elderly people in our community, particularly in country areas, who could not afford electricity and who used firewood for their cooking and heating. In many instances they were totally and utterly reliant on it.

It has been very pleasing to see that this coalition government has honoured its election commitment by rolling out reticulated natural gas to country towns in Victoria. I think the most recent one was Huntly in Bendigo, which has been a great success. We have also heard in debates in this place how in the past senior Victorians have stayed at home in bed because they could not afford to turn on the electricity to keep warm, particularly in winter. It is particularly pleasing to think that 800 000 households will benefit from lower electricity bills all year round thanks to the coalition government.

On 1 July 2011 the coalition government halved the cost of ambulance membership for Victorian families and singles, including senior Victorians. It was a huge worry when people needed to get an ambulance but could not get one because of the prohibitive cost. This is a very real change that makes a very real difference to senior Victorians.

As a coalition we have provided \$42.1 million in stamp duty relief for eligible seniors, including eligible self-funded retirees who are entitled to a commonwealth seniors health card. If we can keep our self-funded retirees and our older and senior Victorians healthy and engaged in the community, given some support and assistance, we are going to make quite certain that they will not become as frail as quickly and that they do in fact have a better quality of life. This is another very important initiative.

From 1 July 2013 we have provided a \$50 fire services property levy concession for property owners who currently receive a local council rates concession in respect of their principal place of residence. Fifty dollars might not mean much to a lot of the MPs in here, but it is actually quite a lot when you are living on a very limited income. It is a recognition that there needs to be some assistance for senior Victorians. We have also increased the municipal rates concession and the water and sewerage concession annual cap amounts by 18.5 per cent since 2011. That is a considerable saving, and I know that people who pay those bills will recognise that saving.

We implemented our election commitment to improve participation for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) seniors through the CALD seniors program, including a grants program to support community organisations to create or expand participation opportunities for isolated CALD seniors. In our debates we can easily forget what members of CALD communities require. They have some very specific needs. When they start to develop Alzheimer's or something else, they often revert to their language of origin. A series of added complications affect people from CALD backgrounds. It is very important to make certain that they are not isolated but rather incorporated.

We have supported the University of the Third Age and Life Activities Clubs Victoria. We have supported the annual Victorian Seniors Festival, which is about to happen again in October; I encourage everybody to turn up in their local communities. We have improved the tools and functioning of Seniors Online to enhance its accessibility. As I have said in this place before, you only have to go to the State Library of Victoria on any given day to see the number of seniors accessing the

computers, usually, I think, driving their grandchildren, who are travelling overseas, mad.

There are a number of other things. We have developed the first *Seniors Card Magazine* with tips to get the most out of the Seniors Card. We have introduced the Seniors Card age-friendly partners program and we have initiated a historic deal between Victoria and New Zealand so that Victorian seniors can use their seniors cards to enjoy discounts offered abroad. We have developed publications such as *Savvy Savings for Seniors*, and we are introducing free tram travel in the CBD and Docklands and reducing the zone 1 and 2 fare from January next year.

We have also appointed Victoria's first commissioner for senior Victorians, Gerard Mansour, who has had a very good history in the aged-care sector. This is a first for Victoria, and we will start to see the ramifications. It builds on the system of commissioners that we have in Victoria, including the health services commissioner, the children and young persons commissioner and the disability services commissioner. These are all working exceedingly well and doing all that their offices were set up to do — listening to the complaints and concerns of Victorians across the board so that services and service provision can be enhanced.

It is with sadness that I look at Ms Mikakos's motion today because she has not recognised the bigger picture. She has not looked at Victoria's place in the wider sphere. Her motion and its nine paragraphs have missed the point, resulting in her spreading fear and trying to score political points with her scaremongering and trying to tie the responsibility back to the Abbott government. She has missed the point of what aged care in this country is doing and achieving, where it is going, what the strategic approach is and where Victoria should sit in this regard. I sincerely hope Ms Mikakos never gets to become a minister for aged care, because that would be the very worst thing for Victoria.

Just in case there are some members who have not heard me talk about many of these things, I will reiterate a couple of points. First, there is the concessions commitment. The coalition government has taken action to ensure that all Victorian seniors who hold a concession card will continue to enjoy a raft of vital money-saving concessions. Recent federal changes saw funding withdrawn for some of those concessions, but the Victorian government will fill this funding gap so that seniors with a pensioner concession card remain eligible for concessions on their electricity, gas and water bills, and municipal rates.

Aged care is important. As I said, that is why Ms Mikakos's motion is so disappointing. She is playing politics with the sector. It is sad to think that that is where we are at. I would have thought there was a more bipartisan approach in the aged-care sector. Perhaps Ms Mikakos is not as close to aged care as I am — by that I mean her understanding of it.

As I said, the government has provided an enormous amount of support for country Victoria particularly, but in her motion Ms Mikakos mentions the closing of public aged-care facilities in Ballarat, Castlemaine, Flemington, Koroit et cetera. Ms Crozier pointed out in her contribution what was done under the former Labor government, and she did so particularly well.

I am concerned about paragraph 5, which talks about limiting aged-care choices for Victorian families. I just talked about the opportunities across Victoria, and it is important to ensure that families understand they have choices, certainly about aged-care readiness. People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, for example, can engage with the community and not feel isolated or fearful about entering the hospital system. They need to understand that they can afford to use ambulance facilities. These types of things are part of the pre-frail-aged sector and include supporting self-funded retirees and giving Victorians the confidence of knowing what those choices will be. This fits in very well with what the federal government is doing in looking into providing more choice for people. As Mitch Fifield said in his address to CEDA, there will be greater consumer choice. As people in this ageing population knock on the frail-aged door they will want more choice and more opportunity to age the way they choose to age.

I was particularly incensed with Ms Mikakos's comments about the lack of choice for senior Victorians. I dispute that strongly. Her motion also says:

... failing to address the increasing cost-of-living pressures by slugging Victorian pensioners more for car registration, public transport, the new fire services property levy ...

As I said earlier in my contribution, there is a \$50 concession for the fire services property levy. As I also said regarding public transport, Ms Mikakos has forgotten that the government's policy is to introduce free tram travel in the CBD and Docklands and to introduce the zone 1 and 2 fare from 1 January 2015. That will benefit not only senior Victorians but all Victorians. The motion talked about public transport, and as I said, that is an important issue.

Another important issue — I am sure Ms Mikakos has also heard this — is that it is hard to put an age on these things because you can find some 70-year-olds who are very frail and you can find some 90-year-olds who are hardy and healthy. You cannot really put a time or age on it. It is far better to talk about them in terms of being frail or not being frail. But you want people to be engaged and to lead an active life. I commend COTA Australia for its work. It does some fantastic work in ageing readiness. People of this generation who are facing frail age are becoming more used to being consumers, and that is very important.

As I started to say before, I sincerely hope Ms Mikakos does not get to be aged care minister. That responsibility is far too important to be put into the hands of a Daniel Andrews Labor government. I put on the record my praise for all senior Victorians, frail and otherwise, and through the federal government's initiatives we will certainly get it right.

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My comments in reply will be brief. Mrs Coote usually makes considered contributions, and some of the points she made in her contribution today were quite considered comments. The point I wish to make to her is that this motion was not intended to be a comprehensive range of policies around aged care. Of course I accept that people want to age in place and that we need to have home and community care and other services to provide support to enable people to do that. We also need to encourage people to continue to be active in the community and participate in many other areas. That is why I have spoken on many occasions in the place about U3As, seniors groups and the activities of COTA and many other organisations. I commend them for their work.

This motion is very specific. It is about highlighting the areas where we are concerned about what the government is doing. In the past governments have made cuts to programs that encourage active living and good wellbeing programs, such as the Living Longer, Living Stronger program, which was a very good weight program that Labor supported in government. I was very critical of those cuts at the time and took up that issue with the minister.

The issue that I seek to highlight through this motion today is specific and relates to our concerns about the government's agenda for privatising our public aged-care system. We are firmly committed to choice in aged care. As I said, we accept that most people would want to age in place — that is, in their home. We also accept that will not be possible for all individuals. In some circumstances individuals will need to rely on

aged-care facilities, including nursing homes, to fall back on where they are very frail and where they require constant medical care. That is why we are committed to ensuring that people have a choice in those circumstances, whether they wish to go to a public facility, as is currently the case, or a not-for-profit or private aged-care facility. We are concerned that the government is taking away the choices and options that currently exist for senior Victorians.

The motion specifically calls on the Napthine government to stop its privatisation of public aged care. I have also highlighted in this motion some cost-of-living issues. I will not reiterate all of those issues but I will make the point that, as Mrs Coote and other members have acknowledged in their contributions, seniors are doing it tough, particularly those who live on fixed incomes through the age pension. In many cases they are already struggling with the costs of energy, and in some cases they are fearful of turning the heating on at home because they are concerned about the power bills they will get. They are concerned about the concessional support they receive from the government which, as I said, is now limited in nature for a 12-month period. These are all issues that need to be addressed.

When we talk about costs of living, the government must acknowledge that its coalition colleagues in the federal government in Canberra are putting in place a whole raft of measures that will add to cost-of-living pressures for our seniors, particularly changes to the age pension and the real purchasing power that the age pension will provide in the future through the changes to indexation, through the imposition of the new GP tax and through other changes they are making.

In the past when there was a federal Labor government the state coalition government had a lot to say about Labor taking particular positions. I call on the government to stand up to Tony Abbott and his colleagues and do some advocacy around protecting Medicare — our universal health system that so many seniors rely on — and around the issue of the age pension to ensure that seniors will be able to live comfortable lives in retirement.

We put on the record our strong concerns about and our strong opposition to the government's privatisation of public aged care. If the government is serious about providing the choices that it has spoken about and if it is serious about looking after the needs of Victorian seniors, it will support this motion, which calls for the government to take action in a range of areas but in particular to stop the privatisation of our public aged-care system.

House divided on motion:*Ayes, 18*

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

Noes, 20

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

Pairs

Viney, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
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Motion negatived.**EMPLOYMENT****Debate resumed from 20 August; motion of Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria):**

That this house notes that —

- (1) when the coalition took office, the unemployment rate was 4.9 per cent — 2.1 percentage points below today; and
- (2) under Dr Denis Napthine, MP, Victoria's unemployment rate has rocketed to 7 per cent, the highest it has been for 14 years, which means under the Napthine government more than 70 000 people have lost their job;

and agrees that this record level of unemployment is a direct result of the Napthine government not having a jobs plan, not delivering any major projects in its term of office and cutting \$1.2 billion from TAFE, forcing the closure of many campuses and reducing retraining opportunities for the unemployed.

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the order of the day relating to the unemployment rate. In about 80 days it will be four years since the coalition took office and the unemployment rate was about 4.9 per cent. In July 2014 the unemployment rate in Victoria was 7 per cent. In New South Wales it was 5.9 per cent and in Queensland 6.8 per cent. The average unemployment rate in Australia was 6.4 per cent.

In the last few months members of the coalition government have been talking about all of the jobs being created in Victoria and how great that is, but the fact remains that our unemployment rate is the highest it has been in 15 years. Coalition members say it is about 7 per cent but that is because more people are coming to Victoria. That is the only logical explanation I have heard so far. They are not talking about the fact that we have been losing tens of thousands of jobs from Victoria for the last four years. We have seen the demise of a lot of jobs from Qantas at Avalon, from Alcoa and from Holden, and soon we will see the demise of jobs from Ford and Toyota. Add to that the fact that just today Coles announced that 600 jobs will disappear from its operations in Victoria. The only news has been that the number of jobs lost in Victoria is far greater than the number of jobs created, particularly in the manufacturing sector.

Under this government's watch that trend will continue and the manufacturing sector will probably no longer exist in this state. I hope that will not be the case because Victoria will be worse off if we do not have a good, solid manufacturing sector because it provides good, well-paying jobs. We cannot simply rely on the tourism and education sectors to provide jobs; we need jobs in the manufacturing, infrastructure and other sectors.

We are losing all of these jobs because this government really has not done much in the last four years, even on infrastructure projects. In this year's budget the government made announcements about \$27 billion worth of infrastructure projects that are going to happen over the next 10, 15 or 20 years. That is in the never-never. Thinking back, I cannot recall a single major project having been commissioned under this government.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr MELHEM — That is why there are big losses in the manufacturing sector. Companies that manufacture goods that can be used in infrastructure and construction projects have unfortunately had to shut up shop or make massive cuts to the number of people they employ because there has not been any activity by this government.

The most recent example is the acquisition of the next 400, 500 or 600 trains for our metropolitan rail system. It looks like they will finish up being manufactured in Korea or China. They are not going to be made here even though the former government, after a lot of work, managed to put in place a procurement policy which encouraged local content. The case in point I want to

talk about is Bombardier in Dandenong, where we manufacture the best V/Locity train or country long train or diesel train in the world. It runs on time, it does not break down, the quality is second to none and price wise it is very competitive. We are now building the replacements for our tram system in Dandenong — a great project. What I am worried about is that instead of giving Australian-based companies the chance to make these trains or even mandating that they be made here, instead they are likely to be manufactured in China or Korea.

The government will say, 'Look, there is going to be 30 per cent local content'. The big job is making the train shell. That is where the skill is required and where a lot of the work is actually performed. There is no point in bringing the shell here and just fitting it out.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr MELHEM — You are sounding like a broken record. It is really boring. You are boring.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

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

Mr MELHEM — Let us talk about CMI Industrial. The owners and directors of that company, who sent it to the ground, are probably your mates. They tried to rip off the workers and deny them their entitlements. I did not see you out there helping these workers to get their entitlements. I did not see you out there banging on Ford's doors to make sure that CMI continued to have a contract. You do not know what you are talking about. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union actually did that; it went to Ford and the car companies to make sure that CMI survived.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr MELHEM — Stop sounding like a parrot.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! Does Mr Ondarchie want to go on the speakers list? Mr Ondarchie is not on the speakers list.

Mr MELHEM — To continue, it is vital that we as a state and as a country maintain our capability to manufacture these trains here. That is one of the cornerstones of the Victorian Labor Party's Plan for Jobs and Growth. The policy moving forward in relation to this election is to do exactly that — to make sure that we give our local manufacturers a fair go to

make trains here and to mandate that the threshold for declaring any project a strategic project would go from over \$250 million, as it was when we were last in government, to \$100 million. I care about Victorian jobs. I am not going to apologise for that. Those opposite do not; they care only about their own jobs. I care about other people's jobs, not mine, because I have a job.

Should we form government, Victorian Labor will reduce the threshold for declaring a strategic project from \$250 million to \$100 million, and the capital costs will go down to only \$25 million and the whole-of-life costs to \$50 million. Basically we will be giving weighting, taking into consideration the local content in the tendering process, and we will mandate in these contracts that bidders have to include local components and local manufacturers to give them a fair go to bid for these jobs.

The 30 per cent local content threshold this government is talking about will be accounted for simply by maintaining the fleet. Those opposite say, 'It's okay; they are maintained. They have their 30 per cent. Let's go and build it in China, or let's go and build it in Korea'. That is not what was intended. There has been a lot of research done by various economists that shows that for every \$1 you spend here you get \$22 back, so there is a lot of sense in giving local manufacturers a chance to build trains in Australia. One of the areas the ALP will be looking at is to take the whole issue to the Council of Australian Governments to make sure that we have the economies of scale needed to get the other states to put in resources so that we can have a competitive rail stock industry in this state.

I could go on, but I will conclude by saying this: this government is not fair dinkum about providing Victoria with jobs. Government members are only worrying about their own jobs, and we saw that today with what has happened in the other place. The Premier is only worried about his own job, and he does not want any disruption from people in that house. The cuts to TAFE are another example. There are people losing their jobs, and where are the young kids going to go? The government has cut the funding.

Hon. D. K. Drum — They'll get training.

Mr MELHEM — They cannot get in, because you have taken \$1.2 billion out of the TAFE system, so they have nowhere to go. It is about time that this government woke up to itself. It will probably be too late anyway because we have only 86 days before the election, but I am sure that Victorians have woken up to the government. I am sure that Victorians will be

casting their votes on 29 November, and they will judge the government as the do-nothing government for jobs in this state.

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — I rise to make a contribution to the debate on this motion, which will be opposed and is misconceived in many of the assumptions it makes, particularly in relation to suggestions about the jobs plan. In terms of the repeated inaccurate phrases about a supposed \$1.2 billion in TAFE cuts, in fact the record is that over our four years we put in much more money than Labor put in, and we have invested not only in TAFE but in the most important jobs plan you could produce, which is the Victorian budget.

On this matter there is a clear divide between the coalition parties and Labor, particularly when it lines up with the Greens, as it did most recently in the shambles of the former federal government we had to endure. There is a divide not only in our economic philosophies but also in our records in office at state and federal levels. Within our jobs plan, the Victorian budget, we have persisted in delivering surpluses in every single one of our four years, building up to an ability to deliver with this budget a record \$27 billion in infrastructure spending. There is not only more money than has ever been put into job-creating infrastructure in this state but also more money for services that are essential to our quality of life in Victoria, including health, education, tourism, livability, social services, sport and recreation, and veterans affairs.

These are the things this government has carefully administered. These are the realms of government, and the budget is a document the Labor Party does not want to know about and does not want to talk about. It did not ask any questions of the Treasurer in the other place for I do not know how many weeks after our state budget was passed — and passed in record time. That is something Labor ought to get its head around, because if there is one thing that clearly puts those who sit on this side of the chamber apart from those in the Labor-Greens alliance, it is that those opposite do not know how to manage money. They do not know how to budget. They do not how to create the infrastructure and the conditions that enable both private sector projects and also government projects to be delivered on time and on budget.

Let us look briefly at the situation in relation to our record in office. The Bracks and Brumby governments have a record of failure in relation to the delivery of major projects and also in relation to the administration of important opportunities to create wealth in the state, such as the \$3 billion lost on the sale of poker machine

entitlements. These mistakes have been well documented. I do not necessarily want to rehash them, but when you put in context where the government finds itself in relation to job-creating programs it is important to remember Labor's record in office, because the money that was poorly spent on a desalination plant that does not deliver any water, because it is not needed, and also on a north-south pipeline that is also not needed was to the tune of \$1 billion.

We can look at what in economic terms is called the opportunity cost. The opportunity cost of Labor's failures lies in the opportunities that were lost at the time to build hospitals and to invest in projects that not only create jobs in construction — because whenever you spend government money in construction you will obviously create jobs on those construction sites — but also answer the question of what your priorities are, what you choose to build and what you choose to allocate scarce taxpayers resources to in relation to those decisions. That is where we, as members of The Nationals, have been very proud to deliver with our coalition partners, the Liberals, programs such as the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund, which has enabled the job-creation opportunities from little projects to large projects in the regional areas I represent with my colleagues currently in this chamber, Mr Ramsay as Acting President and Minister Drum, a former Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development. As well, Ms Tierney — —

Mr Barber interjected.

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN — Mr Barber, at the moment you represent Northern Metropolitan Region, and when you attempt to cuddle up to farmers, as you do, to see if you can, I think for the third time in a row, win the seat I presently hold, you show that your views are formed in Northern Metropolitan Region. The voters will decide how that seat goes, but what I will stand on is the record of this government. I am very proud to have been part of this government of coalition parties that has put together a program such as the Regional Growth Fund. I will talk about some of the things that have been delivered in western Victoria and in other parts of the state. The Regional Growth Fund has delivered about 1500 jobs, and it has leveraged between \$440 million — —

Hon. D. K. Drum interjected.

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN — Yes, it has delivered about 1500 projects, I should say, from small to large ones. At this stage about \$450 million of its \$500 million in the first term has been spent, and from

that amount it has leveraged about 5600 regional jobs through job creation projects. As I say, these are projects that have come from the community. They have been put through the processes at Regional Development Victoria (RDV), at times in conjunction with the processes of federal departments and particularly those of local councils, although under the Putting Locals First program projects can go directly to RDV and to the government in case, as sometimes occurs, councils are not prioritising the programs the way the community would like them to do. These directly driven community projects are job creating projects which build the infrastructure and livability of these regional cities, and that is something this government is very proud of and is something it will take to the next election so that it can pursue the implementation of this important program over the next four years of its currently funded life.

To answer Mr Barber's earlier interjection, some of the projects have been delivered in Ballarat. In the three months to July the unemployment rate in the Ballarat region was 3.7 per cent, which was lower than the approximately 6.5 per cent unemployment rate for regional Victoria. There are now 5200 more people employed in the Ballarat region than when Labor left office, and that answers one part of Ms Tierney's motion. Some of the job creating investments include \$30 million for the Ballarat West employment zone; \$14.1 million for the new railway crossing loop at Rowsley; \$90.4 million to boost Ballarat Health Services, increasing Ballarat's capacity to meet current and future demand for its services; \$38 million for the Ballarat link road development connecting Midland Highway, Western Highway, Remembrance Drive and the Ballarat West growth area; \$1.6 million for additional train services to Wendouree station; \$8.4 million to build a new police station and emergency services hub in Ballarat West; \$7.8 million for modernising Ballarat High School; \$42 million to duplicate 18 kilometres of the Western Highway between Beaufort and Buangor — and Mr Ramsay, Mr Scott Turner, The Nationals candidate for Ripon, I and others have been advocating very strongly for that funding and for further funding for the Western Highway.

I will pause for a moment and, in relation to election choices, speak about the individual we have in Mr Scott Turner. In terms of this very motion, Mr Turner is someone who in his professional life works in the area of employment in regional manufacturing; he works for Gason in Ararat, where he was born and raised and where he is standing for office. Gason has supported his decision to make the transition to being a member of Parliament, should he be elected. Not only has he

worked in Gason in a professional capacity, but he has also spent time mentoring young people in his capacity as a member of the local learning and employment network board. In that role he has shown the leadership he would take to Parliament if he were elected.

Those are the sorts of people who get attracted particularly to The Nationals and to the coalition in general. They often come with the life skills and experience of being in business and being local community leaders, which enables them to make a contribution when they are elected. They are not put through some sausage factory involving working in labour law firms or becoming union officers — and I make the distinction between the union officers and the people who work on the shop floor. I am referring to people who come through the Labor university clubs and then join a union to get a few months experience in the union before they go off into the Labor policy branches, to then fill the Labor Party parliamentary benches and, when they get into government, to send the state or the country into economic disarray, because they have either spent all their time backstabbing each other and fighting or they have introduced white elephant projects such as the desalination plant and myki or have sold pokie machine licences for \$3 billion less than they could have obtained. That is their legacy; that is the Labor opportunity cost.

Hon. D. K. Drum interjected.

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN — Yes, we have our fair share of AFL footballers in this party, including the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Mr Drum. If you can make it in AFL, if you can survive the cut and thrust of getting to the top of a sport, and if you can survive in a team environment, then you are a worthy person to stand in this Parliament. That is the sort of people we attract to our party and seek to have represented.

Our jobs plan is our budget and our record. We have delivered not just in Ballarat. Ms Tierney and I share an office in Geelong, where there is another series of important projects, which Mr Ramsay is well aware of, and I will list some of them. There is \$15 million for the Geelong cultural precinct redevelopment. The projects have also included support for the acquisition of Geelong's T&G building recently and support for Deakin University's desire to be a regional campus university in a campus town to attract the thriving culture seen in other international campus towns, including some of the best known university towns in the world, such as the regional locations of Oxford, Yale and Princeton universities. With Geelong's north-facing waterfront, there is a huge opportunity. I commend the mayor, Darryn Lyons, for his leadership.

There is no doubt that Geelong is facing challenges. I am one who believes manufacturing has a bright and strong future and is something Australia and Victoria should continue to invest in. I note that much of Mr Melhem's contribution related to the importance of retaining manufacturing; I share those concerns with Mr Melhem. It is important that these issues cross the political divide. When cities such as Geelong face these challenges, it is important that as community leaders we all work together, including Ms Tierney with her knowledge of the car industry, to try to do what can be done with government policy settings and in terms of procurement to ensure as many jobs as possible can be created.

The coalition's record in three and a half years of government includes: a \$25 million commitment to the further upgrade of Simonds Stadium, which Mr Drum, the Minister for Sport and Recreation, was proud to talk about earlier today; \$5 million for the planning and development of Avalon Airport; \$50 million for a rail link from Melbourne and Geelong to Avalon Airport; and \$80 million for the expansion of Geelong Hospital. Geelong Hospital will be rebadged University Hospital Geelong as part of Barwon Health's recognition of the role played by Deakin University, which the government supports.

I commend the Minister for Health, Mr Davis, for the leadership he has displayed in supporting the service Barwon Health provides to its community and the research conducted by Deakin University. The development of Epworth Geelong and the Geelong Centre for Emerging Infectious Diseases and the continued role of the CSIRO and other research bodies in the area will continue to provide cutting-edge medical research that will not only benefit the Geelong community but also western Victoria, the state and the nation.

Mr Barber — You haven't mentioned renewables yet.

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN — I have spoken about renewables in many of my speeches in this house, including my maiden speech. The government has talked about an aspect of the renewable energy industry that the Greens are not prepared to acknowledge, which is that all energy comes with a cost. Renewables should be encouraged. I have been a passionate supporter of small-scale renewables that do not have the amenity impact that large-scale wind farms can have. However, I am a supporter of large-scale wind power, where it is supported by the local community, which is something for which Mr Barber has scant regard.

He would not know a local community if he stepped on it or sat on it. He would not know the local community that he pretends to talk about, because he does not know its wishes. He does not know about the divisive effects of the previous government's wind farm policies. It did not consider local issues on wind. It pretended that all the wind turbines were wonderful creations that had no adverse amenity impacts. A more balanced approach needed to be brought to the policy table in relation to renewable energy.

Mr Barber — What, no new wind farms?

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN — Mr Barber says, 'No new wind farms'. That is misleading. There are new wind farms. I think Mr Barber is referring to the 2K policy, which is the state government's policy that was brought in — —

Hon. D. M. Davis — Labor would rip that up and put them through towns. That is what Labor is going to.

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN — That is what Labor would do. Our policy still allows turbines within that 2K buffer if the affected land owners provide their consent. That is something that Mr Barber would know nothing about. He would not know anything about consideration. Then he runs around conducting a scare campaign in relation to coal seam gas. The government, its ministers and I have clearly placed on the record that we would consider the approval of using coal seam gas very slowly and carefully and place the balance of doubt with rural farming communities, which we know and understand. However, we again hear misleading assertions from the Greens that we have not provided a moratorium in relation to fracking, that we do not have legislation before the house in relation to banning BTEX chemicals and that we do not understand our communities.

We are consistent. We will respect our farming communities on all approvals, including renewable energy and the consideration of coal seam gas. I am on the record as saying in 2011 that until you know your aquifers in western Victoria you cannot give consideration to coal seam gas. We will not create jobs in one sector that harm another sector by creating divisions in rural communities. We will create a suite of balanced policies that respect local decision-making, support local interests, provide for community processes and put in place planning controls to allow these complex and divisive issues to be worked out fairly. The environment, local community issues and job creation will all be considered.

Another key policy that I am proud this government has implemented is the establishment of the national headquarters of the National Disability Insurance Agency in Geelong. Premier Napthine, who has had a personal involvement in this issue, and the Minister for Disability Services, Ms Wooldridge, led the community advocacy. The federal Labor government did not give the state coalition government credit for its efforts in this regard, but the Premier was always prepared to extend a bipartisan arm to the then Gillard federal government. He provided leadership and placed \$25 million on the table to ensure that the national headquarters was based in Geelong, a city with a significant history with regard to this issue, both in the government and the non-government sector.

We have also provided \$27 million for a new secondary college at Torquay. This was a project that was deemed to be too hard by the previous government. However, the hardworking Liberal member for South Barwon in the Assembly, Andrew Katos, delivered that project, as well as \$22 million to build the new train station at Grovedale, which will serve that growing community, which I now reside in.

We have also contributed a number of other government projects, including cutting WorkCover premiums by 2 per cent from 1 July. Payroll tax is a tax on jobs. The Australian Democrats and other senators blocked the passage of the GST in the Senate, which prevented a deal on payroll back in 1999. We have also introduced the fire services property levy.

The government is very proud of its record. It acknowledges that there have been challenges in the sector, but it does not make excuses. We have delivered a AAA budget, and we are the only state to have delivered that. I think Western Australia's budget was recently downgraded AA1. We stand on our record. We stand prepared to deliver beyond the next election if we are fortunate enough to be in the good graces of the citizens of Victoria come November 2014. I oppose the motion on the table.

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I wish to exercise my right of reply as the person who moved this very important motion on the unemployment crisis in this state in the last parliamentary sitting week. What have we learnt since that time, which was only some 10 days ago? We have learnt that 25 jobs have gone from the Target headquarters in Geelong. We have learnt that 483 jobs have been announced to go at the Coles headquarters in Melbourne. We have also found out that Alstom, a company based in Ballarat, is now going to have to fight for its survival. This government is not committed to local procurement; it is not

committed to local jobs for local people. These are the things that concern us. It is not just the current level of unemployment, whether it be in the adult or the youth sector; it is also the ongoing rampage happening in terms of our economy and the flow-on in respect of what is happening in our communities right across the state. Whether it is in small communities, regional centres or metropolitan Melbourne, unemployment is a major crisis facing this state.

What have we learnt about those opposite from this debate? What have we learnt about government members from this debate? We have learnt a few things, but none of them is an enormous surprise. What we have learnt — and it has been reinforced today as well as last sitting week — is that this government is in absolute denial about the situation that confronts most people wanting a job in this state. This government is even questioning the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data. It is refusing to acknowledge those statistics and inferring that every time someone from this side of the house wants to talk about unemployment statistics they are simply making them up. The government will not even accept the authority of the ABS. It is very difficult to deal with a government that is in furious denial.

The government is also in denial with respect to acknowledging every headline and every story in every media outlet in this country, whether they appear on our computer screens, TVs or the front page of every newspaper in this country — in every country town as well. We see that journalists and the community are highly aware of the unemployment crisis we face, but we have government members in absolute denial. On the last occasion we debated this motion we heard government members refuse to acknowledge the views of senior economists. In fact government members claimed that the views of highly respected economists were absolutely wrong.

We have a government that is in denial. If you are in denial, it means you do not accept there is a problem. If you do not understand that there is a problem, then you cannot work towards a solution. That is the dilemma we face. This government is not interested whatsoever in long-term, skilled, sustainable jobs. It keeps on making references to a whole range of other things that might be happening, but its examples include people who would be lucky to pick up casual work in the vicinity of 6 hours per week. That is hardly enough work to keep themselves, let alone their families, together and maintain a reasonable livelihood. This is the sort of government we have — one that wants to drive down the living standards of people who really need a job.

This government cannot plan. It does not understand the importance and the need for transitional labour market planning. It has an ideological problem with labour market planning. It does not understand that government has a very important interventionist role when things are difficult and when there are huge challenges. At those times it is government's responsibility, in partnership with other stakeholders in the economy, to sit down and work out how to rectify the situation. The very thing you need to do is to sit down and work out the labour market planning processes that are needed to provide a skilled workforce that can move into jobs. For jobs to be there, you need to have economic and business confidence, and that is what this government is failing to achieve.

We know from the contact we have had, as well as the public statements now being made across the state, that there is a severe lack of confidence in this government when it comes to the economy and indeed the much-needed investment required for this state to move forward. When pressed about jobs this government talks about what it may get around to doing if re-elected; however, it has barely turned a sod on anything. How is anyone meant to believe it when it has not done anything over the last three and a half years? This is one of the major contributors to high unemployment levels because there has not been an infrastructure program in this state for the last three and a half years. There has been no work for people to go to. How many people do I come across who say, 'I have not heard the phone ring for weeks or months now'. They are sitting there waiting for work, and the phone is not ringing, because the jobs are simply not there.

The most difficult situations are now coming to the fore, and people are saying, 'The jobs are simply not there. Let's get on with the election and build some infrastructure so that we have some work'. The government continues to stick its head in the sand and abrogate its responsibility to Victorians. It continues to trot out the same lines and sit there in comfy chairs while the unemployment queue grows longer and longer. The scary thing is that even if the unemployment rate was 30 per cent or 50 per cent, the Napthine government would still be trotting out the same lines of denial. It simply does not care. At the end of the day it does not understand industry policy, it does not understand that there is a lack of business confidence in the state and it does not care about Victorians, because, if it did, we would not be in this situation.

If you need a job in Victoria, under the Napthine government you are on your own. If you are a young

Victorian in this state wanting a job, not only do you not have one, but you will not have a chance to go to TAFE and you will not get to university. Indeed your whole future has been stripped from you. Bring on 29 November. We will work together to make this a great state again.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 18

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

Noes, 20

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

Pairs

Viney, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
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Motion negatived.

Mr Lenders — President, I have two points of order regarding Mr Barber's bill, the Members of Parliament (Serious Misconduct) Amendment Bill 2011. I will raise the first point, and then if I can, the second.

Firstly, if I remember correctly, the bill was debated in this house in May 2012 and when we got to the end of general business time Mr Barber was 1 minute or so into his summing up. The point of order I raise is almost one of procedural fairness. For Mr Barber's own reasons he has brought the bill back on now, but we are now in a situation where this bill was considered by the house a long time ago, we have a number of new members in the house and there really is no opportunity under our standing orders for anybody to reflect or comment on the bill. The debate froze in May 2012; now one speaker has the right to continue speaking on it and then it will be put to a vote. Regarding my first point of order, President, I ask: is my interpretation of the standing orders correct and is there another option for debate on this bill to be resumed?

Hon. D. M. Davis — On the point of order, President, the member has raised a number of points which are worthy of consideration. There is a second but related point. With the effluxion of time a great deal has occurred, not the least being that the mover of the reasoned amendment has left the chamber and gone to a different place. It would be novel — to say the minimum — to have such a motion. I can conceive of a case where somebody may have died and a motion could still be on the notice paper in their name and they could in effect move the motion from the grave in this sort of arrangement. There is a genuine issue about whether the reasoned amendment can stand as a part of this process.

I understand that some Labor members may wish to move such a motion, and the government would have no objection if a different member was to bring the reasoned amendment forward quite legitimately. However, it is odd to have a reasoned amendment shackled to a bill in this way because of the long effluxion of time, during which the mover of the reasoned amendment has moved on and, having moved on in that way, cannot be here to advocate one way or the other for the reasoned amendment. At a minimum we need to look closely at what the standing orders say about this and what the practice is.

I have been in this chamber for a long time, and I have never seen a reasoned amendment or a motion of any type — or a bill — proceed when the member who moved it has left the chamber permanently in the way Mr Pakula did when he became the member for Lyndhurst in the Assembly. We are moving into novel territory. It is in part due to the unique circumstances that I am pointing to but it is also in part due to some of the points that Mr Lenders has raised about the effluxion of time.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I thank both members for their points of order, which are worthy of consideration by the Chair in terms of the vote that is expected to take place as part of our proceedings today.

I will first address Mr Davis's point in respect of a member having moved a reasoned amendment but then having left this chamber. On the last occasion this matter was considered Mr Pakula moved a reasoned amendment. He was the sponsor of that reasoned amendment, and now he has left the chamber. From my point of view, if a motion has been moved and is within the consideration of the chamber, and this reasoned amendment was part of the debate in the chamber on that occasion, I do not believe that that proposition fails because the member who moved it has left the chamber. At any rate, in the case of Mr Pakula other

sponsors from the Labor Party might well have picked up that reasoned amendment in the event that there was a change of personnel.

Irrespective of whether there was somebody who would do that, the fact is that the proposition has been put and debated on the floor of the chamber, and therefore it is, if you like, the property of the house. It is within the capacity of the house to debate the matter and to discharge it without the original sponsor being present in the house. Indeed there is no right of reply to a procedural motion of the nature Mr Pakula moved on that occasion — the reasoned amendment — so it is not even as if somebody else has to take up a right of reply on that proposition to prosecute that matter.

From my point of view, it is perfectly okay for a vote to proceed despite the fact that Mr Pakula has left the chamber. Coming back to the point Mr Lenders made, and I appreciate that Mr Davis also has some concerns in this respect, we are in an unusual circumstance because of the amount of time that has passed since this matter was previously considered and the fact that Mr Barber has started his right of reply and is now looking to complete that right of reply. A right of reply terminates a debate and does not allow other members to participate in the debate any further — the matter is concluded and would proceed to a vote.

I thank Mr Lenders for the courtesy of flagging with me that he might wish to explore this matter given the circumstances of the proposition before the house. From the research that I have requested and the advice that I have been provided with, I have formed the view that there is nothing in the standing orders to prevent the bill from being returned for the consideration of the house after a lengthy period since it was first debated.

The point to which the proposition had progressed is not really relevant at this time as described by our standing orders. As I have indicated, Mr Barber is already 1 minute into his reply, and that is the point the debate was at when it was interrupted for statements on reports and papers. There are other instances where we have had motions that have been part debated by the house and then basically left and picked up on another occasion for further debate.

The defining position that Mr Lenders has raised on this one is that the debate is at the point of right of reply after a considerable passage of time and therefore if in the opinion of members of the house circumstances have changed — or indeed people have changed, which is Mr Davis's point of view; there are new members of the house — there is no further opportunity for members to perhaps make some summary of their

position on the debate and to indicate to the house how they will vote after such a period of time. In other words, there is no opportunity for them to reflect on whether there is a change in their position as a result of that effluxion of time.

Notwithstanding that, after an initial check of both Council practice and rulings, Erskine May and the House of Representatives practice, there is no guidance to suggest that Mr Barber's proposition cannot proceed and there is no opportunity for me to allow other members of the house to make comment at this time because we are at the right-of-reply stage, save for the fact that the house could determine by leave to grant a short period of time to perhaps the leaders of respective parties or other lead speakers to make any comments that might bring the house up to date with their views on this proposition. That would be by leave of the house, and I am quite prepared to entertain such a request, but I have no opportunity myself to direct that other members can participate in this debate at the stage of this proposition.

Hon. D. M. Davis — On a further point of order, President, and point of elucidation, Mr Pakula was in the chamber and moved the reasoned amendment. He is no longer here; Mr Melhem is now in the chamber. As I understand it, Mr Melhem would be asked to vote on this matter without having the opportunity to speak. That seems to me to raise a whole series of questions. This again comes from the long effluxion of time —

Mr Lenders interjected.

Hon. D. M. Davis — That's right, but the most stark is Mr Melhem, so the long effluxion of time raises all sorts of inconsistencies and all sorts of odd outcomes, and this is something that I think needs to be reflected upon.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I thank the Leader of the Government for those comments, and I accept the proposition that he puts — that is, that some members of this house were not here at the time the original debate was conducted.

This house considers a number of matters from time to time, and, as I said, some of those are matters that may be held over for one reason or another and that might create a similar situation where a member is perhaps not a participant in the full debate on a matter or does not participate at all.

I come back to the standing orders and the processes that are outlined in the other resources that we consult in these sorts of matters. The fact is that nothing I have available would suggest that I should reopen the debate

or that I have the capacity to reopen the debate — except by way of the house determining that by way of a motion being moved, by leave. I do not have the ability to reopen the debate. I accept that in a motion seeking leave the very proposition that the Leader of the Government puts — that four members were not party to the original debate — may well be one of the propositions used to persuade the house to pursue some additional commentary on this legislation, but I am not in a position to direct the house in that way.

In this context I am also of the view that whilst a member may not have been here at the time of the original debate, these matters are listed on the notice paper. If a member were interested in informing their vote on a matter, then it would be appropriate for them to do some research in *Hansard* as to how that matter was canvassed on that occasion and establish what position they might take on the vote. The apparatus is there to do that, but as I said we would rely on a motion seeking leave if members believed there was a need on this occasion to recommit, as it were, this proposition to at least some limited debate.

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (SERIOUS MISCONDUCT) AMENDMENT BILL 2011

Second reading

Debate resumed from 23 May 2012; motion of Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan); and amendment standing in the name of Ms MIKAKOS:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted with the view of inserting in their place 'so much of the standing orders be suspended to enable the contents of the bill to be referred to the Environment and Planning Legislation Committee for inquiry, consideration and report and that the bill not be read a second time until the Council has considered the final report of the committee on the bill'.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Before I call Mr Barber, can I get an indication from either the government or the opposition if they wish to pursue, by leave, any further commentary on this legislation?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — No.

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — No.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The reason I ask is that I would have held Mr Barber's right of reply until afterwards so that he could take any further comments into account in his right of reply. However, given that there is no leave motion being sought to pursue this matter, I call on Mr Barber.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — As noted, it has been nearly two years since I first brought this bill to the house and around 18 months or so since we commenced debate on it. Events during that time have borne out both the diagnosis of the problem that led to the bill being presented and the need — in fact the necessity — for this bill to be passed. The bill creates an offence which, if a prima facie case can be made out, would be a trigger for IBAC to commence an investigation. That is, if there were a prima facie case for dishonest conduct or a reckless breach of public trust, plus the other necessary element, such a breach would represent an indictable offence. The purpose of this bill is to create that indictable offence. An offence under this bill would land right in the middle of the square that would trigger an IBAC investigation. The speaker for the government — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I do not think there is any problem at this point, but given the circumstances of this proposition, the debate we have had and the rulings I have made today, I would counsel Mr Barber that — —

An honourable member interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Short would be good, too, but it is more a case of sticking to what was covered in the previous debate and not opening up any new material, which would be difficult for the house in the context of members being constrained by not being able to participate further. As I said, I think Mr Barber is on safe ground at this point, but I provide that counsel.

Mr BARBER — I have returned and read the debate as it occurred at the time, and that is what I am referring to here. The speaker for the government, Mr O'Donohue, and the lead speaker for the opposition, Mr Pakula, both qualified lawyers, purported to be confused by the elements of the bill and what it did. As I have just explained, there is no reason to be confused. If the question is how this bill interacts with IBAC, which was a question raised by the government and opposition speakers, then it is actually very clear. The offence created by this bill would qualify as a trigger for an IBAC investigation. Secondly, the bill makes prosecutors and the courts responsible for pursuing any wrongdoer against a provision of this act.

Cognisant of the advice you have just given me, President, I would just briefly say that events in the time since this bill was first presented have shown that the rules for MPs are not tight enough and MPs cannot enforce them on themselves — certainly not in a balance of power Parliament, anyway.

Parliament's processes, including privileges committees and other sorts of motions, have been used to protect an MP whose vote the government needed until that vote was no longer needed and then the same processes were used in an attempt to expel that MP overriding the voters' decision. This was a specific issue raised for the opposition by the member for Lyndhurst in the other place, Mr Pakula, when he was a member for Western Metropolitan Region in this place. He said, 'We don't want the courts getting involved in the business of Parliament'. Unfortunately we have seen, and it is occurring as we speak in another place, a very good example of why we would prefer some independent authority to deal with the most serious breaches of the MPs code of conduct, and that is what my bill does.

Furthermore, since a proven serious breach of the bill attracts a five-year jail term then that offence if proven would lead to the MP's seat being automatically vacated as per the requirements of the constitution. It would not be a debate amongst MPs as to whether they should expel a member from the Parliament, because if the member was found guilty of a serious offence as outlined in the bill, they would have been charged and convicted of an offence attracting up to five years jail and their seat would automatically be vacated. The outcome of that question would not be subject to shifting political allegiances.

I think I have answered very clearly the objections that the lead speakers for the government and the opposition made in addressing my bill. Both gentlemen are qualified and experienced lawyers, and frankly we are all becoming a bit more experienced with these matters as every day goes on. I believe there has been every opportunity for both the government and the opposition to reconsider their previously stated position on the bill. I am also happy to support the reasoned amendment, because I am always advocating that legislation that comes before this Parliament should receive great scrutiny. We will support the amendment, and then we will see how the motion fares. If the bill were to pass its second reading, I can assure you, President, that I am ready, willing and able to discuss the clauses in more detail if I am required at the table.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will deal with the reasoned amendment first. The question is that the reasoned amendment standing in the name of Ms Mikakos be agreed to. As the Leader of the Government indicated, it was originally proposed by Mr Pakula, who is now the member for Lyndhurst in the Assembly. Ms Mikakos is now the Labor Party sponsor for the reasoned amendment.

Hon. D. M. Davis — On a point of order, President, has Mr Pakula been consulted about whether he is happy for his role to be taken in this regard?

Mr Lenders — On the point of order, President, given your earlier ruling the question is not of particular relevance to the standing orders, but for the edification of the chamber Mr Pakula is very comfortable with it proceeding in this format.

House divided on amendment:

Ayes, 18

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

Noes, 20

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

Pairs

Viney, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
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Amendment negated.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 3

Barber, Mr	Pennicuik, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)
Hartland, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	

Noes, 35

Atkinson, Mr	Lovell, Ms
Coote, Mrs	Melhem, Mr
Crozier, Ms	Mikakos, Ms
Dalla-Riva, Mr	Millar, Mrs
Darveniza, Ms	O'Brien, Mr D. D. (<i>Teller</i>)
Davis, Mr D.	O'Brien, Mr D. R. J.
Drum, Mr	O'Donohue, Mr
Eideh, Mr	Ondarchie, Mr
Elasmar, Mr	Peulich, Mrs
Elsbury, Mr	Pulford, Ms
Finn, Mr	Ramsay, Mr
Guy, Mr	Ronalds, Mr
Jennings, Mr	Scheffer, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Koch, Mr	Somyurek, Mr
Kronberg, Mrs	Tarlamis, Mr
Leane, Mr	Tee, Mr
Lenders, Mr	Tierney, Ms
Lewis, Ms	

Motion negated.

JUMPS RACING

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house takes note of the petition bearing 532 signatures from certain citizens of Victoria requesting that the Legislative Council of Victoria call on the Minister for Racing to intervene and end steeplechase and hurdle racing in Victoria tabled in the house on 5 August 2014.

The petition reads:

To the Legislative Council of Victoria:

The petition of the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses draws to the attention of the house the decision on 21 January 2010 of Racing Victoria Limited (RVL) to grant a reprieve to jumps racing in Victoria if it meets conditions set by RVL.

Horses in Victoria suffer horrific injuries and die while participating in this so-called 'sport'. Jumps racing (which is illegal under NSW animal cruelty legislation) has a long history of deaths and injuries of horses from falls. The 2009 season was particularly bad resulting in the deaths of 10 horses despite numerous reviews and modifications. Many more horses sustain injuries and fail to reappear.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council of Victoria call on the Minister for Racing to intervene and end steeplechase and hurdle racing (jumps racing) in Victoria.

That petition, tabled on 5 August, was signed by 532 Victorian citizens. The Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses, which collected the signatures on the petition I am asking the house to take note of today, is collecting signatures for a further petition which will be tabled later this year or possibly next year. It has collected a further 4200 signatures. Close to 5000 signatures so far have been collected from citizens of Victoria calling on the council to call on the Minister for Racing to intervene and end jumps racing.

I should start by explaining that jumps racing, which is its colloquial name, is a sport which requires horses in Victoria to gallop and jump up to 33 steeples in steeplechase and up to 12 hurdles in hurdles racing. Races can be more than 5 kilometres long for steeplechase and 3.5 kilometres for hurdles. A large number of falls occur in the latter stages of the races, when horses are exhausted. People listening to the races being called will often hear the race caller saying, 'The horses are tiring', and that is often when a horse falls and is killed.

The jumps racing season runs from March to September. This year the venues were Warrnambool, where there were 8 meetings with around 15 events; Sandown, with 6 meetings and around 11 events; Hamilton, with 3 scheduled meetings and around 7 events; Ballarat, with 2 scheduled meetings and

around 4 events, although some were cancelled; Moe, which had 5 scheduled meetings and 10 events, and some were cancelled; Casterton, with 3 meetings and 7 events; Bendigo, with 1 meeting with around 6 events; and Coleraine and Cranbourne.

Some racetracks have discontinued jumps racing. For example, Flemington and Moonee Valley used to hold jumps races but do not anymore, and in fact Sandown is now the only metropolitan course in Victoria that conducts jumps racing.

Victoria and South Australia are the only two states that continue to allow jumps racing as part of the racing calendar. It is interesting to note that Queensland stopped jumps racing in 1903 and Western Australia stopped it in 1941. The sport was banned in New South Wales in 1997, and the last race held in Tasmania was in 2007.

It is now more than 20 years — in fact 23 years — since the Senate recommended that jumps racing be phased out. In 1991 the Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare recommended that jumps racing be phased out over a three-year period, concluding:

Based on evidence received during the inquiry, the committee has serious concerns about the welfare of horses participating in jump races. These concerns are based on the significant probability of a horse suffering serious injury or even death as a result of participating in these events and, in particular, steeplechasing. This concern is exacerbated by evidence suggesting that, even with improvements to the height and placing of jumps, training and education the fatality rate would remain constant. The committee, therefore, can only conclude that there is an inherent conflict between these activities and animal welfare. Accordingly, the committee is of the view that the relevant state governments should phase out jump racing over the next three years.

As I said, jumps racing now only exists in Victoria and South Australia, and since the Senate inquiry in 1991 there have been a number of reviews in Victoria. Despite these reviews, horses' deaths and injuries to horses have continued and the implementation of new safety measures and revised key performance indicators (KPIs) have failed. While horses suffer the greatest toll, jockeys are also at risk and have suffered injuries from this dangerous so-called sport.

If jumps racing were banned in Victoria it probably would not be viable for it continue in South Australia. In fact the South Australian Jockey Club announced on 15 August this year that it wants to stop holding jumps racing at its Morphettville racecourse due to public backlash against it.

I pay particular tribute to the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses, which collected the

signatures for this petition, for its dedication and persistence in campaigning for the ending of jumps racing in Victoria and South Australia. It has been dedicated to this task for many years, as have I. While I have been in Parliament I have also been campaigning for the previous government and this government to end jumps racing in Victoria, because the majority of Victorians want to see jumps racing ended. We know 8 or 9 out of 10 Victorians do not support jumps racing and want to see it finished. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Animals Australia, Animal Liberation and the Humane Society International all oppose jumps racing, as do the majority of Victorians, as I said.

I will mention some of the statistics. Every season horses continue to suffer horrific injuries or are killed in jumps racing events in Victoria. Jockeys are also at risk and have suffered from this deadly sport. Animals Australia reports that since 2000, 114 horses have been killed in jumps races and trials in Victoria. Of course that obviously refers to horses that are killed as a result of jumps racing — that is, they are killed on the track after they have suffered horrific injuries such as a broken leg or a broken neck. I have seen this happen — I have seen footage of it — as have many others, and it is very distressing. It should not be allowed to continue in a state where the citizens are interested in animal welfare. It is not in the interests of animal welfare to allow jumps racing to continue.

A 15-year study conducted between 1989 and 2004 into the catastrophic injuries in flats and jumps racehorses by Dr Lisa Boden at the University of Melbourne clearly showed that jumps racing is far more dangerous than flat racing. The death rate of horses during jumps racing is almost 19 times higher than for races on the flat. The overall death rate for jumps horses is one death for every 115 horses that start in a race, and for flats racehorses it is one death for every 2150 horses that start in a race. Catastrophic limb injuries are found to be 18 times more likely in jumps racing. Cranial, meaning head, and vertebral, meaning back and neck, injury is found to be 121 times more likely in jumps racing, and sudden death is found to be 3.5 times more likely in jumps racing.

Anyone who has been following the issue and campaigning to end jumps racing would be very familiar with the types of catastrophic injuries — horses breaking their legs and their necks on the track and suffering horrific injuries — which we should not be allowing to continue. It is not an unfamiliar sight in a jumps event for that sort of catastrophic injury to occur and for the green screen to be brought out and the horse euthanased on the track.

I mentioned earlier that 114 horses have been killed in jumps racing around Australia since 2000. 'Around Australia' means only Victoria and South Australia because jumps racing is not held anywhere else. That means 114 horses have been killed in Victoria and South Australia. That does not include a lot of horses that are injured in jumps racing that may not actually die on the track but are never seen again because of the injury they have sustained.

The petition mentioned the catastrophic 2009 year. The statistics for 2009 were 44 falls in 32 races, nine deaths from 56 races and two deaths in trials. That year's catastrophic figures for death and injury to horses prompted a review by Racing Victoria. In fact Racing Victoria had decided that in 2010 it would end jumps racing. That was a welcome decision, and people were very excited about it —

Mr Koch — Which people?

Ms PENNICUIK — Victorian citizens were very excited to hear that jumps racing would be finished, but unfortunately that decision did not go ahead. I said that prior to this happening there had been a review with KPIs and changes to the jumps et cetera put in place that were all meant to make jumps racing safer, but these things had not done so. Racing Victoria had decided to abolish jumps racing at the end of 2010, but it caved in and decided to continue with even more changes and KPIs.

In making its decision Racing Victoria acknowledged the inherent dangers of jumps racing, citing that there had been no reduction in incident rates despite the implementation of the recommendations of six major reviews over the course of several years. Despite one of the worst seasons for horseracing fatalities occurring in 2009, Racing Victoria's chairman at the time, Michael Duffy, announced that if the industry could meet yet another raft of conditions, the sport could continue. The conditions set, in yet another futile attempt to lend this activity the appearance of safety, were a 50 per cent reduction in deaths based on the terrible figures of 2009 and a cut in the rate of falls to 3 per cent of starters.

These stringent conditions would have allowed for five horses to be killed on the track each year and every season, apparently an acceptable state of affairs. I do not see that as an acceptable state of affairs. The number of other horses destroyed later because of injuries on the track through falls or over-riding is not included in this figure and is unknown.

Unfortunately the then Minister for Racing, Mr Hulls, did not intervene and hold Racing Victoria to its

original decision to stop jumps racing in 2010. That is a big shame because it would have prevented the deaths of and injuries to horses in the years since then. There were six deaths of horses in 2011, three in 2012, four in 2013 and four this year in Victoria. There have been other deaths in South Australia and in trials.

The horses killed in Victoria this year include Viva Delspec, which was killed on 3 April, just two weeks into the 2014 jumps racing season. It was a seven-year-old gelding which faltered going over the 17th jump in the steeplechase at Warrnambool and was killed. Seventeen jumps is a long haul for a horse. Viva Delspec began his jumps racing career on 11 May 2012, and just under two years later it ended with his death in this race in Warrnambool. I draw members' attention to the kind of description often put in the media that 'the horse faltered going over the 17th jump' as if it were the horse's fault that it did not take the jump properly and that is why it was killed.

The second horse killed in jumps racing this season was called Show Dancer, which was killed at Sandown Racecourse. Show Dancer flipped over the hurdle and was subsequently killed. Two other horses also fell in that race, one crashing through the ring of the first jump. It was distressing to see the footage of this race, where so much carnage was visited upon the horses, and there is a particularly distressing image of the horse coming down on its front leg. These are the sorts of things that should not be allowed to continue in the racing industry.

The third horse killed in Victoria was called Elms. It was killed on 25 May in a hurdle race at Casterton. Earlier that week the South Australian Jockey Club, which had also seen some horses killed in races and trials in South Australia, released a statement saying:

Victoria will soon be the only state in Australia where jumps racing is legal, according to the former head of the South Australian Jockey Club, Steve Ploubidis.

'I think that jumps racing in South Australia, the days are numbered', he told ABC's 7.30 program.

His comments come as another horse was killed ...

and that horse was Show Dancer, which was killed at Sandown after —

... catapulting into the air and landing on its neck.

The rider was thrown clear and escaped serious injury but the horse was euthanased on the track.

It is the third horse to die in a jumps event since the season opened in Victoria and South Australia, the only two states in Australia where jumps racing remains legal.

...

Mr Ploubidis, who ran the jockey club for eight years, says, with protests at every Oakbank carnival and attendance down 25 per cent this year, jumps racing is turning the crowds away.

Just six days before the first jump at Oakbank one of the trainers was reported as saying that his horse, Black Moon, was severely injured after a fall during a training race and had to be put down soon afterwards. He was quoted as saying that that 'is just part of the sport; I don't think about it'. In response to that comment the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) is reported in the ABC news item as saying that jumps racing is too dangerous. In fact the RSPCA has stated that jumps racing is inherently dangerous and that is why horses continue to be killed and injured. A representative from RSPCA is reported as saying:

... jumps racing is too dangerous and the public is starting to realise that.

Jumps horses are 19 times more likely to die whilst racing than flats horses.

Just last Saturday I was informed that the Premier of South Australia said he thought that jumps racing was dangerous but that the decision should be left up to the clubs. That is movement from the South Australian Premier, Mr Weatherill, with regard to his opinion of jumps racing compared to what is happening in Victoria. I am sure my colleague, Tammy Franks, a Greens member of the Legislative Council in South Australia, would agree that the Premier should intervene and just stop jumps racing in South Australia. Of course I would prefer to see jumps racing ended in both states, but the motion before us today asks for the Premier, who is the Minister for Racing, to intervene and put an end to jumps racing in Victoria.

Given the comment by Mr Weatherill, it is also interesting to note that on 30 July this year the shadow Minister for Racing and member for Lyndhurst in the Legislative Assembly, Martin Pakula, commented that he would leave any decision on the future of jumps racing to the board of Racing Victoria. Unfortunately we have already been through the experiment of leaving the issue to Racing Victoria which, when it had the opportunity to do so after being faced with horrific injuries to jumps horses and the failure of its measures to make this so-called sport safer, failed to act. That is not good enough. I call on the shadow Minister for Racing to make a more firm commitment to ending jumps racing if he were to become the minister in the next Parliament.

I have already outlined the horrific injuries and the catastrophic toll that jumps racing takes on horses. We

have also seen growing public concern about jumps racing. I have been to many protests at race meetings where jumps events are held, and while they may have some support, there are a lot of people who attend the races who are not happy about jumps events being included with other events on the day.

Whenever I speak about this issue to people in the broader community, everybody appears to be against it. I have run a postcard campaign on jumps racing, distributing thousands of postcards around Victoria, and many have been returned to my office. I have had lots of people ringing my office asking if they can have more of them to give out themselves. There is a large amount of concern. There is also another petition that the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses is still compiling, as I mentioned, which already has 4200 signatures, and I am expecting that figure to be a lot higher by the time that petition is tabled in Parliament.

Jumps racing is an activity that should have been ended years ago, as it has been in most other states of Australia. It is a blight on Victoria, and it is a shame that it is allowed to continue. That is why I have raised the issue many times in Parliament, asking questions of ministers about the amount of money that is being allocated as prize money for jumps events, something the Premier and Minister for Racing is doing to try to prop up a sport which the public does not support. Some racing clubs are voluntarily not holding any more jumps events at their tracks, and in fact some have already been cancelled this season. I think that will happen more and more.

I have also written to some of the sponsors of jumps events. While some of them have not agreed with my suggestion that they not sponsor any more jumps events, others have said that they had not really thought about the issue but they would take my views into consideration. In fact some of those sponsors are thinking again about whether they will even sponsor events.

We are past the time when jumps racing should have been ended. That is what this motion is about. It is to acknowledge that there is a group of people out there who are persisting in their dedication to get rid of jumps racing. They have collected signatures on a petition, and I have tabled that petition in the house on their behalf. I am raising this issue on behalf of all Victorians who want to see an end to jumps racing.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise this afternoon to speak to Ms Pennicuk's motion in relation to which she has tabled a petition bearing

532 signatures. I start my contribution to the debate by putting the racing industry into context so that we know what we are talking about. It is an industry that is worth \$2.8 billion to the Victorian economy. It employs more than 214 000 people directly involved in the racing industry and sustains 27 000 full-time jobs. This government continues to support the industry through an \$80 million Victorian Racing Industry Fund.

I was pleased to join the Premier, who is also the Minister for Racing, on 13 May this year when he released a comprehensive study showing the growing social and economic importance of the racing industry across Victoria. The Premier unveiled an IER document entitled *Size and Scope of the Victorian Racing Industry*, which demonstrates the importance of thoroughbred, harness and greyhound racing to communities right across the state. The overall economic benefit to the state has increased by 33 per cent since 2006, with the racing industry generating more than \$2.8 billion in economic activity in 2013. The study shows how vital racing is to Victoria and the many people who work in or enjoy this important industry. When I say ‘people who work in or enjoy this industry’, they range from the once-a-year punter to owners and breeders who invest in the dream of breeding or owning a champion racehorse or greyhound.

This success plays a key role in regional Victoria, with the economic benefits touching all regions across the state. In regional and rural Victoria alone racing generates more than \$940 million in annual economic benefit, with more than 43 000 regional participants in the industry.

Mr Koch — And growing.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Indeed. As Mr Koch interjects, it is growing. Racing is a major employer in Victoria, with more than 27 000 full-time jobs directly sustained in the industry. Another 114 000 people or thereabouts are directly involved in the industry, including a large proportion, as Mr Koch interjects, from regional and rural Victoria.

The report, which was released on 13 May, also demonstrates the importance of racing to the state’s tourism sector, with more than 207 000 international and interstate visitors attending Victorian racing events. In 2012 Melbourne’s world-renowned Spring Racing Carnival, which is almost upon us for this year, saw attendances top 706 000 and generate more than \$620 million in economic activity.

The extent of the Victorian racing industry’s community engagement was also measured in the study. It identified 630 organisations and charities that are assisted financially by racing clubs, while 430 community organisations share race club facilities. Charitable organisations supported by racing include the National Jockeys Trust, the McGrath Foundation, our own Royal Children’s Hospital, emergency services and disability support groups. Other figures in the report I would like to highlight include the 1.8 million attendees at racecourses throughout the year, with 2024 race meetings held and 18 974 races run. There are 22 736 horses and greyhounds in training and 71 848 owners and syndicate members.

The size and scope study I have talked about was a joint investment of the coalition government, Racing Victoria, Country Racing Victoria, Harness Racing Victoria and Greyhound Racing Victoria. I remember that the Premier reiterated on that day that this coalition government is committed to growing the racing industry, particularly through its \$80 million Victorian Racing Industry Fund. This fund helps grow the industry through the building of new racing infrastructure, enhancement of integrity measures, support for the breeding industry and the marketing of racing to new audiences.

Let me touch on some of the things Ms Pennicuik mentioned in her contribution today. Specifically she talked about the South Australian Premier and his comments about jumps racing. If it is true that he said those things, then he is in contradiction with his own racing minister. The Labor government racing minister in South Australia has stated that:

Jumps racing is an integral part of the racing industry ...

... I do not believe that jumps racing is cruel and I will not be banning the sport.

The Labor government in South Australia continues to support jumps racing, so if it is true, as Ms Pennicuik claims today in this place, that the South Australian Premier wants to stop jumps racing, he is in direct contradiction with his cabinet minister.

Then again, when it comes to Labor and Labor governments, who would know where they stand on any one day? It was not that long ago that Victorian Labor was calling for the expulsion of a member of the other house and today it has done a complete backflip and said, ‘No, we love him. We’d love him to stay’. Who would know what Labor Party members and Labor oppositions want to do? Daniel — ‘Danny’, ‘Dan’, ‘Danno’ — Andrews, the Leader of the

Opposition in the Assembly, has changed his views on this so many times it is getting ridiculous.

Mrs Millar — What is his name?

Mr ONDARCHIE — I am not sure what his name is.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr D. R. J. O'Brien) — Pursuant to standing order 5.02 I must interrupt Mr Ondarchie. The house will now proceed to statements on reports and papers.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Auditor-General: *Access to Legal Aid*

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report entitled *Access to Legal Aid*, which was tabled on 20 August 2014. We are all aware of the effects of ongoing legal aid budget cuts in Victoria, especially in Northern Metropolitan Region. The Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) office in Preston, which serviced Darebin, was closed during the term of this government. There was an outpouring of grief and disbelief that such an essential service could be cut in such a brutal fashion without any warning to the people who were affected most — that is, the disadvantaged, the unemployed and people facing prison sentences.

When I read the report the reason for the Auditor-General giving Victoria Legal Aid such an astonishing tick of approval became apparent to me. He wrote:

My audit found that VLA is performing its role in delivering legal services, and has a sound understanding of the service demands it faces and the challenges it faces around policy settings and funding constraints.

However, in order to be financially viable VLA has had to make changes to its eligibility criteria for intensive services. The moving of the goalposts means that large numbers of vulnerable people are by necessity being denied access to legal representation based on VLA's capacity to operate within its allocated budget and obfuscation of its fundamental obligation under the Legal Aid Act 1978. I accept that VLA is complying with the act but it is not, in my view, acting in the spirit of the act.

The core function of the agency is to provide legal aid on an equitable basis and to manage its resources to make legal aid available at a reasonable cost to the community. Legal aid was initially established to allow the disadvantaged and underprivileged in our

community to access legal representation due to the fact they could not afford to pay for it themselves. The report does not tell us what the new criteria are for those people. Again in the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report we see difficulties in VLA's current reporting mechanism in being able to demonstrate or quantify the effective provision of services. The performance monitoring framework needs more than a tweak; it needs to be substantially clearer in providing evidence of effective performance.

In recent years the demand for legal aid has increased exponentially, doubtless due to the tough-on-crime policies of the government and the increase in the prison population, together with the downturn in the economy. Not surprisingly, court duty lawyer services accounted for 70 per cent of the overall services provided. There is no doubt that Victoria Legal Aid has to cut its cloth according to its needs, but I would like to think that even in tough times the concept of justice for all is not an empty platitude. The recommendations contained in the report are appropriate in the context of the allocated budget. However, Victoria Legal Aid's ability to operate and meet its objectives is compromised, and for that reason I support the recommendations.

Public Transport Victoria: performance report

Mr RONALDS (Eastern Victoria) — I rise to talk about the report entitled *Public Transport Performance — Six Months Ending 31 December 2013*. There is actually some very good news in this report. It talks about a number of things, but if we look in particular at the performance summary for that six months, we find a figure of 69.4 per cent on the customer satisfaction index, which is above the half-year target of 69 per cent; a service punctuality figure of 93.9 per cent; and a scheduled service delivery reliability figure of 99.1 per cent. For trams, the customer satisfaction score was 73.6 per cent, service punctuality was at 82.6 per cent and scheduled service delivery reliability was at 99.1 per cent. All of these are greater than the half-year target. If we go further through the report and look at regional V/Line train and coach reports, we again find more good news. Customer satisfaction with regional trains was at 76.5 per cent, greater than the target of 76 per cent; customer satisfaction with regional coaches was at 82.2 per cent; and reliability of scheduled service delivery for regional trains was at 98.7 per cent. I think these are outstanding results for Victorian public transport.

In addition, if we look at what the coalition government has done overall with respect to public transport, we see

that over the past three years we have funded 18 level crossing separations and that another four are fully funded to a cost of \$659 million. Keep in mind that under the previous government only eight level crossings were upgraded over 11 years and that at that rate it would take approximately 70 years to complete the 50 level crossings those opposite are saying they would do. It would cost \$19 billion, and there is no business case.

In terms of regional trains, at the moment we have on order 43 individual V/Locity trains, the first of which will be in service by the end of the year. On Sunday in my own town of Warragul we had the privilege of opening stage 1 of the \$26 million redevelopment of the Warragul station precinct, featuring a 200-space car park, a bus interchange and a pedestrian walkway. A fantastic sausage sizzle was attended by about 200 locals, which was very good. I compliment the member for Narracan in the other house, Gary Blackwood, who advocated fantastically for that station.

Also this week five new protective services officers commenced work at the Traralgon railway station, which comes on top of another five protective services officers that I had the privilege of inducting last Friday at the Upper Ferntree Gully station. This means there will now be 1036 protective services officers by the time 29 November comes along — more than the 940 we promised originally. Keep in mind that we also have 1700 more police. This is at a total cost of about \$900 million.

The Cranbourne-Pakenham rail corridor project is another massive project that is very important. This \$2 billion to \$2.5 billion project, which will involve the construction of a train maintenance depot, is closer now with the announcement of the next step in the planning approval process. The new depot will be home to the new high-capacity trains to be delivered as part of this project. The overall project will include 25 new trains; new, modern and reliable signalling on the corridor, enabling more trains to run more often; removal of level crossings at Murrumbeena Road, Koornang Road, Clayton Road and Centre Road; and planning and pre-construction funding for future removal of level crossings at Corrigan, Heatherton and Chandler roads in Noble Park, Grange Road in Carnegie and Poath Road in Murrumbeena. It will also include newly rebuilt stations at Clayton, Murrumbeena and Carnegie and a new power substation to support the new high-capacity trains. This is another way that Victoria is building better public transport and that we are building a better Victoria overall.

Auditor-General: Access to Services for Refugees, Migrants and Asylum Seekers

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the tabled report, *Access to Services for Refugees, Migrants and Asylum Seekers — Victorian Auditor-General's Report — May 2014*. I found this a very concerning report, one dealing with an issue this government needs to take very seriously and act on immediately.

We in this house are very aware of how important multiculturalism is in our state. It is something that I am very proud of, all the more so because my electorate is one of the most culturally diverse in the state. In fact my electorate houses over 65 000 people born overseas and has been identified as one of the areas in the state with the highest proportion of people born overseas in the state.

Migrants and asylum seekers arrive in Australia for a number of reasons, and they come from very different and difficult circumstances. One thing that these people share is the hope that in Australia they will find a better life for themselves and their loved ones, free from persecution, suffering and torture. They arrive ready to integrate with already established communities and contribute to them now and for their future generations. It is something that many of us in this house or our parents or grandparents did many years ago. The decisions of this government, however, are closing off these disadvantaged people, who often struggle with low English proficiency or literacy in their own language, leading to their further isolation.

The Auditor-General states in his report that these people, who are the most vulnerable in our state, 'have complex needs, particularly in relation to health, welfare and language services'. The investigation surveyed the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Health, the Department of Human Services, the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship to assess whether these departments are meeting the needs of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the areas of health, education and human services.

I am afraid, President, that they are not. A number of weaknesses have been identified, which are leading to the further isolation of these newly arrived people. Some of these failures have been identified as significant barriers to accessing services, transport barriers, lack of familiarity with service systems and lack of social networks that could help these individuals understand their rights to gain access to services to

which all Victorians are entitled. It goes without saying that disengagement with these people has a flow-on effect to various public systems, including the health, housing and criminal justice systems.

Throughout the investigation, the audit assessed the effectiveness of access to much-needed everyday services, including: maternal and child health services, a universal and free service provided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; refugee and early childhood development, provided by the Department of Health; and family violence services, which are provided by the Department of Human Services. Within these programs the following objectives were audited, as stated on page x of the report's audit summary:

government departments understand the needs of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

departments have appropriate strategies and actions in place to support access to services

departments can demonstrate that services are accessible to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

whole-of-government structures and processes are leading to informed and coordinated service planning and delivery.

The results were disappointing. The Auditor-General indicated that he has significant concerns surrounding:

... the lack of regular collaboration among departments working to address the needs of the same cohort, and the lack of authoritative leadership and oversight to monitor and report on whether services are meeting the needs of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

The report outlines a number of recommendations, including that the departments mentioned above report annually on their cultural diversity plans and that they explicitly outline their progress on their cultural diversity plans; that the multicultural affairs section within the Department of Premier and Cabinet monitors and reports on departmental compliance; and that the Department of Premier and Cabinet makes clear the roles and responsibilities of the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship and the Victorian Multicultural Commission. Considering this has been an issue for quite some time and given the negative findings outlined in the report, I sincerely hope the Premier acts on this quickly to ensure that these isolated and disadvantaged members of our community receive the support and access to services that all members of our community deserve.

Department of Health: report 2012–13

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — I have great pleasure this afternoon in speaking on the Department of Health report for 2012–13. I seem to have had a day speaking on aged care today, having spoken on the motion earlier. However, I am particularly keen to speak about the aged-care sector in relation to this report. The report's overview states that the priorities of the portfolio of ageing are:

Residential and rehabilitation care for older people, along with support and assistance to enable them to remain independently in their homes.

Promoting healthy ageing and the participation of older people in social and economic activity in the community.

I put on the record earlier what this coalition government has done for senior and ageing Victorians, including a whole raft of benefits. Before I discuss the report, I would like to highlight the Victorian Seniors Festival, which is happening soon. This will be the 32nd seniors festival, and there will be a whole range of activities. I encourage members to go into their communities and inform their constituents about the options out there for seniors. Most importantly, metropolitan and regional public transport will be free for all Victorian Seniors Card holders. That will make a huge difference to people's access to all the events of Seniors Week.

This afternoon a very interesting report came across my desk. It is called *Blueprint for an Ageing Australia*, and it has been produced by the Everalld Compton Charitable Trust. This report parallels the work that the Department of Health is doing in the ageing sector. One statement in the blueprint that particularly struck me is:

Longer lives are the most positive development of the last century of human history. They represent the product of greater prosperity, better diet, disease eradication and healthier lifestyles. They offer each of us, on average, 25 extra years of high-quality living with new opportunities for productive work, unprecedented leisure, teaching and learning, and fulfilling relationships with family and friends.

That is a particularly apt comment. Healthy living and healthy ageing are very important in obtaining those 25 years.

The blueprint lists seven areas for new policy, one of which concerns health professionals' lack of knowledge and understanding of ageing. It states:

... despite older people being the most frequent users of health and hospital services there are no mandatory requirements within health professional basic training to study ageing.

That is an important point I raised when speaking on the motion moved earlier this afternoon. The Minister for Ageing is particularly cognisant of this, as was the former Minister for Higher Education and Skills, the Honourable Peter Hall. Members may recall that he created additional TAFE courses for personal care workers and people in the aged and disability sectors, which was very pleasing to see.

The *Department of Health — Annual Report 2012–13* lists as one of the highlights of the department's achievements:

The department provided \$1.6 million over the past three years for staff training to public health and aged-care services (including district nursing) in the comprehensive health assessment of older Victorians, which has benefited over 1200 clinicians and care staff. The program aims to train aged-care and district nurses to identify and address people at clinical risk, thereby avoiding potential hospital admissions.

In the annual report, the minister has addressed this issue, which is still relevant, as reflected in *Blueprint for an Ageing Australia*.

Many years ago I was on the board of the Royal Flying Doctor Service. John Flynn used the technology of his time, which was aeroplanes and radios, to take health out into regional and remote Australia. We must use the technology of our time to do the same thing. We must make certain that we can use the very big advances in ICT to take telehealth into people's homes, where they need it and can benefit from it. This would be a good study for the state government to undertake. People should be able to use this technology effectively so that they do not have to leave their homes. Particularly in rural and regional Victoria, people could be getting the best of health information and care by using the technology of the day. I encourage the minister to have a closer look at this, but I congratulate him on his annual report.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development: report 2012–13

Ms LEWIS (Northern Victoria) — I would like to make some comments on the annual report of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for 2012–13. This report covers the full range of Department of Education and Early Childhood Development operations and planning for the period, some areas in far more detail than others. It is one of the less detailed areas that I wish to comment on today.

A paragraph on page 37 of the report has the heading 'New directions for school leadership and the teaching profession'. One on page 40 is headed 'Supporting government school governance — school council

training'. Neither of these brief paragraphs gives us a full picture of the direction government school education in Victoria is taking. Under the coalition government education is being treated as a commodity. Educational stakeholders are being used as pawns and economic playthings, supposedly for efficiency and accountability.

Some 40 years ago democratically elected school councils were introduced to the Victorian government school system by what was probably the last Liberal government to demonstrate any concern for or understanding of our government school system. With some minor reforms school councils have been working well ever since, serving communities and schools, parents, students and staff with democratically elected representation and avenues to contribute to school planning and policy development, financial management and reporting and review. With its democratic, representative model, Victoria has been a leader in school governance for decades. Victorian schools and school councils have had far greater autonomy within a central system than government schools in states such as New South Wales.

We are now learning that the coalition government is trying to convince Victorians that new autonomy measures will help improve student outcomes and achievements, despite the lack of links between devolution and improved outcomes. In fact Victoria, with a highly devolved system, and New South Wales, with a highly centralised system, consistently appear as either the second or third highest performing jurisdictions using measures such as the national assessment program — literacy and numeracy.

What will this new devolved and autonomous model for school councils look like? It certainly will not look very autonomous as appointed boards take over from locally elected, community-based school councils. Apparently it will see the demise of the school council as a governance body, relegating it to an advisory and community consultation role. Our democratically elected, representative school councils will be replaced by federated boards with business leaders appointed to them, creating a new mid-level bureaucracy.

The new vision for school governance ignores the fact that school councils are able to co-opt community members or business leaders with particular skills or knowledge that may be relevant to a particular school. Under the new model school councils or federated boards will have powers to guide and monitor a school's curriculum, including what will be taught and how it will be taught. This leaves the way open for supposed community members with little or no

educational expertise to direct the school to focus on narrow, restrictive and unproven curriculum. Will this curriculum power see the introduction of subjects such as creationism into Victorian schools in the same way that it has crept into the curriculums of schools in the USA?

The new governance model will see school councils or federated boards with changed powers in relation to a school's workforce strategy, facilities and infrastructure, and financial management. This raises concerns about the ability of a school council or federated board to undermine the working conditions of staff by encouraging short-term contract employment and varying pay and conditions.

Perhaps the most regressive proposals relate to the membership of the new school councils or federated boards. Currently school council membership comprises elected parents and teachers, with parents comprising the majority of members. School principals are automatically members, and community members with relevant expertise can be co-opted. The proposed model removes democratically representative teachers from the school council or federated board. This demonstrates this government's contempt for the knowledge, skills and expertise of teachers and the enormous contributions they make to school communities. Principals will be able to identify staff who may be co-opted by school councils or federated boards, but this will not encourage diversity of opinion or experience; instead it may result in narrow views being brought to the school council or federated board. School councils or federated boards may end up having only one member with educational expertise — the principal.

The model for school councils or federated boards is deeply flawed. It overturns a democratically elected model that encourages participation and diversity, replacing it with one that narrows input from people with the greatest educational expertise in the local community. The proposed autonomy model for school councils or federated boards opens the way for fragmentation of the government school system, undermining the working conditions of teaching and support staff and encouraging the development of narrowly focused economic units instead of community-based school communities.

The vision for education under this autonomous model will ensure that the free market will take care of this industry as it has others. The result will be a disaster for Victorian students.

Education and Training Committee: approaches to homework in Victorian schools

Mrs MILLAR (Northern Victoria) — I am pleased to make a statement in relation to the Education and Training Committee's inquiry into approaches to homework in Victorian schools. I was very pleased to have served on this inquiry into homework, which has been an abiding component of our education system over time but, as the evidence shows, its effectiveness has seldom been questioned or challenged. Some of the most surprising evidence pertained to the lack of research in this area — even globally — the lack of prominence given to the theory of homework in teacher education courses, the widespread lack and inconsistency of homework policies in our schools and also the failure to measure the effectiveness and outcomes of homework more generally.

The terms of reference for the inquiry offered a broad scope, enabling a great array of witnesses and evidence. Witnesses included academics and researchers, curriculum experts, teachers, schools, community organisations involved in delivering homework clubs and, perhaps most importantly, students and parents. I especially thank those students who gave evidence about the impact of homework on their wellbeing as it was paramount to the inquiry's findings.

The time available to me in making this statement does not permit me to unpack all the aspects reviewed by the inquiry, so I would like to touch upon just a few aspects covered in the report.

As a working parent of two primary school-aged children I am acutely aware of the impact homework has on working families, who typically have little time available at the end of any day to have dinner, engage in music or sports practice, spend time outdoors, exercise or most importantly spend quality time with family. The period between arriving home from work or school and when the children go to bed is in fact the only real time that families spend together during the course of the working week. The amount of homework set has a big impact on this time, especially noting the academic evidence before the committee suggesting that there are little to no measurable benefits deriving from assigning homework at the primary school level. Recommendation 2 calls for a project to assess the effectiveness of homework based on gathered empirical evidence.

Other very significant aspects of this inquiry involved the role of homework clubs across Victoria, in particular in supporting students from non-English-speaking or disadvantaged backgrounds. Evidence

before the committee noted many very effective homework clubs in which dedicated volunteers work with students to assist not only with homework needs but also with overall learning outcomes. Homework clubs also assist with access to technology, which is another significant barrier for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and one that needs to be carefully considered to ensure equal outcomes for all students.

One aspect of the inquiry which yielded some very positive and innovative findings was the concept of flipped learning, in which new material is introduced by way of students undertaking simple research tasks in their own time and then coming back into the classroom to explore and review them. Evidence is emerging that this new type of learning — often integrated as homework — is very effective in terms of embedding that learning.

The evidence received by the committee in relation to the proliferation of private tutoring, while not the primary focus of the inquiry, raised some significant questions and concerns not only about the hours of tutoring some students are undertaking but also the financial pressures placed on families. Some of the evidence given, particularly by Victoria's selective entry schools and their students, raised concerns about the extent, impact and pressures caused by the use of private tutors in Victoria.

I particularly note the submission and evidence from Bendigo Senior Secondary College, an excellent school within my electorate of Northern Victoria Region. Some of the evidence presented by this school included its own system for monitoring and tracking student performance, which encompasses a significant homework assessment component. This model is very impressive and demonstrates the school's integration of homework assessment into its learning framework. It is a very clear example of a school which regularly and effectively assesses homework tasks in order to utilise them in tailored student plans.

I take this opportunity to again thank the committee chair, Mrs Jan Kronberg, and the other committee members, Mr Peter Crisp and Mr Colin Brooks — the members for Mildura and Bundoora in the Assembly — and Mr Nazih Elasmr. I especially thank the wonderful parliamentary services staff who served this committee. Discussions between the committee members and the parliamentary staff were valuable dialogues, evidencing again the value of these types of inquiries in terms of generating knowledge.

I encourage all schools, educationalists and teachers, parents and senior students to consider the generated outcomes of this report and to work towards more evidence-driven, effective and creative homework practices into the future.

Auditor-General: *Coordinating Public Transport*

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report entitled *Coordinating Public Transport*, yet another damaging report on the way the state government is managing the public transport system. The Auditor-General found that:

... public transport services are poorly coordinated and progress to improve this has been slow. This longstanding deficiency is due to past management approaches that have given insufficient attention to driving coordination.

While the creation of Public Transport Victoria in 2011 has begun to address this, progress has been far too slow. The Auditor-General also found that public transport has been managed as a collection of separate modes rather than as an integrated system and that inefficiencies in the bus network are of particular concern. The Auditor-General highlighted in the report problems with the frequency, availability and directness of bus services, the poor location and design of many bus-train interchanges, and the inadequate provision of customer information. He said that many bus services remain indirect, are infrequent and have long wait times for connecting train services. The Auditor-General also noted the lack of contractual obligations for operators to cooperate to improve service coordination.

These problems have been brought to the government's attention many times. Audits and reports in 2012 and 2013 came to similar conclusions, which raises the question: why has the government taken so long to act, and how many times does it need to be told before it starts to lift its game? After at least three reports in as many years highlighting the lack of coordination in public transport services, why has the government not gotten the message? You almost feel sorry for the Auditor-General. Does the government need the message to be delivered by skywriting?

The Auditor-General made nine recommendations, which are listed on page xiv of the report. He recommended:

That Public Transport Victoria

1. expedites efforts to finalise its multimodal coordination policy and strategy and plans for buses, trams and rural and regional services;

2. develops incentives in future bus contracts focused on achieving defined system-wide coordination objectives.

That the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure:

3. develops, in consultation with transport agencies, statewide and agency performance measures for transport system coordination to support the planning and monitoring of public transport coordination initiatives;
4. reviews its governance arrangements and establishes mechanisms for systematically monitoring the progress and outcomes of statewide coordination initiatives.

That Public Transport Victoria:

5. requires the operators of all new bus contracts to undertake a full timetable rebuild to support achievement of defined system-wide coordination targets;
6. collects and analyses data on the directness of bus routes to assist in service planning;
7. provides real-time bus service information to public transport users to better support the connectivity of buses with other public transport modes;
8. develops measures and reports on indicators that reliably convey the level of intended and actual coordination across different public transport modes;

strengthens its monitoring processes around the measurement of on-time running of trains and buses and coordination outcomes.

That the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure:

9. ensures its proposed performance monitoring and reporting framework evaluates achievement of defined statewide coordination goals.

I call on the government to heed the Auditor-General's comments and put plans in place to implement these recommendations to improve our public transport system, which I think Victoria deserves.

Education and Training Committee: approaches to homework in Victorian schools

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — It is my great pleasure to make a contribution tonight on the Education and Training Committee's report on its inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools, which was tabled in August 2014. I draw the house's attention to the fact that I have made a significant summation of the report in the form of my chair's foreword, and I made a major contribution to the compilation of the executive summary. The grand sweeping elements are contained in those two parts of the report. I thought I would shine a light on the

homework debate. It might give people an appreciation of the information we had to wrestle with and also the conclusions the committee drew through its deliberations, as manifested in the 11 recommendations and 12 findings which are set out in the report.

The committee relied on the input of two erudite contributors who flew from interstate to give evidence at our hearings, Professor Michael Horsley and Associate Professor Richard Walker, authors of a highly respected 2013 work, *Reforming Homework — Practices, Learning and Policy*. One of the things they said in that book that I think will get everybody sitting up and taking notice is:

Researchers have variously concluded that homework is beneficial or harmful, that homework has no effects, that it has complex effects or that the research is too sparse or too problematic to be able to justify the drawing of strong conclusions ...

It is against that background, with all those intersections and complexities, that we had to formulate our recommendations. That is why we beavered away at this inquiry. The report is the result of the compilation of a lot of evidence gathering — from parents' groups, selective entry schools, student cohorts, students themselves, people representing the disadvantaged, migrant communities, people with learning disabilities and many highly respected academics on the subject.

Homework has been seen as a fact of life for students. Many of the drivers and much of the impetus and anxiety around homework can come from parents, who are interested in and passionate about what they see as an opportunity to monitor their children's schoolwork. It is an opportunity for them to get together with their children and to see how they are progressing through their education. This is enshrined practice and, amazingly, it has been a cause of debate since the middle of the 19th century, when we first moved to have a compulsory education system.

It is no easy task to draw hard and fast conclusions. People often look at these positions through the lens of their own experience. Whether homework has been assigned to complete work not completed in class, for the revision of lessons, for the practice of newly acquired skills, to prepare for tests or upcoming lessons, or even for punishment — that is clearly the worst form — it is rarely popular with students, and it is even unpopular with some parents, but it has been an accepted part of school experience.

Despite the widespread use of homework as a learning tool, it has been a controversial issue among educators, as I said earlier, for more than a century. Prominent

educational theorists have questioned homework's effectiveness as a tool to enhance student learning and have pointed to the potential for negative effects on the development of other aspects of a student's life. These objections have been met with arguments from those who believe that homework plays an important role in reinforcing learning and developing study habits, self-discipline and time management — —

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

Adult, Community and Further Education Board: report 2012–13

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise to make some comments on the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board annual report 2012–13. At the outset I acknowledge the contribution of the chair, Rowena Allen, the departmental staff and the staff who work in the regional offices around the state. The ACFE board is a statutory authority that supports the development of adult, community and further education across Victoria. The ACFE board does a tremendous amount of work with young people, early school leavers and the marginalised in our community, as well as the unemployed and adults who are looking to do further training. Often those are adults who have been made redundant and need to retrain in order to find further employment.

In 2012–13 ACFE achieved a number of successes on which it should be congratulated and which are set out in the report. The board allocated funds to around 300 Learn Local organisations around the state at a total cost of just over \$20 million. It successfully managed the re-accreditation of the certificates in general education for adults, which are the pre-eminent literacy, numeracy and basic skills qualifications in Australia. In the Hume region in my electorate the Learn Local organisations delivered 1.4 million training hours, with 7992 people enrolled in vocational education and training courses, of whom 63 per cent were women. The largest percentage of enrolments in Learn Local programs throughout Hume were early school leavers, followed closely by the unemployed and students. There was a 25 per cent increase in enrolment numbers compared to previous years.

Similarly, in the Loddon-Mallee region, which is also in my electorate, 8153 Learn Local participants enrolled in 41 different organisations for training. The highest percentage of enrolments was school leavers, at 42 per cent, and the unemployed, at 35 per cent. These are significant numbers of enrolments, showing just

how important these programs are that address the requirements of disengaged young people and the unemployed.

What we have seen with this Liberal-Nationals coalition state government is a complete disregard for education in this state. Every provider, whether it be a TAFE, a secondary school or a community college, has been adversely impacted by this government's savage cuts to education. To cut funding and programs that help the disengaged and marginalised in our communities is deplorable. Many participants who access Learn Local programs have survived abuse, mental health issues, social exclusion and despair. In my electorate Berry Street, neighbourhood houses, community colleges and not-for-profit organisations do a huge amount of work to help students with low literacy and numeracy skills, as well as to assist them with other personal and professional development courses.

Early in 2014 a total of 486 surveys were sent out to local providers of adult, community and further education across Victoria to gauge the impact of the Liberal-Nationals coalition state government budget cuts on Learn Local providers. The results showed that 75 per cent of Learn Local providers have been negatively affected by funding cuts. Some 59 per cent were worried about their future financial viability, and 56 per cent said they would have to cut courses and increase their volunteer workload in order to offset those cuts.

This is a very interesting report, and it is well worth a read. The ACFE board does an excellent job and provides much-needed courses throughout the state — as I said, particularly to the disengaged, the marginalised and the unemployed. They are very important courses, and they need to be supported by the government. Whilst it has made cuts to education in the past, I would urge the government in future budgets to ensure that ACFE gets the funding it requires to deliver these much-needed courses to those in our community who are most in need.

Auditor-General: *Coordinating Public Transport*

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to speak this evening on the Victorian Auditor-General's report entitled *Coordinating Public Transport*, dated August 2014. As we know, public transport gets a lot of attention in this place and affects many people's lives, both in Melbourne and in the regional parts of Victoria. This report highlights the many concerns that the Napthine coalition government

is addressing. I turn to some of the comments that the Auditor-General made in relation to his findings in the report. The Auditor-General says in his opening comments that:

Public Transport Victoria (PTV) was created in December 2011 —

it was a commitment of the coalition government for PTV to be established in order to have better coordinated services in our public transport system —

with a particular focus on increasing the share of public transport trips, expanding the network and ensuring public transport services are properly coordinated.

As you read through the report it is fairly evident that PTV is doing that. He goes on to say:

PTV's establishment, including its focus on improving coordination, is a key development that has begun to address this situation.

There have been some efficiency and simplicity issues in relation to the coordination of various public transport modes, and the findings of previous performance reports were that various public transport applications had been a siloed whether that is our train, tram, bus or coach services across the state. Clearly there were some issues, as the Auditor-General highlights. A number of performance audits have been undertaken over the past five years, and these are cited on page 5 of the report as follows:

Over the past five years VAGO has tabled three audit reports that have considered the performance of public transport — in June 2009, February 2012 and August 2013 —

These reviews have consistently identified challenges in addressing demand for services and the need to improve performance ...

The report goes on:

The 2009 audit *Melbourne's New Bus Contracts* found the operational performance regime for bus services needed to be strengthened to provide greater assurance about the on-time running of buses.

The report highlights a number of areas, including the planning and governance of coordination initiatives. The conclusion the Auditor-General comes to is that:

Public transport has historically been managed as a collection of separate modes of travel rather than as an integrated system. This has resulted in inadequate coordination between modes, and long wait times between connecting train and bus services.

In the metropolitan bus service reviews of 2007 and 2010 deficiencies were identified, including that service frequency was poor and users needed to wait a long time between services. The service reliability is poor,

with issues such as road congestion causing buses to operate unreliably, resulting in missed connections and users arriving late to the destination. Many improvements have been undertaken, which the Auditor-General acknowledges, and he cites some case studies including the ones at Williams Landing. The report states:

Since 2012, it has implemented three major timetable changes, and has updated the timetables of more than 200 bus routes across Melbourne ...

The government has been working very closely to address these issues, fixing the problems left by Labor. Since we came to government in 2010 we have introduced 1276 extra weekly metropolitan train trips, 1671 extra weekly tram trips and a whopping 7136 extra bus trips. We have added 10 000 extra weekly public transport trips, which has created many more options for people to travel across the city and across Victoria.

The formation of PTV results from an election promise, and it has done a tremendous job since its commencement. It is working through the issues that were left to us. Clearly they have been going on for many years. We have made great inroads, and I commend the Minister for Public Transport, Mr Mulder, for taking the initiatives he has and for improving so many more connections right across the rail, tram and bus networks, as well as the very important east-west link, which will relieve a lot of the congestion that was highlighted in the 2007 and 2010 reviews.

Auditor-General: Access to Legal Aid

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — This evening I wish to make some comments on the Auditor-General's report tabled on 20 August in relation to access to legal aid. While the Auditor-General is complimentary of Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) for its performance in this dire financial environment, he warns that limiting eligibility criteria in order to achieve financial sustainability has serious consequences for access to justice. He is also concerned about the VLA's performance monitoring framework and whether it adequately reports to its board and the public about achieving statutory objectives.

The VLA plays a crucial role in our society by providing legal services to those who cannot afford them and are most in need. Victorians who come into contact with a vast array of legal jurisdictions are assisted by VLA. Among them, of course, are victims of family violence, children and families amidst family law disputes, and those in contact with the criminal

system and jurisdictions such as the Mental Health Review Board. VLA also does essential work in areas such as immigration. The organisation provides assistance to those who otherwise simply would not receive it. These services contribute to Victorians having fair access to justice and an opportunity to be heard and treated fairly within our legal system. VLA also provides outreach services to ensure that rural Victorians are not left without assistance. These services include the funding of community legal centres across the state, regional VLA offices and visiting services such as advice visits to several prisons.

During the reporting period we saw an increase in demand for VLA's services by the community. The factors identified as contributing to the increase include the current government's sentencing policies; an increase in family violence; an increase in child protection activity; an increase in prisoner numbers; and the current economic conditions. Despite increased demand VLA experienced funding cuts from the Napthine government in the 2012–13 reporting period. In that year, the government decided to incorporate a temporary funding increase to VLA's base funding for 2010–11 and 2011–12 rather than making it an additional sum, which would have increased the overall funding. At the time of the review, this was estimated to be around \$5.8 million to \$13.7 million less than the funding required to meet increased demand.

VLA also relies significantly on revenue received from the public purse fund, from which VLA can receive up to 35 per cent of its funding subject to the discretion of the Attorney-General. In 2007–08, 25 per cent of VLA's revenue was received from the fund, an amount of \$31.9 million. For the last three years VLA has received \$25.7 million from the fund, comprising just 15 per cent of its revenue. This is a reduction of \$6.2 million. In 2012–13, VLA reported a deficit of \$9.3 million.

In response, VLA was forced to reassess the guidelines of eligibility for legal assistance. The organisation was no longer able to meet demand while maintaining existing levels of service. The consequences were restricted eligibility, with fewer people qualifying for a grant of legal assistance. VLA reacted in accordance with its statutory obligations, making only the most vulnerable Victorians a priority for funding. Priority clients include people living on a low income, in custody or detention, children and those experiencing or at risk of experiencing family violence.

The Auditor-General concludes that VLA is performing its role in delivering legal services across Victoria. These services are being provided in an environment of

increased demand and limited fixed funding. The tension between these two factors is identified as further eroding access to justice for the most vulnerable Victorians. Insofar as measures are within its control, the Auditor-General recommended that VLA review its performance reporting framework to ensure a clear indicator for whether statutory obligations are being met. Further, the Auditor-General recommends that VLA assesses the awareness of priority clients as to the services available and reviews the legal information line service established by VLA to improve access to legal assistance. The organisation has been forced to adapt to a financial environment created by —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ondarchie) — Order! Thank you, Ms Tierney.

Education and Training Committee: approaches to homework in Victorian schools

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — I rise to make a contribution on the Education and Training Committee's August 2014 report on the inquiry into approaches to homework in Victorian schools. I note that Mrs Kronberg, the chair of the committee, made a contribution on this report earlier, as did Mrs Millar. Both contributions were excellent. This is the second report by this committee on which I have made a contribution. The reports are somewhat related. The other report was on the committee's inquiry into the importance of music training in education; this one is about homework.

As a parent of four children, some of whom are at school, what I like about this report is that rather than recommending that we all do more and saying that we are somehow failing, it provides a balanced account of the options and issues relating to whether kids should be doing homework. This can relate to questions about how education itself should be carried out.

Without wanting to personalise it too much, as a parent one sometimes feels a bit concerned that kids are not doing enough homework or the right type of homework. In the modern age you have to balance homework with sport, music, social activity and general play. In an electronic age, that can include a lot of distractions, such as electronic games, videos and television. Speaking from personal experience, the increased use of iPads and iPhones in recent times has made children connect to devices in a way that is a new phenomenon in society. We are going to need to work through the issues in relation to homework and technology.

What I like about this report is that it takes a very considered approach. It says that there is no real data about which approach is best but that some approaches will work in some instances and some will work in other instances. It then provides the learnings and accounts of some of the features that can be used.

One of the sections I enjoyed reading was the section on what they call 'flipped learning', which is an interesting innovation in education. As described in the committee's report, flipped learning has the potential to affect homework in that students undertake preparatory reading or watch video lectures at home. I know that some of my younger children engage in a program called Reading Eggs, which I occasionally do with them. As an absent parent, you rely very heavily on kids involving themselves. I also rely on my very hardworking wife, Janine.

This flipped learning model is something that, in a sense, we are already doing. It acknowledges a constructive role for technology within the home environment. I have mentioned the Reading Eggs program, but I am sure there are many others that allow the benefits of video technology and video learning to be offered to children in the home environment. This can then, as has been helpfully set out by the committee on page 52 of the report, result in a slightly different emphasis on the more structured activity in the classroom. A table is set out on page 52, and I urge all members to read it. It sets out warm-up activities in a traditional classroom and a flipped classroom, and because the video education homework has been part of the entertainment for the child, it allows a more guided and independent practice to occur in the lab activity for 75 minutes.

The finding of the committee was that flipped learning offers a new way of engaging children in education and may allow for better use of time in the classroom. The recommendation that the department investigate ways to support a new homework feedback paradigm, including the development of flipped learning models and online resources that are shared between schools, is very worthwhile. It is consistent with recommendations that were pushed and advocated by the former Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Mr Hall, in his time spent dealing with higher education, particularly in remote areas. I commend this report to the house and thank members of the committee for their excellent work.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the house do now adjourn.

Ambulance officers

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and it relates to correspondence I received from Ambulance Employees Australia in which it identifies what it says are a number of inaccurate and misleading statements made by the Minister for Health about the payoff the government has made to paramedics. It refers to what it says is a million-dollar publicity campaign engaged in by Mr Davis as part of the negotiations with Victorian paramedics. It identifies a number of inaccuracies in that campaign, including claims by Mr Davis that paramedics earn more than \$100 000 per year when in fact they receive a base salary of some \$56 000 per year, rising to \$71 000 per year after shift allowances.

Ambulance Employees Australia also refers to a claim by Mr Davis that there is a benefit of 10 weeks annual leave per year when ambulance paramedics receive 4 weeks annual leave per year and, as is the case for other permanent shift workers, are entitled to a fifth week of annual leave only. It refers to the proposed pay increase of 12 per cent over three years, which is what Mr Davis promotes. The fact is that ambulance paramedics have not had a pay increase since 2011 — more than three years ago. They will be receiving a 12 per cent pay increase over six years.

Ambulance Employees Australia says that Mr Davis refers to the sign-on payment of \$3000 but does not refer to the fact that this is, in effect, back pay since the expiry of the previous agreement. This means that paramedics are substantially behind, even on the government pay policy rate of 2.5 per cent.

My request to the Minister for Health is in relation to this matter. The work of our ambulance paramedics is too important for the type of political game playing we are seeing from the government, particularly the Minister for Health. My request is that the minister stop the misleading public statements which are being made at taxpayer expense and that he sit down and in good faith work constructively to resolve the dispute, which is not in Victoria's best interests and which has become quite damaging because of its protracted nature. These ambulance paramedics have my full support and the full support of the community, and they deserve to have the full support of the government.

Hobsons Bay differential rate

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Local Government, and it follows a meeting I recently had with Mr Jimmy Kane of The Village Williamstown. He has expressed concerns about the differential rate, or indeed the lack of a differential rate, being applied to The Village Williamstown by the Hobsons Bay City Council.

Mr Kane informs me that there are approximately 38 000 residents living in approximately 400 retirement villages in Victoria and that currently residents pay totally to repair and maintain the facilities within their villages through fees paid to the managers or owners of the villages. These facilities include several kilometres of roads, footpaths, kerbs, drainage and street lighting. A number of villages manage their own rubbish removal and include that cost in their residents' fees. Many villages also provide services such as libraries, swimming pools, suitable sporting facilities, medical support and similar services, thus reducing the pressure on the community and the use of community facilities provided by the local council.

Last year, despite amendments having been made to section 161 of the Local Government Act 1989 dealing with differential rates, only 5 councils out of the 79 in Victoria introduced differential rates for their retirement villages. I am sad to say that Hobsons Bay City Council was not among them. That is the main thrust of the concern of Mr Kane and his fellow retirees in The Village Williamstown. They believe the village should be allowed to have a differential rate — in fact a cut in rates of somewhere around 25 per cent — and I have to say I think they probably have quite a good argument.

I ask the minister to request that his office facilitate a meeting between The Village Williamstown and the Hobsons Bay City Council with a view to discussing what the possibilities are with regard to differential rating and to ensure that both sides of the argument are put so this matter can be resolved constructively and justly before very long. I ask the minister to do that on my behalf for the benefit of those good people in Williamstown.

Local government funding

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is addressed to the Minister for Local Government, Mr Tim Bull. The interface councils launched their *Fairer Funding Report* this month. The report highlights the existing state of affairs for the sharing of funding in local government areas

(LGAs) and makes a series of recommendations. Two interface councils lie within my electorate, the Melton and Wyndham city councils.

In short, the report observes that there is a worrying level of growing inequality in the level of funding received by LGAs that have been host to much of Victoria's population growth over the past decade and will continue to be in the coming decades. Melbourne's west is host to booming population areas. According to some estimates, the region will be expected to accommodate more than 40 per cent of the metropolitan population growth over the next 40 years. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures for 2013–14. There have been increases in population of 9.5 per cent in Melton South, 9.3 per cent in Wyndham Vale, 8.9 per cent in Tarneit and 8.7 per cent in Point Cook, for example. Yet the west has not received the level of funding from this government that it both needs and deserves.

The report also makes recommendations, including the provision of \$197 million to improve bus services, a \$200 million interface fund for community infrastructure, an increase in health funding, \$1.5 billion to create 130 000 places for students from kindergarten to year 12 and 12 new TAFE buildings for 58 000 new people. My understanding is that the minister has yet to provide a response to the interface councils' recommendations. The action I seek is that the minister provide that response to the *Fairer Funding Report* and indicate what action he plans to take to address the issues raised in the report.

Ambulance officers

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Health, David Davis, and it concerns the state government's plans to introduce compulsory rural reserve relieving arrangements for paramedics. There is a lot of concern about what compulsory rural relieving could mean for paramedics in rural and regional areas of the state. It could see individual paramedics being forced to leave their teams and work in other parts of the state for up to one month. Senior paramedics with over 20 years experience have recently spoken out about the proposed change to their conditions of employment. They are concerned that compulsory rural relieving would impact on their families. Some of these paramedics have partners who also do shiftwork, making such a change untenable for them and their families.

Shifts of 14 hours or more are not uncommon for ambulance officers, and then at the end of the shift they would have to travel back to their place of residence,

which in rural and regional areas could be a very considerable distance. This is dangerous and puts paramedics' safety at risk. Experienced paramedics have said they are already looking at taking up other work options that are more family friendly should these proposals be implemented. It would be detrimental to our communities if we lost our very skilled paramedics who have such a lot of experience.

Paramedics have said that compulsory rural reserve relieving is something that staff will never agree to and that it would result in paramedics being sent away at any time. Three paramedics from Shepparton are presently carrying out rural relieving roles in Gisborne. Currently the rural relieving role is voluntary, but paramedics have serious concerns about Ambulance Victoria making it compulsory and forcing them to carry out that role.

The specific action I am seeking from the minister is that as a matter of urgency he resolve this uncertainty and that he reach agreement with ambulance officers in such a way that maintains voluntary flexibility, without compulsory rural relieving. Instead of imposing unrealistic demands and removing conditions from paramedics, it is time the state government recognised the role that paramedics play in our community and rewarded them at a level commensurate with that of their interstate colleagues.

Youth employment

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Premier, and it relates to the youth unemployment rates in rural and regional Victoria. It is no surprise that this is a major issue confronting youth right across the state but particularly in rural and regional Victoria. Indeed the unemployment rate in the Premier's electorate of South-West Coast is the highest in the state. That is also part of my electorate of Western Victoria Region, and I have serious concerns about the situation we have there. It is an issue that cannot be avoided by the government when you see the Warrnambool *Standard* running a banner headline of 'Our youth in crisis' on its front page and giving example after example of the problems we are facing in our local communities.

On the front page of the *Age* of 26 August there was a photo of a young Warrnambool lad called Arie Eddy, who said he had applied for 780 jobs and had had just one interview. He is quoted as having said:

It constantly makes me feel worthless.

Youth unemployment is a real issue, and the government cannot have its head in the sand, especially

when youth unemployment is coupled with very low school retention rates in western Victoria. The action I seek is for the Premier to outline to me what plan he has for alleviating the youth unemployment crisis not just in his electorate of South-West Coast but in the rest of western Victoria.

St Mary's House of Welcome

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Services, the Honourable Mary Wooldridge. It relates to funding cuts for St Mary's House of Welcome. On 27 August I attended a meeting with Tony McCosker, the CEO of St Mary's House of Welcome in Fitzroy. This wonderful charity has provided hot meals for disadvantaged and homeless people for many years. I have in fact assisted it in serving meals to local residents, who are mainly housing commission tenants.

The charity informed me that its funding has been cut by the state government, so it will no longer be able to feed the hungry as often. In fact due to these funding cuts it now has to close its doors every Saturday. Cuts in excess of \$400 000 to mental health funding have had a dramatic effect on the ability of St Mary's to deliver services. The action I seek is that the minister meet with the committee of management to hear its concerns regarding the cuts.

Responses

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — There were only six adjournment matters raised tonight, the first being from Mr Tee to the Minister for Health, David Davis, about an Ambulance Employees Association letter. I will have a reply sent to Mr Tee.

The next was from Mr Finn to the Minister for Local Government, Tim Bull, and was in relation to differential rates in Hobsons Bay. I will seek a written reply for Mr Finn.

There was also a matter for the Minister for Local Government from Mr Melhem in relation to interface council funding issues. I will have a reply prepared for Mr Melhem.

I will have a reply prepared for Ms Darveniza, who raised a matter for the Minister for Health, David Davis, in relation to, I think, compulsory rural reserve relieving for regional paramedics. I think I have that correct; I hope I do. I am sure Mr Davis will be able to ascertain from *Hansard* the matter for which Ms Darveniza requires a response, and she will receive a written response to that matter.

Ms Tierney raised a matter for the Premier in relation to the youth unemployment rate in regional Victoria. I will have a written response prepared for her.

Mr Elasmr raised a matter for the Minister for Community Services, Mary Wooldridge, in relation to St Mary's House of Welcome. I will seek a written response for him on that matter.

I have a written response to present to Ms Pulford tonight on a matter she raised on 5 August.

The PRESIDENT — Order! On that basis, the house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.46 p.m.

