

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 6 August 2014

(Extract from book 10)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable ALEX CHERNOV, AC, QC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

The ministry

(from 17 March 2014)

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Deputy Premier, Minister for State Development, and Minister for Regional and Rural Development	The Hon. P. J. Ryan, MP
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Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Community Services, and Minister for Disability Services and Reform	The Hon. M. L. N. Wooldridge, MP
Cabinet Secretary	Mrs I. Peulich, MLC

Legislative Council committees

Privileges Committee — Ms Darveniza, Mr D. Davis, Mr Drum, Ms Lovell, Ms Pennicuik, Mrs Peulich and Mr Scheffer.

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

Participating member

Legislative Council standing committees

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

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.

Environment and Planning References 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.

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

Joint committees

Accountability and Oversight Committee — (*Council*): Mr D. R. J. O'Brien and Mr Ronalds. (*Assembly*): Ms Kanis, Mr McIntosh and Ms Neville.

Dispute Resolution Committee — (*Council*): Mr D. Davis, Mr Drum, Mr Lenders, Ms Lovell and Ms Pennicuik. (*Assembly*): Ms Allan, Ms Asher, Mr Clark, Ms Hennessy, Mr Merlino, Mr O'Brien and Mr Walsh.

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.

Heads of parliamentary departments

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

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

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

President: The Hon. B. N. ATKINSON

Deputy President: Mr M. VINEY

Acting Presidents: Ms Crozier, Mr Eideh, Mr Elasmr, Mr Finn, Mr Melhem, Mr D. R. J. O'Brien, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Pennicuik,
Mr Ramsay, Mr Tarlamis

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The Hon. D. M. DAVIS

Deputy Leader of the Government:

The Hon. W. A. LOVELL

Leader of the Opposition:

Mr J. LENDERS

Deputy Leader of the Opposition:

Mr G. JENNINGS

Leader of The Nationals:

The Hon. D. K. DRUM (from 17 March 2013)

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)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Atkinson, Hon. Bruce Norman	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Lovell, Hon. Wendy Ann	Northern Victoria	LP
Barber, Mr Gregory John	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Melhem, Mr Cesar ²	Western Metropolitan	LP
Broad, Ms Candy Celeste ⁹	Northern Victoria	ALP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
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
Dalla-Riva, Hon. Richard Alex Gordon	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	O'Brien, Mr David Roland Joseph	Western Victoria	Nats
Darveniza, Ms Kaye Mary	Northern Victoria	ALP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John	Eastern Victoria	LP
Davis, Hon. David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Ondarchie, Mr Craig Philip	Northern Metropolitan	LP
Davis, Mr Philip Rivers ⁵	Eastern Victoria	LP	Pakula, Hon. Martin Philip ¹	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Drum, Mr Damian Kevin	Northern Victoria	Nats	Pennicuik, Ms Susan Margaret	Southern Metropolitan	Greens
Eideh, Mr Khalil M.	Western Metropolitan	ALP	Petrovich, Mrs Donna-Lee ³	Northern Victoria	LP
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
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas C.	Western Metropolitan	LP	Ramsay, Mr Simon	Western Victoria	LP
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
Hartland, Ms Colleen Mildred	Western Metropolitan	Greens	Scheffer, Mr Johan Emiel	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Somyurek, Mr Adem	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Koch, Mr David Frank	Western Victoria	LP	Tarlamis, Mr Lee Reginald	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
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, 6 August 2014

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

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

SUB JUDICE CONVENTION

The PRESIDENT, by leave, presented briefing paper.

Laid on table.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Acting Clerk:

Auditor-General's reports on —

Coordinating Public Transport, August 2014.

Technical and Further Education Institutes: Results of the 2013 Audits, August 2014.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 —

Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 74 and 107.

Legislative Instruments and related documents under section 16B in respect of a notice of 25 June 2014 amending the Racing Victoria Bookmakers' Licence Levy Rules 2012 under the Racing Act 1958.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Child protection

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — What we have seen from this government in response to the increase in revelations of cases of abuse in Victoria's child protection system has been nothing short of inept. Earlier this year we heard shocking revelations of gangs of paedophiles preying on children in residential care. Last month the ABC revealed the horrifying story of two siblings under the age of 10, placed in two separate residential care units, who were both the subject of sexual and physical exploitation and abuse.

Subsequently the Children's Court, in considering orders relating to these children, has made absolutely scathing comments about the failure of the Department of Human Services and the secretary in their duty of care to these two children. How can Victorians have confidence in the state's child protection system when

the Children's Court itself does not have confidence in the department that runs it?

Leaked departmental figures show that over a 12-month period to March 2014 there were nearly 300 instances of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in out-of-home care. In another case the *Herald Sun* reported that children as young as nine were being sexually abused by other children in residential care while staff members were asleep in the residential care units. In March the Auditor-General found:

... there has been a fundamental failure to oversee and ensure the safety of children in residential care.

The minister continues to ignore the systemic problems in out-of-home care and is failing to ensure the safety of vulnerable children. In desperation the sector has requested a meeting with the Premier, who has refused to meet with them to date. I am calling on the Premier to meet with the sector urgently.

Mallee Family Care

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — As a member for Northern Victoria I was thrilled recently to commission Mallee Family Care's new lift at its Mildura headquarters. A \$72 000 grant from the Victorian coalition government has allowed Mallee Family Care to install the lift and consolidate its service delivery by relocating key programs to the Eighth Street building. These programs make a real difference to the lives of vulnerable Victorians. It is wonderful to see that, even after 30 years, Mallee Family Care continues to maintain a consistent focus on the wellbeing of children and families in the community.

Apprenticeship Factory

Hon. W. A. LOVELL — It was also wonderful to attend the official opening of a new office for the Apprenticeship Factory alongside my colleagues the Minister for Higher Education and Skills, the Honourable Nick Wakeling; the member for Shepparton, Jeanette Powell; and The Nationals candidate, Greg Barr. The Apprentice Factory provides around 90 apprenticeships and 60 traineeships to regional Victorians and is based in Shepparton. Many of these apprentices are training in occupations facing skills shortages and will play a key role in meeting the skill demands of the Goulburn Valley and across the state, helping to build a stronger economy and a better Victoria.

Goulburn Valley Skills Initiative

Hon. W. A. LOVELL — I was delighted that the Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Nick Wakeling, recently launched the \$1 million Goulburn Valley Skills Initiative and the Goulburn Valley Skills Fund. This program will first identify gaps in training and then identify pathways to address these gaps. This investment will enable the local community to develop projects that meet local training and workforce demands, leading to better training options for local students that in turn will lead to high-value jobs that will boost the economy in the Goulburn Valley.

Sunshine Primary School

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — I rise today to speak about Sunshine Primary School and the neglect suffered by our school sector in the western suburbs at the hands of this government. Last Tuesday I had the privilege of visiting Sunshine Primary School and meeting principal Lyn Read and school council president Carmen Borg. Ms Read, Ms Borg and all the teachers are doing a fantastic job at the school on a shoestring budget. With 185 students, 50 per cent of families qualifying for education maintenance allowances and 50 per cent coming from non-English-speaking backgrounds, Ms Read took a school that was in deficit two years ago and put it back into surplus. This community is an example of the real lifters in society, yet our government is not giving it a fair go.

The school is in need of funding for maintenance and repairs, as confirmed in May's 2012 condition assessment summary report conducted by the Department of Education and Early Childhood infrastructure and sustainability division. The school was informed that the sum of \$637 707 had been allocated to address some of the issues; however, the government never delivered.

The school is also in need of its first school oval and running track. The oval redevelopment project will cost \$128 000. The school has worked very hard to obtain funds to get this project up and running. Through community fundraising the school has managed to raise \$73 426, leaving it a shortfall of \$54 574.

Seaspray Surf Lifesaving Club

Mr D. D. O'BRIEN (Eastern Victoria) — Last Wednesday I had great pleasure in attending a function in Sale for the launch of a fundraising drive for the Seaspray Surf Lifesaving Club. A number of us went along planning to pledge some money, but we were

somewhat trumped by the Deputy Premier and member for Gippsland South, the Honourable Peter Ryan, who turned up to announce a further \$500 000 for the project from the Regional Growth Fund for new clubrooms for the Seaspray Surf Lifesaving Club. This brings the state government's contribution to \$1.5 million for a \$2.6 million project. The surf club is now looking for donations from the rest of the community to raise funds for this vital new project.

We have seen some significant donations and fundraising already. The club itself has raised \$250 000. On the night about \$75 000 was pledged for the new facility, which will be a great facility. This is a great club. It has 312 members, and it does great work on behalf of the region and the many people who head to the beach.

Mr D. R. J. O'Brien interjected.

Mr D. D. O'BRIEN — In response to Mr O'Brien, I contributed \$1000 out of my own pocket.

There was also good news around the Victorian volunteer emergency services equipment program: another \$10 000 was provided to the Seaspray Surf Lifesaving Club for a new jetski; some members of the club were more excited about that than the new surf clubrooms. That funding facility has also provided funds for other clubs, such as the Woodside Beach Surf Lifesaving Club and the Yanakie Country Fire Authority brigade, which will receive \$30 000 for an extension to the station.

World War I centenary

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — This week marks the commencement 100 years ago of World War I. The total casualties of World War I were 37 million — over 16 million deaths and 20 million wounded. The total number of deaths included 10 million military personnel and about 7 million civilians. About 6 million military personnel of the Allies were lost, and about 4 million of the Central Powers.

It is hard to believe 100 years have passed since the start of World War I. For me, as for many people whose relatives were caught up in the war, whether they were members of the Australian Imperial Force, whether they were doctors or nurses or whether they were civilians whose lives were forever affected, it still seems a short time ago. Around 60 000 Australians were killed and 152 000 wounded. New Zealand lost around 17 000, with around 40 000 wounded.

I was particularly impressed by the Roll of Honour soundscape, where primary school students from around Australia can record the names of each of the 60 000 Australians who died during World War I, and the Roll of Honour name projections on the facade of the Hall of Memory. The soundscape and the name projections commemorate the individuals affected by World War I and create a personal remembrance of the effect the war had on individual lives.

World War I centenary

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I also wish to speak on the commemoration marking 100 years since the outbreak of World War I. On 4 August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany, which led to a four-year battle that killed more than 9 million military personnel and 7 million civilians and resulted in a total of 37 million casualties. Over the course of the war, 60 000 Australians died, with over 156 000 Australians wounded or taken prisoner. This loss of life and casualty list for a nation of only 5 million people that was in its earliest years as a commonwealth nation was significant. Australia was permanently scarred as it faced and participated in the deadliest and most devastating of all wars, one which affected generations of families and changed the world's political landscape.

In my own family, my grandfather Major Robert Ramsay set sail on the HMAT *Orviato* on 21 October 1914 from Port Melbourne with 1457 men and women. Those men and women joined a convoy to Egypt and went on to the beaches of Gallipoli at the end of April 1915. My grandfather was injured at Gallipoli, fell ill and was transferred to France for medical treatment, where he was treated by a New Zealand nurse who later became his wife. Both returned to Australia at the end of the war.

While my grandfather had the good fortune to survive the horror of the war, the fact that we are commemorating a centenary of a war that killed 16 million people and injured millions of others should allow the world to pause to reflect on the human tragedy, the sacrifice and the consequences of a war that historians even today argue started for no clear reason other than the great powers in Europe, who were led by incompetent leaders, wanting to flex their muscles.

Renewable energy target

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — With the current discussion occurring nationally about the renewable energy target (RET) and the debate about whether the federal government should move to scrap

this Labor government initiative, I thought it timely to outline some facts about renewable energy. The RET was established in 2001 to ensure that 20 per cent of Australia's energy comes from renewable sources by 2020. Since then the RET has reduced emissions by 22.5 million tonnes. If the RET is left unchanged, it is anticipated that emissions will reduce by a further 76 million tonnes by 2020.

The Australia Institute released a research report in July 2014 entitled *Fighting Dirty on Clean Energy*. The research found that despite the federal government blaming rising electricity prices on the RET, the RET is only responsible for around 3 per cent to 4.5 per cent of the increase. In fact the research indicated that the RET is likely to put downward pressure on wholesale electricity prices, which will flow through to retail prices and then ultimately benefit consumers.

In 2011 more than \$5 billion was spent on renewable energy due to incentives provided by the RET. Since 2001, 90 per cent of additional renewable energy generation can be attributed to the initiative. In addition to the environmental and financial benefits of renewable energy, the Australia Institute found that consumers strongly support it. Of the Australians surveyed, 86 per cent wanted to see more renewable energy, while 79 per cent think governments should support renewable energy expansion.

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — Oh, what a tale of woe! Those opposite have spent many a time in this place quoting from and referring to articles from the *Age* newspaper. I refer to the *Age* newspaper, and specifically that of 29 July, where a headline says 'Andrews' dirty mess'. It is a tale about a misplaced dictaphone, a found dictaphone, a downloaded dictaphone and a destroyed dictaphone. Apart from the dictaphone being labelled 'Property of Fairfax', the whole saga has Labor written all over it.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Daniel Andrews, first claimed he knew nothing about it. Then his chief of staff, his media adviser and the ALP vice-president were involved. Mr Andrews still claimed, à la Sergeant Schultz from *Hogan's Heroes*, that he knew nothing. It emerges that the ALP candidate for Yuroke knew about it, yet Daniel Andrews still tells us he did not know what was going on in his office.

I remind Mr Andrews of his remarks in 2011 when he told Deputy Premier Peter Ryan, referring to Mr Ryan's comments relating to a police investigation, that

Mr Ryan did not know what was going on in his office. Mr Andrews said that was gross incompetence and that Mr Ryan should resign.

If it is true that Daniel Andrews did not know what was going on in his office — and that is yet to be determined by a police investigation — then that is gross incompetence and he should resign.

Maroondah education regeneration plan

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I was very pleased to be in attendance in recent days when Labor recommitted to the Maroondah education regeneration plan for the schools in the Maroondah area. Also in attendance were the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Daniel Andrews, and James Merlino, the member for Monbulk in the Assembly, as well as Tony Clark, who is a fantastic Labor candidate for Ringwood, and also Leslie Fielding, who is a fantastic ALP candidate for Croydon.

Labor has repledged to this plan. It is a plan that was abandoned by the Napthine government. Labor will provide funding so that Melba College can consolidate its two campuses. Labor will fund a new performing arts centre and stadium for Norwood Secondary College and Mullum Primary School, and Labor will fund the regeneration of the Ringwood Secondary College.

As I said, this plan had been worked on by the school communities for a number of years and was all set to go until a huge hurdle appeared, which was the Napthine government, which opposed funding schools that deserved it.

Emergency services

Mr RONALDS (Eastern Victoria) — I rise to talk about something that happened in my electorate a few weeks ago. On Sunday two weeks ago a friend of mine, Jon Lambert, was just landing in Africa to do some work with sustainable agriculture when he got a call from a telephone number he did not know. It was his wife calling from the Warragul hospital. Their son had been found unconscious. She had rung 000 and commenced cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Within 5 minutes the ambulance was there. A few minutes later he was in the Warragul hospital, and a little while later he was airlifted to the Monash hospital.

This was a great example of what we all should be thankful for — that is, quite a good health system. Jon's son was there for three days. He was released, and after some scans were done no long-term damage was found.

On Sunday just gone I saw him crawling around on the church floor as if nothing had happened.

I commend the great work of the 000 operators and the ambulance paramedics, particularly Ross Breadon, who was there, and all those in the medical profession at both the Warragul and the Monash hospitals.

Malaysia Airlines flight MH17

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — Like so many of my fellow Australians, I wish to give expression to and pass on my condolences to the loved ones, families and friends of those who perished in the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 atrocity on 17 July. Two hundred and ninety eight people, including 80 children, were literally blasted out of the sky when they were flying at the commercial airline altitude of 32 000 feet over the troubled area of eastern Ukraine. This can only be described as an act of total barbarism, and the perpetrators must be held to account by the community of nations.

We feel deeply the suffering of those who mourn the 283 passengers and 15 crew members: the 193 Dutch citizens; 43 Malaysians; 38 Australians, including 28 citizens, 9 who called Australia home and 1 New Zealander who was living here long term; 12 Indonesians; and 10 Britons. Victoria is still reeling from the shock of losing 18 of its residents. What we know about this catastrophe is that the barbarians behind it committed a war crime by targeting a civilian aircraft and that operating the surface-to-air missile required highly specialised training.

The barbarism continued as bodies, remains, identifying possessions and evidence were left neglected. It is an outrage that until very recently the dead were not accorded the dignity and respect one expects in such events of horror, sadness and loss. Thank goodness our Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, and our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop, have shown such leadership.

Our thoughts are now with the expert teams and our own police who are working to bring the victims home. May those mourning this staggering loss find the strength and comfort to sustain themselves through this period.

Sheepvention

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — I was delighted to join the Premier, Dr Denis Napthine, on Monday as he officially opened Sheepvention 2014 at Hamilton. As the Premier said, Sheepvention is a world-leading exhibition of sheep and wool products that attracts over

25 000 local, national and international visitors. Hosted by the Hamilton Pastoral and Agricultural Society, this is the biggest farming event in western Victoria and a great boost for the regional economy. Competitions and events include the ram sale, sheep show, ewe weaner competition, farm dog competition, alpaca show, inventions competition, seminars and highly acclaimed wool fashion parades.

A major feature of Sheepvention is the Australasian Young Designer Wool Award, where woollen designs are showcased by up-and-coming young designers alongside established iconic clothing brands. The award encourages fashion students to use wool in their designs, and each year the winning young designer receives a \$10 500 cheque from the Handbury Scholarship to attend the Instituto Marangoni in Milan, Italy.

Some 70 garments were modelled in a range of categories as part of this year's Discover Wool fashion event. I congratulate South Australian TAFE student Jessica Nicholls on winning the 2014 Australasian Young Designer Wool Award for her evening wear design and Stephanie Cartledge from Ballarat Grammar on winning best secondary school entry for her fantasy design.

I also congratulate Sheepvention president Nick Sutherland, the committee and the many volunteers who have worked tirelessly to make this a very successful event for Hamilton and western Victoria.

MENTONE GARDENS AGED-CARE FACILITY

The PRESIDENT — Order! I advise the house that pursuant to an order of the Council on 5 August, general business orders of the day 1 and 2 are to be moved and debated concurrently.

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That the house takes note of —

- (1) the Minister for Health's answers to a question without notice and supplementary question on 28 May 2014 relating to Mentone Gardens liquidation;
- (2) the Minister for Health's answers to a question without notice and supplementary question on 29 May 2014 relating to a Mentone Gardens liquidator FOI request.

Thank you, President, for allowing this concurrent debate. It is sensible that we consider these two take-note motions in a cognate debate, as they relate in substance to the same matter. It is useful to give a bit of background to this matter in coming to the questions

that were posed to the minister and the minister's response to those questions.

The motions relate to the collapse last year of the supported residential service (SRS) Mentone Gardens and specifically to the extraordinary lack of cooperation shown by the Minister for Ageing, Mr David Davis, throughout the entire process of the liquidation and his lack of response to the house and, ultimately, to the bondholders, who have been severely affected by the collapse of this SRS.

Mr Lenders has spoken eloquently in the past about the plight of his local constituents. He has taken the trouble to meet with them and has had numerous discussions with them. He has received correspondence, pleas and requests for assistance in this matter. We are talking about some individuals who are very advanced in age. In some cases some of the bond holders who lost their money when Mentone Gardens collapsed have passed away, and it is now the family members who are seeking to pursue these issues and get some explanations from the government and from the department.

By way of background, on 12 June 2013 Parklane Assets Pty Limited, trading as Mentone Gardens, was placed in voluntary administration with debts of more than \$4 million. The company subsequently went into liquidation on 18 September 2013, leaving around 32 elderly residents at risk of losing security deposits that in some cases were as much as \$400 000. I have subsequently raised these issues many times in the house through questions to the minister. I have done so because I remain concerned about those 32 elderly residents who have been affected by this collapse. As I said, some of these residents have since passed away, but there are nevertheless families who remain affected.

These former residents and family members have not been getting any detailed response to their requests for information, so in October last year I asked the minister when he first became aware of the financial troubles at Mentone Gardens. I received his response one month later by way of a letter in which he advised that on 11 January 2013 his department had been notified by a family of a deceased resident that they were pursuing a refund from the proprietary company. There were media reports at the time in which the department indicated that it had been investigating Mentone Gardens prior to it having gone into voluntary administration, so I subsequently sought to extract this information from the minister.

On 28 May I asked the minister whether his department had any reason to investigate Mentone Gardens or its

proprietary company in respect of their financial operations prior to 11 January 2013. The minister failed to respond in any substantive way, so we still do not know whether there was contact with the department prior to 11 January 2013. We do not know whether the department took any action to ensure that the residents of Mentone Gardens did not lose their security deposits. We do not know whether there was any action taken before January 2013. These are very important issues that the government needs to make clear when responding to the former residents about the circumstances of the collapse of Mentone Gardens.

I understand that the residents' security deposits were not placed in a trust account, as is required under the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010. This is now a criminal offence under the act and something that I imagine would need to have been monitored by the department. In a letter dated 17 September 2013 the minister wrote to Mr Alan Lorraine, one of the former residents of Mentone Gardens, who has lost \$400 000 and who I understand has also had quite extensive discussions and correspondence with the minister's department. That letter stated that authorised officers at his department:

... conducted a review of the service in respect of money management, and identified areas of non-compliance to the act in relation to the keeping of trust account records and the preparation of residential and services agreements.

Yet when asked whether anyone had been prosecuted by his department for any breaches of the act, the minister said, 'This is a complex scenario'. This may well be a complex scenario, but the minister would have been provided with advice from his department. If he has not been provided with advice from his department in respect of these matters, then he should be seeking this information.

As I have said, I have asked the minister numerous questions about this issue. It is not an adequate response for the minister to come in here and say that this is a complex scenario and that he cannot advise the house or those who have been affected by this issue as to whether there have been any prosecutions to date and whether matters are leading up to action being taken in respect of anyone involved with the company that has since gone into liquidation. It is very disappointing that the minister was not able to respond to a very direct question with a straightforward answer.

Authorised officers within the department are appointed under the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010 to monitor compliance of the act and regulations by undertaking inspections, investigating complaints and imposing sanctions. It is

important to note here that despite authorised officers performing this regulatory function, it may well be that the department was not exempt from the coalition government's sustainable government initiative, which has seen 4200 jobs lost from the public service. Again I seek some clarity from the government and a response in relation to that. I would like the government to advise whether these authorised officers were in fact exempted from the sustainable government initiative, because the minister has failed to provide any clarity in response to my questions on this issue. He particularly took issue with my quoting from the Office of the Public Advocate's community visitors annual report 2012–13, which on page 57 notes:

... there was a massive loss of staff and corporate knowledge from the department, particularly in the eastern and southern regions, which have the majority of SRS.

On page 68 the report goes on to single out the southern metropolitan region as being:

... without the support of a department manager as well as a reduction in the number of permanent authorised officers because of resignations and government policy. This puts enormous pressure on staff to support and regulate the SRS sector ...

The public advocate has identified issues around a lack of resources within the department to adequately regulate supported residential services. I pursued these issues with the minister in the last parliamentary sitting week when I asked him a series of questions about the number of audits and inspections conducted by authorised officers of his department of SRSs in the 2012–13 financial year. I asked him in particular how many audits were conducted in the southern metropolitan region, and I asked him how many audits and inspections had been conducted at Mentone Gardens during this term of government and whether an audit of the finances of Mentone Gardens was conducted by the department prior to a receiver being appointed and on what date this occurred.

In the last sitting week the minister took all these questions on notice. At the time he did so, Mr Lenders, as Leader of the Opposition, took a point of order and sought an indication from the minister as to when we might expect a timely response to the questions that I posed, because the minister had said he was going to provide this information to me and he had taken these matters on notice. At the time, the President indicated to the house and to the minister that a 30-day period would be a reasonable time frame and that he expected that I would receive a response from the minister within that 30-day period, as is consistent with the standing orders that apply to questions on notice more broadly. These were questions without notice, but the President

indicated to the minister that 30 days would be a reasonable time period.

Those 30 days have since expired, and I am still waiting for a response to those particular questions. I will be pursuing this matter with the President quite separately,— perhaps an appropriate time might be after question time — unless government members or the minister come into this house during the course of this take-note debate and respond to these questions today, because we still do not have any response to those issues I pursued prior to the winter recess of the Parliament.

On 28 May I also asked the minister about Mentone Gardens and in particular his cooperation with the liquidator, Mr Roger Darren Grant, in the course of his investigation. Despite the minister's assurances last year that his department had 'sought to do everything that it can to assist', I was advised by the liquidator that the minister's department had not released all the relevant documentation and that the matter is now the subject of a complaint with the FOI commissioner. The liquidator has further advised me that when the minister wrote to him on 13 November last year seeking a copy of the liquidator's report the liquidator provided his report to the department, yet when the liquidator wrote to the minister on 13 March and 20 April this year outlining the difficulties the liquidator was experiencing in obtaining a response to his FOI request he did not receive a response.

This is an extraordinary show of arrogance on the part of this minister. In fact in a letter sent to me on 28 May the liquidator noted that he had:

... reasonable grounds to question whether the above request for details of my investigation are in good faith in circumstances where I am unable to obtain timely responses from the Department of Health.

It is important that the liquidator have access to all the relevant information in order to be able to meet his statutory obligations to do a thorough investigation into the circumstances of this company's collapse and liquidation and to be able to recover funds for those creditors who are owed funds.

The lack of response and the fact that we now have a liquidator having to resort to a complaint with the FOI commissioner is a very unfortunate turn of events. I speak with a bit of experience here, having also had FOI requests rejected and having to go through the FOI commissioner on numerous occasions myself. We all know that the FOI commissioner is under-resourced and that there are many delays there, so I am concerned as to how Mr Grant is going to obtain a timely

response, not just from the department but also from the FOI commissioner, to enable him to complete his investigations.

We are seeing a continual refusal by the minister to release the relevant documents to assist the liquidator in his investigation. This is not a cooperative approach, as the minister claimed last year. In fact the minister even sought to shift responsibility for furnishing those documents to the liquidator himself when he said that it was a 'challenge' for documents to be released from the liquidator to the department. I hope the minister will be able to provide some further information today as to the current status of this matter and in particular the FOI request and whether the department will be furnishing those documents to the liquidator, as has been requested.

Sadly, the minister's unsatisfactory responses, or the lack of response to my questions has also extended to the very residents who are at the heart of this matter. I know they were very disappointed that the minister did not participate in the previous general business debate we had on this matter on 11 June.

I have received copies of many letters that residents have sent to the minister about their individual situations. What is most evident throughout is the hurt and anger they feel at the minister and his department's treatment of their plight. I do not propose to quote extensively from the voluminous correspondence I have received, correspondence of which I think the minister is very well aware, but I want to touch on a couple of individuals. Ms Sue Higgins has said in a letter to the minister:

What distresses and disgusts me more so is your total lack of interest, Mr Davis, in the Mentone Gardens/Parklane Assets matter.

...

... a minister for health and ageing with no heart.

I referred earlier to Mr Lorraine. In his most recent letter to the minister, dated 23 June, he notes the following:

... there has not been the slightest genuine expression of empathy from you, for the continued duress and other suffering daily affecting the lives of the now 5 centenarian ladies and the other 20 or so nonagenarian males and females (leaving aside the 10 or so people who have passed on), while awaiting your genuine display of interest in helping to recover so much of their hard-won life savings ...

The minister might be hoping that this matter is going to go away, but I can assure him that it will not. These individuals are absolutely determined to get some

answers from this government as to what has happened and what the department knew. They are wondering what the minister is hiding and why he is refusing to release documents or participate in a debate about these matters and respond to questions in the house about when his department knew that Mentone Gardens was in financial trouble. They want to know whether Mentone Gardens was properly audited. They want to know whether any action has ever been taken against the proprietary company in relation to its non-compliance with the act. These are all very important questions that deserve answers.

I know that Mr Lenders is a very passionate advocate on behalf of his constituents. As I said earlier, he has met with individuals and devoted a lot of time and energy to researching these issues and looking at all the correspondence in great depth. He has lodged questions on notice with the minister about these issues and tried to assist those who are affected to get some answers from the government. We have to wonder when the minister is going to be forthcoming with some more detailed responses. To date, we have put a number of questions and had very few answers.

The minister keeps referring residents to the liquidator, who is struggling to complete his investigation due to obstacles put in place by the minister himself. This is a farcical situation where the department and the minister say, 'Go off and pursue these issues with the liquidator', and then the liquidator says, 'Well, I'm stymied in my investigations because the department and the minister are not providing me with the documents that I need to complete the investigation'. It is a very sad situation where people's lives and their financial futures are in limbo until the liquidator is able to complete his investigations and provide some advice back to the creditors, the security holders, about these issues.

I want to touch on one bit of correspondence that the department sent Mr Lorraine on 9 July this year. This is a letter from Paul Smith, deputy secretary of the Department of Health, to Mr Lorraine. In that correspondence he said:

The department has no authority under the legislation to audit the financial statements of private companies registered under the commonwealth's Corporations Act 2001.

I hope that the minister will be able to shed some light on this comment in his contribution — if he chooses to make one, and I hope that he does — in particular as to whether the financial statements of private companies registered as support residential services under the Victorian Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010 are within the domain of

authorised officers to be able to audit and monitor compliance of the SRS. If this is not the case, then it would seem there is a glaring gap in the legislation.

I will just finish by saying that we are seeing continuous deflection and blame-shifting from the minister — nothing is ever his fault or responsibility. I am accustomed to getting that response from him every time I ask about his privatisation agenda in relation to public aged care. He has ripped \$75 million in funding out of this area, and he has never sought to accept responsibility for the subsequent closures and contracting out of these facilities. We are seeing this again with respect to this SRS.

As I said at the outset, some very elderly people have been affected by the collapse of Mentone Gardens. In many cases they have been significantly affected in terms of the amount of money they have lost from their security deposits. These residents deserve some answers. I am very disappointed that we have had to bring on a take-note debate due to the fact that we have not had any proper answers from the minister not only to those questions to which the minister provided very flippant and non-responsive replies but also in his failure to respond to my most recent questions that I raised in the last sitting week before the winter recess about audits and inspections of SRSs and of Mentone Gardens in particular.

After all of these questions and because this is now the second general business debate the opposition has devoted to Mentone Gardens, it is time the minister himself came into the house and provided answers not to me or the opposition but to the security holders and former residents who have lost money. They expect answers. They want the minister to come into the house and provide a fulsome response to all the questions he has been asked and to which he has refused to respond. I am calling on the minister. I hope he is listening from his office because he has not been in the house during the course of my contribution. I hope he will come in here and respond to this debate.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — My contribution will be quite brief. After having listened to a number of the questions Ms Mikakos has attempted to ask of the minister over several months as well as her contribution today, it has become quite clear to me that the Minister for Ageing should be answering these questions. Considering these motions are about the minister's answers, I am quite surprised that he has not even bothered to come into the chamber. I am not quite sure whether he is listening, or how or even if he intends to respond. The Greens are very supportive of the action Ms Mikakos has taken today in

attempting — yet again — to get the minister to be transparent and answer quite reasonable questions.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — On behalf of the government, I am pleased to rise to speak on Ms Mikakos's take-note motions this morning. I note Ms Mikakos gave some background on these motions, which I will go through as well.

Ms Hartland's contribution was very brief. I note that it related to the minister's whereabouts. The minister has a number of areas of responsibility, so I will be speaking on behalf of the government in relation to Ms Mikakos's take-note motions. As I have said previously, it is very distressing for anybody who in their later years is facing financial difficulty. It is very concerning for their families. I want to place on the record my concern for the difficulties that those various individuals and their families are experiencing in this matter. As has been highlighted, this is a complex matter — it involves different jurisdiction-based law — and we understand that. As Ms Mikakos stated previously, there have been a number of individuals and family members who have been embroiled in this issue.

By way of background I reiterate to the chamber that Mentone Gardens is a supported residential service (SRS) and as such is a private business governed in Victoria under the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010, otherwise known as the SRS act. Pursuant to the administration of acts general order dated 22 February 2011, the Minister for Ageing and the Minister for Community Services jointly and severally administer that act.

Ms Mikakos made a number of comments in relation to the minister's lack of interest and in relation to his ability to answer questions relating to the issues that have been surrounding Mentone Gardens. I have reviewed in *Hansard* the answers to the questions that have been raised. I note that in his last contribution Mr Lenders said that I said it is a complex issue. I reiterate that; it is a complex issue. It is governed by a number of acts — criminal law and commonwealth law, amongst others.

I remind members that the SRS act received royal assent on 24 August 2010 under the Labor government. In the blame shifting that Ms Mikakos has just engaged in in the chamber it was stated that the minister should take some responsibility. I was not in Parliament in 2010, but my point is that that regulatory regime was put in place by the Labor government, of which Ms Mikakos was a member. I think some responsibility must be sheeted home to the Labor government, given

what was done at the time by the government she served under.

In contrast, under the coalition government regulations were developed following extensive consultation with the sector to effect the act's provisions relating to financial and money management matters, including a requirement for any fees and deposits paid to be held in a trust account and a specification of retention and refund requirements in relation to fees and deposits.

The regulations were subject to a regulatory impact statement, submissions and consultation. A large number of stakeholders involved in the sector were consulted, including the Office of the Public Advocate, the SRS proprietors, residents, residents' families, guardians, medical healthcare practitioners, the Tenants Union of Victoria, the health services commissioner, the disability services commissioner, the Victorian Council of Social Services, State Trustees, the Royal District Nursing Service, VICSERV — the peak body representing community-managed mental health services in Victoria — the Law Institute of Victoria and the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel. They were all consulted for the purpose of making the proposed regulations.

I think members will all agree that that is an extensive list of very important stakeholders involved in the area that we are discussing today. It was most appropriate that they were consulted in the manner in which they were. The regulations came into effect on 1 July 2012 but do not apply to the full suite of payments made to proprietors prior to that date.

The objective and primary focus of the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010 is the protection of the safety and wellbeing of residents. Clearly, as we are discussing today, there have been some significant issues. The financial provisions under the SRS act do not replace the broader protections, penalties and remedies available under consumer law, criminal law and the Corporations (Victoria) Act 1990, which I have already referred to. Those are the three areas that make this matter somewhat complex.

To get back to the issue of Mentone Gardens, the bulk of payments made by the Mentone Gardens residents to the old proprietor Parklane Assets Pty Ltd were made under the Labor government's regime and are therefore not likely to be covered by the new regulations, and that is the issue at hand, which has not been fully understood by the residents or others. But they are the facts.

Mentone Gardens was placed into voluntary administration in June 2013 and a liquidator was subsequently appointed in September last year. Mentone Gardens was sold in September 2013 to a new proprietor, CPN Assets Pty Ltd, meaning that the 36 elderly residents did not need to be relocated. However, I am led to believe that a number moved facilities of their own accord.

The liquidator, which has been the subject of quite lengthy discussion in this debate, is currently undertaking investigations, and the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, or ASIC, will determine any action under the commonwealth Corporations Act 2001 when these investigations conclude. Ms Mikakos made various comments about the liquidator. She said it has been stymied in its investigations and has not had access to all the relevant information to enable it to make a thorough investigation. But it is fair to say that the liquidator has not provided key information to the Department of Health to enable those investigations to proceed. The minister again wrote to the liquidator on 31 July seeking its support in making available any analysis and/or company records that may assist the department to clarify whether there have been breaches of the SRS act. That is a quite appropriate requirement because it will assist the department to fully assess what is going on.

There has been some discussion around a number of residents' deposits being transferred to the bank account of another entity owned by the Mentone Gardens proprietors, Acacia Falls Pty Ltd. The Minister for Ageing recently wrote to ASIC seeking its cooperation in allowing the liquidator to pursue all available options, particularly with respect to expanding its investigations into Acacia Falls Pty Ltd. Significant and appropriate activity is occurring to try to get to the crux of this matter.

Ms Mikakos's take-note motions also refer to Mentone Gardens liquidator's freedom of information request. As members will be aware, decisions under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI act) are made by officers of the department with the appropriate delegation to perform this function. That is an appropriate function the department undertakes, and it is one that all members will be familiar with. The department's freedom of information unit received a request from the liquidator, Mr Roger Grant of Dye & Co, for documents under the FOI act. Mr Grant's request was processed in accordance with the act without interference and in a manner that will protect privacy in accordance with FOI legislation.

I understand the applicant has sought an independent review of this decision by the Freedom of Information Commissioner and that the review before the commissioner has not yet been finalised. It would therefore be quite inappropriate for the Minister for Ageing to comment on the case before the commissioner, or indeed to interfere with established procedures and processes under the FOI act. Ms Mikakos said she had some experience in relation to the FOI process, so I think she will agree with that view.

This has been a difficult issue. A complex set of circumstances have arisen. The department and the minister have acted appropriately, and the questions that have been put to the minister on numerous occasions by Ms Mikakos have been answered thoroughly. With the further investigation I have outlined, and recent correspondence to the persons involved, hopefully we will get further information to assist with the investigation. With those words I conclude my contribution.

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — I will be very brief in my response. I record my extreme disappointment that the Minister for Ageing has not come into the house to respond to these matters. This is a take-note debate about his responses to particular questions, and Ms Crozier has drawn the short straw yet again and had to come in and defend the indefensible. She has been provided with notes by the minister's office to sledge the liquidator, because that is what we have heard today; we have heard an attack on the liquidator.

As recently as this morning I spoke with Mr Grant, and he advised that he is yet to receive the documents he is pursuing. Ms Crozier knows the department is able to provide those documents at any time. In fact there have been examples where applicants who have been unsuccessful in obtaining FOI documents have been heading to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, when at the 11th hour the documents have been provided on the doorsteps of the tribunal. So those documents can be provided at any time. It is not correct to say that because the matter is now being pursued by the Freedom of Information Commissioner — and of course there is a process that is followed in such cases — the documents cannot be provided.

We did not hear any substantive response from Ms Crozier to the questions that have been posed, the questions that are referred to by this take-note motion, the questions that I asked on 28 May and 29 May and subsequently in June as well — those outstanding issues to which the Minister for Ageing is yet to

respond. In the hour or so of this debate the minister has not turned up to participate in or contribute to it. He has not been in the house. That in itself is also disappointing. I hope the pleas for information and support for those affected security holders are not falling on deaf ears. I hope some members opposite will take it upon themselves to plead with the Minister for Ageing to do more in this case. Certainly on this side we will continue to ask questions of the minister until we get some satisfactory answers.

Motion agreed to.

MEDICARE CO-PAYMENT

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I move:

That this house notes —

- (1) the comments made by the Minister for Health in question time on 27 May 2014; and
- (2) the Victorian government's opposition to the Medicare co-payment proposed by the federal government;

and calls on Liberal and National Party senators for Victoria to oppose the Medicare co-payment.

As a member of Parliament, my work takes me far and wide. As it does all of us, it puts me into conversations with people across the community on all manner of things. There is a common theme. Time and again Australians and Victorians advocate for the same core principle — that is, fairness. It is a tenet of our society that causes volunteers to be active in their communities. It is a belief in fairness that has led us to be a nation where citizens will donate their time and money to charities and non-government organisations. It is a desire for fairness that sends people in their hundreds into the streets and indeed into the bush when we are faced with a natural disaster. It is fairness that underpins the best policy that comes from this place — the Victorian Parliament — and indeed from the commonwealth Parliament.

When introducing the federal Health Legislation Amendment Bill 1983 — the bill that sought to re-establish former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's universal healthcare scheme and create what is now known as Medicare — Hawke government health minister Dr Neal Blewett stated that the bill embodied not only a major social reform but a health insurance system that is simple, fair and affordable.

For the past 30 years we have all had the benefit of living in a country with a universal healthcare system that is simple, fair and affordable. Everyone in this state knows the comfort that universal health care brings. For

any of us, when a child falls off a bike and breaks an arm, when there is a call from school saying someone has been injured, when we deal with ageing parents, in-laws or neighbours, when our siblings have babies and we become aunts and uncles — for all the reasons we encounter the health system as members of families and as members of communities — we know that we have a world-class healthcare system because we know that in Australia leaving the sick and needy to ail without treatment is not fair and is not good enough.

The Medicare co-payment proposed by the federal coalition government seeks to destroy universal health care in Australia. It seeks to make Medicare complicated, unaffordable and unfair. Dr Liz Marles, president of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, has stated that the poorer and sicker members of our community will be disproportionately affected by the co-payment, creating a two-tiered healthcare system like the one in the United States. The college has said that access to health care will decrease because of this new tax.

The Abbott government proclaims that a \$7 contribution is a minor imposition, but people from both sides of this house know this is not the case. According to research conducted by the University of Sydney, a family with two children under the age of 16 will pay approximately \$184 more per year on average to access basic medical care, a self-funded retiree couple will be impacted to the tune of an extra \$244 per year and a pensioner couple with concession cards will pay an extra \$199 per year. People who need to access out-of-hospital pathology will be charged twice — \$7 to see the doctor for the referral and \$7 to go back for the test results. For people struggling to make ends meet, \$14 to get necessary medical treatment is a significant sum of money. Further to this, and more importantly, it is likely to become a deterrent to seeking medical treatment in the first place.

Dr Liz Marles said:

I have no doubt this will result in vulnerable patients choosing to delay or avoid general practice visits because they cannot afford the out-of-pocket costs. Health care is not discretionary spending.

By making GP visits and associated tests and treatments more expensive, patients will be forced into emergency rooms rather than going to their local doctor. Beyond its inherent unfairness, this is bad policy. The drive to emergency departments for basic primary health care will place additional strain on our already stretched public hospitals and emergency waiting rooms. The doctors and nurses in our emergency departments already have plenty to do and

in many instances are stretched to breaking point already.

Thankfully the Victorian government has recognised the importance of preserving universal health care. In Victoria this crosses the political divide. I welcome the comments of our Victorian Minister for Health, David Davis, who on 27 May said:

In terms of the co-payment, we have been quite clear that we do not support the co-payment ...

Mr Davis continued:

We do not believe the \$7 proposed co-payment for GP services will assist our health system in Victoria. We do not believe it will make primary care stronger. We do not believe it will assist patients, and we do not believe it will assist our health services.

Mr Davis went on to say he did not believe the co-payment would pass the Senate in the federal Parliament. Mr Davis is to be commended on his public opposition to the co-payment. This motion asks all government members to join with their leader in this house and the health minister in their government and take up the fight with us to save Medicare in the name of that basic Australian principle of fairness. I call on the minister and all members of the government to express this objection to their federal coalition colleagues in the Senate.

Students of politics will know — and we may have some students of politics in the gallery who will know this — the Senate is the states' house, and with both sides of the Victorian Parliament vociferously opposed to the Medicare co-payment it is the responsibility of federal coalition senators from Victoria to note the view of the Victorian government and the Victorian opposition in this regard. With the motion before the house today it is my fervent hope that federal coalition senators from Victoria will note the view of the upper house of the Victorian Parliament and vote in accordance with what is in the best interests of Victoria rather than toe the party line — a position that has been determined by Tony Abbott, Joe Hockey and a bunch of other people who are not from Victoria. It is the obligation of Victorian federal senators to protect the best interests of Victorians needing to access health care and the best interests of the state and not to blindly and ideologically dismantle universal health care and destroy the wonderful and unique Australian institution that is Medicare.

Mr Ramsay — Why were you so happy to have a carbon tax on hospitals then?

Ms PULFORD — I hope Mr Ramsay's interjection is not a precursor to a case being put to oppose the motion by government members in this place. This is simply a question of the appropriateness for Victorian patients seeking to access health care of a co-payment introduced by the federal government. Members will be aware that Mr Ramsay, a number of other members in this place and I, as members of the Economy and Infrastructure References Committee, undertook an inquiry into the effect of the carbon tax on hospitals.

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Ms PULFORD — I would discourage Mr Ramsay from re-prosecuting that case in this debate. Mr Ramsay knows that decisions of his own government in relation to energy conservation in hospitals and other government buildings have a profoundly greater impact. I would be frightfully disheartened if Mr Ramsay chose to side in this debate with Liberal members of the federal Parliament rather than with his own health minister, who has made his personal views clear. I assume the views of the Victorian government are clear on this matter — Mr Davis was not in any way equivocal.

Medicare has been with Victorians and with Australians in their moments of greatest delight and greatest despair — the entry into a family of a new child and the loss of a loved one. It has been, and I certainly hope it will continue to be, a source of great comfort to Australians who know they can access health care when they need it, not if they can afford it.

Across the state we have seen people mobilising in their thousands to express their opposition to this new tax, this proposed destruction of universal health care. There are tens of thousands of people in federal electorates expressing to their federal member of Parliament their opposition to this charge. I can only imagine that those in the Senate who represent vastly larger constituencies are being bombarded with people's views on this. It is the responsibility of Victorian federal coalition senators to uphold the wishes of the people of Victoria in the Senate and oppose the co-payment. It is important for those senators to note that the Victorian government and the Victorian health minister have indicated that the \$7 co-payment will be of no assistance to the Victorian health system, health services and patients.

To this day Medicare remains one of the proudest achievements of the Australian Labor Party. We in the ALP have brought it back from the brink of destruction in the past — and if we have to, we will do it again. But on this occasion we are turning to the Victorian government in the spirit of bipartisanship. We want the

Victorian government to stand with its health minister and with us to express to Victorian federal senators the view of the Victorian Parliament that the Medicare co-payment is no good for Victoria, no good for Victorian patients and no good for our health system. I implore members opposite to help us send this message very clearly to the federal Parliament and the federal coalition senators and to help us ensure that health care remains simple, fair and affordable.

We in the Labor Party will fight for Medicare to make sure all Australians are able to access world-class health care irrespective of their financial situation. We will fight for Medicare because we do not want to see a two-tiered American-style health system. We will fight for Medicare because it is fair. We very much hope that the Victorian government will join with us in this fight and support the motion.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to be able to rise to speak on Ms Pulford's motion this morning. I reiterate for the chamber and for Ms Pulford what has been said by the Minister for Health on many occasions: the Victorian government does not support introducing the proposed co-payment. In addition the Victorian government has said it does not support introducing a co-payment in our Victorian emergency departments. The Minister for Health has said that on a number of occasions.

As we are having this debate today, we have discussions going on at a federal level. The Minister for Health is speaking with his counterpart, the federal Minister for Health, Mr Dutton, on a range of issues, and of course he continues to have discussions around the changes the commonwealth is seeking to introduce. Because the Senate is yet to decide on this matter, the debate we are having this morning is hypothetical. I do not know what it is that those opposite do not understand about the very fervent points the Minister for Health has made about not supporting a co-payment, but I will say it again: the minister has said on numerous occasions that the Victorian government will not be supporting it.

The co-payment is not a new proposal. As a reminder, I note it was put to the Australian community in recent times. Back in 1991, when the federal budget was under significant strain, the then Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, and his government announced a co-payment of \$3.50, which was later reduced to \$2.50, and which was abandoned within months by the subsequent Prime Minister, Mr Keating. Therefore this is something that has been put up by those on the opposite side in the past; members of the opposition

understand that health is a very expensive area of government.

Health is an area of great importance for our country and our state. As someone who worked in the public health sector and the health industry for 16 years, I know very well how significant health is. Certainly in Victoria's public health system, where I have worked, the clinicians — the doctors — the nurses, the allied health professionals, the support staff and everybody else involved in running our public health services and public hospitals do a tremendous job. Again I place on the record my support for their ongoing efforts in providing what I think is one of the world's leading health services — if not the world's leading health service. We should be very proud of their provision of that service, but again that goes to the heart of the question — the point that health is really expensive. Health is a very expensive exercise, so it is necessary to have this discussion, if you like, and the federal government is certainly having this discussion. Our Minister for Health, however, has made it very plain that he will not be supporting the proposed co-payment.

I am also pleased to say that Victoria's health services are in a very healthy state. Since being elected to government we have grown the health budget by 32.2 per cent. That is a significant increase in health services and for the health budget, providing for the necessary requirements to cater for a growing and ageing population. This was something the former government neglected to do. In its 11 years of administration Labor failed to provide for a growing and ageing population — that is, it failed to provide health services adequate for that population. We have invested significant funds in health to get to a point where our services are in a very good state.

Of course there are always challenges, and there always will be — as I said, health is a complex and expensive business — but relative to the other jurisdictions around the country, Victoria's health services are in extremely good shape, aided by the increase the coalition has provided to Victoria's health budget. This is something that needs to be highlighted, and we have highlighted it in the chamber previously. Those increases in health spending are in stark contrast to what the former Labor government did at the federal level in putting hospitals and health services under significant pressure when it ripped \$107 million out of their budgets halfway through a financial year. This was an extraordinary decision made by the then Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek, under Prime Minister Julia Gillard. It was extraordinary for that government to put those financial pressures onto health services when it had already outlaid its budget. That just goes to the heart of the lack

of understanding we see from those opposite about how our health services operate. They claim to know how they operate, but to rip out \$107 million halfway through a financial year was quite an extraordinary undertaking.

I remind the chamber it was our Minister for Health who took the lead in arguing for that \$107 million to be reinstated for Victoria. Subsequently the federal government saw sense and reinstated that money for Victoria and money for other jurisdictions as well. It was quite alarming, however, that the members of that Labor government and the Greens, who were on side with Labor at the time, voted in favour of those cuts to our health services. This was very much about them trying to save face in light of a failing budget. We know that the federal government is under extreme pressure given its fiscal situation. I am pleased to say that here in Victoria, under the stewardship and leadership of Treasurer Michael O'Brien and Premier Napthine, we are in a very good position; we are quite the envy of other jurisdictions around the country.

There has been a significant health infrastructure spend in my electorate. Only a few weeks ago I was with the Minister for Health, the Premier and members of the Monash Children's hospital board and the Monash Health board at Clayton, where construction has begun on that very important children's hospital facility. It is a \$250 million infrastructure spend on a hospital that is greatly needed for south-eastern Melbourne and the eastern areas of our state.

Of course we have the Royal Children's Hospital, and I acknowledge and put on the record the Labor government's work in making that an absolutely extraordinary facility for Victoria's children, but it is not big enough. It is not catering for our growing population in the south-eastern suburbs and for families and children who have to cross large parts of the city or indeed the state to get to that facility.

The Monash Children's will meet a significant need in that part of the state. Additionally and importantly the project is providing more than 700 construction-related jobs and it will deliver world-leading paediatric care. As I said, it will be a leader, as are a number of other health institutions around the state, and that is something that all of us in this chamber are proud of. The new hospital will provide leading paediatric care in a number of areas to young Victorians. This is all part of the Napthine government's plan to provide a healthier Victoria and to provide not only the required infrastructure to cater for the growing population but also the very important construction jobs which will deliver economic benefits right across the state.

It is not news to members when I say that we have an expanding, growing population and an ageing population. The Labor government looked at a proposal in this regard in 2002 but did absolutely nothing about it. It neglected those areas. It neglected to cater for the population expansion and did nothing about it for eight years, from 2002 to 2010. It is the coalition government that has put this project in place and enabled it to occur.

As I said, it will be a significant medical centre that will cater for the population in the south-eastern parts of Melbourne and Victoria. There is no doubt that that will result in healthier outcomes for children, but it will also assist many families, both in Southern Metropolitan Region, which I represent, and in the south-eastern areas of Melbourne, as I have already stated. There will be 230 beds in that hospital, and that will provide great relief to other surrounding hospitals and indeed the Royal Children's Hospital. It will have 27 consulting rooms, and it is expected to deliver around 60 000 outpatient treatments for children each year. Importantly, I note also that it will provide the very necessary foetal surgery and treatment of cardiac rhythm disturbances and it will be the only hospital to conduct that complex work on paediatric patients.

Other areas of infrastructure funding have been undertaken since the coalition came to government. I am sure other members will talk about the work occurring in their own electorates, because it has not been only within metropolitan Melbourne that capital has been expended on improved health service infrastructure. It has also occurred in other areas of the state, such as Geelong, the Latrobe Valley and of course at the Bendigo Hospital. A total of \$630 million has been spent on that facility in the northern region of Victoria, which will provide significant services to people in northern parts of the state and take significant loads off our larger metropolitan hospitals. I am sure Mrs Millar would agree that that will be of enormous benefit to the Bendigo community and surrounding areas.

The government has undertaken many improvements in the area of health. I know other members will also speak about these things when addressing the motion before the house today. The Minister for Health has been very much focused on supporting our health services right across the state. The government has delivered record health funding since coming to office. Around \$15 billion has been put into health in the 2014–15 budget, and concurrent with that around \$4.5 billion of health infrastructure projects, some of which I have outlined this morning, have been funded.

As I said, the minister has been arguing strongly in the interests of Victorian patients and indeed in the interests of Victorian healthcare professionals, because they too get affected when significant cuts are made — like the one I mentioned previously, when the former federal Labor Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek, took \$700 million out of the very necessary health budget. Some of those cuts were really significant. There is debate around waiting lists and various other elements. Of course there has to be a catch-up because the health services suffered such significant cuts in their budgets that they had to reassign or reprioritise what they were going to do as the money was no longer there. The cuts involved a significant amount of money.

In my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region, the Alfred hospital had \$26 million taken out of its budget. The impact in Northern Victoria Region was also substantial. In Bendigo the cuts amounted to \$9 million; in Mildura, \$3 million; in Ballarat, \$9 million; and in South West Healthcare, \$4 million. These are just some examples of the very large amount of money that was taken out of health service budgets and the enormous impact on the way those services have conducted their operations in elective surgery, the running of their outpatient services and the like.

The managers of those health services need to look at what must be undertaken to ensure that their communities have the services they need, and they are doing that. The management and staff of the health services should be congratulated on the enormous amount of hard work they have done to enable their hospitals and health services to function in the way they have since that decision was made. As I said, it takes some time to realign when what was previously there has been taken out.

The motion before the house calls on Liberal and Nationals senators for Victoria to oppose a Medicare co-payment. As I said, that is a hypothetical at this stage because the co-payment is not before the Senate. However, the Minister for Health, Mr Davis, has been very forthright. He has spoken widely on this issue and his views are well known. The federal Minister for Health, Mr Dutton, is well aware of Victoria's position on this. It is plain that this motion is about just looking at the issue from the opposition's point of view and about supporting the Medicare system.

As Australians we are very fortunate to have the health system we have, and in certain circumstances we need to take responsibility for ourselves and be aware that the health services experience is challenging at times. Much can be done by the individual to assist our health services in addressing many of those challenges. I am

of course talking about health and wellbeing and various other things. Our health services should support all of us when required, but as a community we need to be looking at how we can support our health services and health workers. We need to look at this issue, because there is increasing demand on our health services. As I have said, we have an ageing population with more complex health needs, requiring a greater length of stay at certain times and the delivery of more intensive care. Those issues need to be looked at as we progress.

Our health services do a tremendous job of providing significant health care, but we need to take charge of things like our health and wellbeing. We need to look at the rate of diseases like diabetes. I note that representatives of Diabetes Australia are coming to Parliament House tomorrow to allow members to be tested. Co-convenors Mrs Millar and Ms Garrett, the member for Brunswick in the other house, are undertaking that important process. As somebody who has worked in the area of diabetes, I commend them on that initiative. That is one area of complex chronic disease where the community can and should be doing more.

In this regard I particularly acknowledge the minister for his support of Healthy Together Victoria, a program involving communities across Victoria. I have had some input into this program in my role as Parliamentary Secretary for Health. Twelve local government areas are undertaking some terrific initiatives and looking at their own local communities to help prevent chronic disease. They have done a significant job in a number of areas, and it is making a real impact. With more than 500 000 Victorians engaged in that program, it is a very practical health initiative that is having real effects. I congratulate all the people involved, particularly those within the Department of Health who are running and coordinating that program. Importantly, I also commend the local mayors and others on their leadership. They have embraced the program and are doing an excellent job of speaking to people in their communities.

That is the responsibility that I am talking about — the responsibility of communities for their own health and wellbeing. If we attend to this, we will see a reduction in demand for our health services. We need to start at a very early age. A lot of the Healthy Together community work is being undertaken in our kindergartens and preschools. That is a significant step forward. We need to capture these children at an early age if we are going to see a generational change. I urge all involved to continue their great work and keep

promoting healthy lifestyles to try to reverse the trend of the significant burden of diseases such as type 2 diabetes. If we can do that, as I said, we will take the strain off a lot of our health services.

Again I have strayed a little from the motion, but this is very much related to how we support our health services and how we can provide for those who are most vulnerable and most in need of access to our public health services. There is no question that those who are most vulnerable and most in need of the services that our larger health services provide should be able to access those. I again commend the significant health workforce we have in Victoria on the excellent care it provides to the Victorian community and extends to other communities, such as those in Tasmania and the southern parts of New South Wales, in many instances. I support the work they do.

In conclusion, the government will not oppose Ms Pulford's motion. As I said, the Minister for Health, Mr Davis, has been very forthright in his response to the Medicare co-payment. On a number of occasions, both within and outside the house, he has made clear the Victorian government's position on a Medicare co-payment.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — This is a very straightforward motion. While I accept that Ms Crozier would want to delve into a whole range of areas, the motion just says:

- (2) the Victorian government's opposition to the Medicare co-payment proposed by the federal government;

and calls on Liberal and National Party senators for Victoria to oppose the Medicare co-payment.

It is a very simple motion. I can say that Adam Bandt, the member for Melbourne in the House of Representatives, and our Greens senators will be opposing the co-payment. One of the problems with the federal government's budget is that it clearly shows its contempt and disregard for ordinary Australians. The co-payments in particular are harsh. If you are an older person, if you are a family with a number of children or if you are a family with a disabled child who has to go repeatedly to the doctor, these co-payments will be incredibly detrimental to your budget. It is quite clear that the federal government clearly does not care about people and that is why it has attempted to inflict these co-payments — —

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Ms HARTLAND — Mr Ramsay says by interjection that it is rubbish to say that the federal

government does not care about ordinary people, yet its members are bringing in this co-payment. They are the ones who are going to inflict a co-payment on pensioners, on people with large families and on people who have children with disabilities. I do not see someone else inflicting the co-payment on people.

It will be interesting to listen to Mr Ramsay's contribution because it would seem that he supports the co-payments. I am not quite sure what his interjections are about. In my mind it is quite clear that the federal government dislikes ordinary people and that is why it has sought to inflict this co-payment on us. The Greens in the federal Parliament will fight against the co-payments in the Senate. We will campaign against them. That will be led by our health spokesman, Senator Richard Di Natale. I absolutely support the motion brought on by Ms Pulford today.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise today to speak to notice of motion 771 relating to co-payments and indicate, as have my colleagues, that the Victorian government will not oppose the motion because it does not support the introduction of the proposed co-payment. Further, we have also said that we do not support the introduction of an emergency department co-payment.

The Victorian coalition government will continue to talk to the government in Canberra about these proposed changes within the commonwealth and work through their impacts on the Victorian health system. I note that the Senate is yet to make a decision on this matter so in a sense it is a little hypothetical at this point in time. I remind members that in 1991 the then Hawke Labor government announced a co-payment of \$3.50. That was eased down to \$2.50 before it was due to begin and was abandoned within months by the new Prime Minister, Paul Keating.

I have to say Victorian health services are in a reasonably healthy state. The Victorian coalition government has continued to grow its health services budget and since being elected this government has grown the health budget by over 32 per cent. There has been a 5 per cent growth in the Victorian health services budgets from 2013–14 to 2014–15. This is in stark contrast to the funding cuts applied by the Labor government. I remind members, despite the denials from those on the other side of the chamber, that in 2012, \$107 million was cut from our hospital system by the then federal Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek, and the then Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. The Labor Party and the Greens voted in favour of those cuts. It was a case of Labor first and Victoria second.

The state government has always advocated strongly on behalf of Victorian patients in hospitals, unlike the Labor Party and the Greens. When Tanya Plibersek and Julia Gillard cut funding to our hospitals, Labor members simply rolled over and agreed with their colleagues in Canberra. We call upon members of the Labor Party in this state to stand up for Victorians ahead of their political mates. We call upon them to stand up for Victorians, but they refuse to do it.

Mr Melhem interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Mr Melhem, in a scene from *Antony and Cleopatra*, is in denial at the moment.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr D. R. J. O'Brien) — Order! Mr Ondarchie to continue.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I quite enjoyed the interjections.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr D. R. J. O'Brien) — Order! They do break up the speech, but they are disorderly.

Mr ONDARCHIE — The 2014–2015 Victorian coalition state health budget delivered record health funding of \$15 billion. Alongside this there is over \$4.5 billion — —

Mr Melhem — On a point of order, Acting President, I could not hear what Mr Ramsay was saying earlier by interjection, but I have just been informed of his words. I ask that Mr Ramsay withdraw his comment about living off your members credit card. Is that correct, Mr Ramsay? Is that what you said?

Mr ONDARCHIE — On the point of order, Acting President, since when can you ask a question of another member during the debate?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr D. R. J. O'Brien) — Order! I accept that last point of order. Mr Melhem should not use points of order to interrogate another member. I will allow him to complete his point of order.

Mr Melhem — If that is what Mr Ramsay said, I simply ask him to withdraw.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr D. R. J. O'Brien) — Order! I am in some difficulty because, if I am right, the comment was heard by Ms Hartland more than others, and she has passed her comments on to Mr Melhem. If a statement was made, there is a need for clarity. If Mr Ramsay made a statement implying that a member

of Parliament was living off a credit card, that may be said to be unparliamentary and I would ask Mr Ramsay to withdraw, but I am not sure if that is what Mr Ramsay said. If that is what he said, I call on him to withdraw his comments. Otherwise, I ask Mr Ondarchie to resume.

Mr Ramsay — I am happy to withdraw a comment if a second party has relayed to Mr Melhem that my comments reflected on him. However, I clearly remember that I did not reflect on Mr Melhem.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr D. R. J. O'Brien) — Order! If that is the case, withdraw.

Mr Ramsay — I am not clear on what I am withdrawing.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr D. R. J. O'Brien) — Order! You are withdrawing any aspersions you may have cast on the member. Just say, 'I withdraw that', if that is what you said.

Mr Ramsay — I withdraw the comments.

Mr ONDARCHIE — It is interesting that members across the chamber tend to stymie debate when they do not like hearing the truth. Perhaps they can buy a recording device and tape the debate to make sure they know exactly what was said in the chamber. This is consistent with comments made by opposition members during the last few weeks — they want to destroy what is before the people of Victoria.

The 2014–15 state budget delivered record health funding of \$15 billion. Alongside that, there are over \$4.5 billion worth of health infrastructure projects underway in Victoria. The rural capital support fund was a Victorian government pre-election commitment to invest \$56 million over four years for smaller capital projects at rural and regional healthcare facilities. A good example of that across the state of Victoria is the \$5 million provided under the 2011–12 state budget to increase emergency maternity service capacity in community health departments at Mildura Base Hospital.

There is the new, game-changing \$630 million that is being spent on Bendigo Hospital. This is the biggest regional hospital to be built in this state, and it is being done under a Naphthine coalition government. Ballarat Health Services is receiving \$46.3 million. There is also \$250 million for Monash Children's hospital. The Frankston Hospital is receiving a \$81 million redevelopment. Capital works costing \$120 million are underway at Geelong Hospital and the development of Barwon Health North. The West Gippsland Hospital at

Warragul is receiving an upgrade to its emergency department, costing \$4.42 million. I know Mr Danny O'Brien was a strong advocate for this development long before he joined this place, and he continues to be.

Mr D. D. O'Brien interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I pick up Mr Danny O'Brien's interjection. I was just going to talk about the expansion and enhancement of Latrobe Regional Hospital. This government has committed \$73 million to support the people of the Latrobe Valley and Gippsland. The Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre, located at the top of Elizabeth Street, is a world-class project that is well underway. The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital is also getting a redevelopment thanks to this government. There is \$15 million to expand the intensive care maternity services at Sunshine Hospital, which I know Mr Finn and Mr Elsbury have been strong advocates for.

The capital funding we have provided for the expansion and redevelopment of hospitals and healthcare facilities is designed to cater for the Victorian community over the long term. In particular I think about one of my favourite hospitals in this state, the Northern Hospital. I had another chance to spend some time there on 9 July. I looked through the new acute inpatient tower block, a site that has been developed under this government, and the new expanded emergency department this government has funded. I also saw the maternity area, a special care nursery where tiny babies are being well cared for by the wonderful staff there. There is also the newly completed Northern Centre for Health Education and Research, which is on Cooper Street.

At this point I have to commend the great work being done by Marilyn Beaumont and the Northern Hospital's board and executive team. The executive team is running that hospital on a day-to-day basis, but it is also doing some wonderful things in developing its strategic outlook. In particular I note the work of the hospital's CEO, Janet Compton; the executive director of research, Professor Peter Brooks; the executive director of corporate and commercial services, Robert Burnham; the man who manages the money on behalf of the hospital executive, the director of finances and data management, Sam Costanzo; the clinical service director, medical and continuing care and chief medical officer, Associate Professor Kwang Lim; the executive director of continuing care and ambulatory services and chief allied health officer, Ms Jenni Smith; the executive director of performance improvement, Michelle McDade; the executive director of people and culture, Zemeel Saba; and the executive director, acute health, and chief nursing officer, Clare McGinness.

These people and their teams are moving remarkable reforms through the Northern Hospital. The northern suburbs of Melbourne are experiencing phenomenal growth, so much so that it is estimated that by 2026 the population catchment served by the Northern Hospital and its allied health services will grow by 64 per cent.

Mrs Amanda Millar and I have had several conversations about the population growth throughout Wallan. She actively represents the people of Wallan, Kilmore and beyond, many of whom make use of the services of the Northern Hospital. Mrs Millar has also been very vocal in her support for the great work being done at the Northern Hospital. The patient cohort there comes from 130 different countries and speaks 100 different languages. In an average week at the Northern Hospital there are 1300 emergency department presentations, including 230 paediatric presentations; 350 ambulance arrivals; 250 elective procedures; 111 emergency operations; and 58 births — and that is just in one week! To give you an example, in the 2012–13 financial year 3031 babies were born at the Northern Hospital. One can speculate what people in the north are doing with their time, but I have to say that this is a great example of a great hospital at work.

The Victorian government has also invested in the safety, health and wellbeing of our health workforce. The Napthine coalition government has committed over \$40 million to improving the safety and security in our hospitals, from upgrading security systems to enhancing the management of clinical aggression. This government introduced the Sentencing Amendment (Emergency Workers) Bill 2014 into Parliament, which will provide a statutory minimum sentence of six months imprisonment for assault of emergency workers and other health professionals. When it goes to the topic of the day, we do not oppose Ms Pulford's motion.

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to support the motion moved by Ms Pulford. I am pleased that coalition members are supportive of that motion; the only thing missing in their contributions is what real work they are going to do to convince their counterparts in Canberra to withdraw the proposed Medicare co-payment. It is fine to go and oppose something through a press release or in an interview on radio — that is one thing — but if you are really opposing something, you have to do some real, hard work. Coalition members have to put more pressure on their colleagues in Canberra. I do not see them jumping up and down to try to get their colleagues in Canberra to abolish or withdraw the co-payment.

Let me talk about the impact the \$7 co-payment will have on people in this state. The people most affected by this co-payment will be poor people, working people on low incomes, people on unemployment benefits, pensioners and homeless people. We are talking about people for whom \$7 could buy three loaves of bread. In some cases it could probably only buy them two; it depends where you buy it from. There is a report that has just been released by Medicare Local for the northern and western regions of Melbourne which quotes that 15 per cent of people who were surveyed would put off a visit to the doctor because they could not afford to go to the doctor or buy medicine. That is with no co-payment. Adding the co-payment is obviously going to add to the problem.

Mr Ramsay — So you're happy to charge them \$550 in electricity and heating? That's the carbon tax.

Mr MELHEM — Hang on, I thought the coalition in Victoria was supporting the resolution. I have not criticised. Let us talk about the facts here. I will come back to that.

I am quoting people in the industry talking about what impact this is going to have on people. The federal government has said, 'We're not going to put the money back into health. We're going to create a fund, and the interest generated from that fund will be used for medical research'. That is great; it is about time we put more money into medical research. The idea itself is a good idea, but do we really have to slug patients who cannot afford it? Medical treatment in this country is not free; we actually pay for it. There is something called the Medicare levy, which most working people pay. Fifty per cent of Australians can afford to purchase private health insurance as well. We need to encourage that. I get that, but this idea of a co-payment is about saying to people, 'You are visiting the doctor too many times. You don't need to visit. Therefore we want to put a \$7 co-payment on it to discourage you from going to the doctor'. That is one of the arguments the federal Treasurer and some other people from the coalition in Canberra are using to try to put some logic behind why the \$7 co-payment needs to be put in place — to discourage people from getting service from their doctors.

Look at what doctors — the Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners — have all said. Dr Jones, who is vice-president of the college, said that in his 30 years he has not seen any evidence of people going to the doctor because they feel like they want to go to the doctor. They go to the doctor because they have a problem. They go to the doctor because they need to. They go to

get a consultation and make themselves better, not because they think, 'I want to have a chat to someone today, so what I'll do is pick up the phone and go to see the doctor and have a chat to the doctor for 5 minutes and socialise'. Let me tell you: people do not do that.

Imposing the \$7 co-payment as a deterrent to stop people going to the doctor is going to put more pressure on our hospital system and put more pressure on people who cannot afford to go to the doctor, preventing them from putting in place preventive measures to make sure that if they have a small ailment, it does not become a big problem as they go on in life and then end up costing taxpayers even more money. If people are going to the doctor to get advice about their general wellbeing and get treatment straightaway, that could prevent us paying more in medical costs down the track.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr MELHEM — If you are supporting this, then you should not be arguing with what I am saying. This will be a disincentive for doctors who currently bulk-bill. A recent article in the *Guardian* warns that every time a doctor bulk-bills it will cost them \$11. It goes on to state:

Doctors will be financially penalised \$11 for bulk-billing concession card holders and children under the government's proposed changes to Medicare.

The Australian Medical Association says small medical practices could lose up to 25 per cent of their income if they continue to bulk-bill.

...

Currently doctors receive a \$36.60 rebate from the government for each patient they see, which will be reduced to \$31.60 under the new system. In metropolitan areas doctors receive a \$6 low-gap incentive payment when they bulk-bill concession card holders and children under 16.

Under the new system doctors will only receive the low-gap incentive if they charge the co-payment. So instead of receiving the \$42.60 they currently get for bulk-billing a disadvantaged patient, they will receive \$31.60. If they charge the co-payment, they will get \$44.60 for treating a disadvantaged patient.

Small clinics will have to accept a 25 per cent reduction in revenue. That is what is going to happen to these doctors. According to the Australian Medical Association, we will probably drive some of these small clinics and doctors out of business. That is the problem.

The government has not given much consideration to the impact this is going to have on disadvantaged people, including pensioners, people in residential care, people on social security benefits, the homeless and

low-income earners. The only consideration it has given is that after 10 visits, you do not have to pay. I think that is absolutely wrong. We should not force these people to pay anything. They should be bulk-billed. The whole thing should just be abolished.

The article goes on to quote a doctor as saying:

You'll be saying to a patient for example, I think you have an ear infection, go and get a sample, and they'll be saying, 'I'm not getting the test'. It'll be \$7 for the doctor, \$7 for the pathologist and another \$7 if they need an X-ray, and the patient says they're not getting it.

We are not talking about people like you and I. You can afford it; I can afford it. I have private health insurance; I do not know what you have. But we are not talking about ourselves here, and that is the problem. That is the problem with Joe Hockey, the federal Treasurer, and some of the people in Canberra. They think people in our society are as well off as they are. Let me give them some news: they are not.

Therefore if the government is fair dinkum about supporting this resolution, if it is fair dinkum about opposing the co-payment, then it needs to make a bit more noise and make sure its colleagues in Canberra, its Liberal and Nationals senators — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr MELHEM — We are doing it; we are going to oppose it. The Victorian Labor senators will vote against the co-payment. The challenge for government members is to get their federal Liberal and Nationals senators from Victoria — who do not take any notice of them, I might add — to vote against the co-payment. I doubt very much that those opposite are even going to pick up the phone and talk to them. Those opposite are only making a token objection. They have put out a press release saying they are going to oppose the co-payment, but what they are really saying is, 'Joe, no, we're not. It's okay; go ahead. We need to appease the people of Victoria. We have an election coming up. We are going to say we're against it, but really it's okay'. If you are fair dinkum, either put up or shut up. Be fair dinkum about it.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I am pleased to rise to contribute to debate on Ms Pulford's motion. Mr Melhem seems to be a sensitive flower this morning, so I will not respond to some of his rhetoric. I will get down to the real issues.

I note the minister has made it quite clear that the government does not support the introduction of an emergency department co-payment. I also note that we are not opposing Ms Pulford's motion. That is for the

record in case Ms Hartland wants to misconstrue anything I say from here on in with respect to my taking a position one way or another in relation to this motion. I also wish to note, however, that Ms Pulford's motion is a cheap political trick to try to make us support a motion that opposes a federal coalition government policy.

However, Mr Melhem is right. This issue is having an impact and is raising concerns among the Victorian community. The Victorian coalition government has quite rightly made it clear that it does not support the co-payment in its current form. In fact it is seeking to consult with the federal government to look at other ways in which Medicare can be made more sustainable in the long term. That is the crux of the matter. In the contributions from the other side, no-one has actually talked about the philosophy of providing one of the best healthcare services in the world. Anyone who has travelled the world will appreciate and acknowledge that in Australia we have one of the world's best healthcare systems. We want to continue to provide that service to our nation on a long-term, sustainable footing.

I acknowledge that modern health funding should ensure that people have universal protection against the potential large financial risk that is posed by sudden illness and that people who are poor or sick are not excluded from the beneficial health care that is presently being provided. I too have some reservations about the federal government's proposal on the co-payment, which is supposed to be a price signal to try to reduce some of the trivial visits to GPs. Despite Mr Melhem's protestations, the fact is that many people wait a considerable time before they can access a GP because demand has increased substantially over the years, particularly as Australia faces an ageing population.

I draw members' attention to some statistics which the current federal government was left with as a legacy from Labor. When it came to office the federal government had a \$350 billion net debt to contend with, so a lot of the services and programs that are traditionally provided by the federal government have come under scrutiny. Health has not been excluded from that. Ten years ago the Australian government was spending \$8 billion on Medicare. Today it is spending \$19 billion. That is more than a 164 per cent increase. Over the next 10 years the spend is projected to be more than \$34 billion.

The taxpayer currently funds 263 million services a year that are free to patients under Medicare. I think all sides would agree that this is unsustainable. There is

growing pressure on the health system from the ageing population. There is an increasing incidence of chronic disease, and there are increases in costs generated by new technologies. Ms Crozier is doing work in relation to preventive medicine. Of particular concern to me is the rising incidence of diabetes and obesity in rural communities. It is great to see there are a number of good preventive programs now being provided to regional healthcare services to try to encourage people to take responsibility for themselves in relation to their health, fitness and diet, all of which accompany good preventive medicine. It is important that we are proactive in that space to make sure that we can reduce the cost of health services to this nation.

I draw the attention of the house to a couple of other facts. Ms Pulford, Ms Hartland and Mr Melhem take a fairly populist view of the cost of health care and the imposition of a new charge. The charge consists of \$2 which goes to a GP and \$5 which goes to long-term science research. I think that is important. As a rural ambassador for the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia I know that we need more work and more money to be invested in researching a cure for prostate cancer. There is almost a 3 to 1 ratio of money going into breast cancer research compared to prostate cancer research. There is certainly a need for ongoing research and funding to look into cancers that are prolific and affecting this nation increasingly.

The federal government's investment in Medicare will continue to increase. In 2014–15 the government will invest \$20.3 billion in Medicare, and by 2017–18 that investment will grow to \$22.6 billion. In response to Ms Hartland — who stood up, as the Greens always do, puffed out her chest and provided the do-gooder populist view of the world — the assertion that the federal government does not care is absolute nonsense. That is the point I made. It is a pity Ms Hartland is not in the chamber now. The government is spending over \$22.6 billion in additional payments to fund the Medicare system — the healthcare system — as we know it today. In fact the government funds about \$30 of the cost of a visit to a GP over and above the Medicare levy at the moment. Ms Hartland's rhetoric in relation to the federal government not caring to provide a superior healthcare system for Australia is absolute nonsense.

It is interesting to note that again Mr Melhem stood there and pontificated about the impost of the co-payment, yet in his time as a member of Parliament he has been happy, in an embracing and in a conciliatory manner, to support the carbon tax. If Mr Melhem would like to take stock and review the impact of the carbon tax on health services and on those

who live in Victoria generally, he would find that the cost of the carbon tax to every Victorian household was about \$550. Mr Melhem is jumping up and down and crying foul in relation to a proposed co-payment of \$2 for members of the Victorian community to have a GP consultation, yet he is more than happy to embrace a levy on every Victorian household of \$550 in the name of a carbon tax.

I question Labor's philosophy and ideology in relation to taxes, particularly in relation to one of the most corruptive and expensive taxes that would cause considerable harm to communities nationally. This tax would create more challenges for communities than a \$2 impost on a GP consultation. I remind Mr Melhem that for those who would be financially challenged in relation to providing a co-payment, whether it is \$2 or whatever, after 10 visits there would be concessions and other things, and the free service would continue to apply.

I am not here to argue the case for the federal government in relation to the co-payment. The Victorian government's position is clear. The Senate is yet to have the discussion, so what the outcome might be is hypothetical at the moment. Despite the changes that Labor federally enforced during its term of government, it passed on a debt of \$350 billion to the federal coalition government, and obviously the federal government faces some challenges with its budget.

The Victorian government is increasing its investment in health services despite the fact that federal Labor did its very best to continue to withdraw funding through the national health agreement and other agreements for health care in Victoria. The minister has indicated that the state will continue its discussions with the commonwealth, and this is important in relation to the proposed changes. He will make the federal coalition government aware of the potential impacts on the Victorian health system if the co-payment as proposed passes through the Senate and becomes legislation. As I said, it is hypothetical at this time because the Senate is yet to make a decision on the matter.

It was ironic to see Mr Melhem standing before us in this chamber bemoaning the co-payment proposal when the supposedly most successful Labor Prime Minister in history, Bob Hawke, proposed a co-payment of \$3.50, which is in fact \$1.50 more than the current proposal. He was aided and abetted by the supposedly most successful Labor Treasurer in history, Paul Keating, who was his support act. If anyone in this place has a bit of spare time, they should look at the federal shadow frontbench during question time. They will see three or four shadow ministers who were all

supporters of the co-payment proposal back in the luxury times of the Hawke and Keating governments.

Despite the fact that the then federal Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek, tried her very best to rip as much funding as she could — \$107 million — out of the Victorian healthcare system, through prudent fiscal management the Victorian government has managed to increase funding to health care across Victoria.

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — There is no better example than Ballarat, Mr Leane, where a number of election commitments are rising from the ground. We have a new car park at the Ballarat Base Hospital and we have a helipad. We will not have a red helicopter flying around the skies with people looking at water reservoirs and at how best to take water from the north of the state and put at risk all the northern food bowl areas along the Goulburn River. We would not have had a desalination plant. I am glad to see Mr Lenders has come into the chamber, because this is his baby. The beautiful, big white elephant sitting at Wonthaggi — —

Mr Scheffer interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — I know you live down there too, Mr Scheffer, and I am sure you had your hand up saying, ‘Yes please’. He wanted a \$1 billion desalination plant built in the swamps of Wonthaggi. In order to provide water to Melbourne he wanted to create more environmental hazards by taking salt out of salt water and dumping it on the marshlands of Wonthaggi and around the communities he is supposed to represent. That is not to mention the friction losses of transferring water up to Melbourne and throwing it into the Sugarloaf Reservoir. I am sure the Victorian community is very happy to pay \$1 million a day for the white elephant that had no business plan and no fiscal parameters. As we stand here today, the cost to the Victorian taxpayer of the desalination plant is now over \$1 billion and not one drop of water has been transferred from Wonthaggi.

But I digress from Ms Pulford’s motion, and I am sure she will be disappointed if I do not mention some of the other good things that are happening in health care around Western Victoria Region, and that is what this motion should be about. It is about the Victorian government investing in health care in Victoria.

As I said, we have 68 new beds at the Ballarat Base Hospital, an ambulatory care centre, a cancer care clinic, a new helipad and new car parks. In Beaufort we have a new ambulance station and wonderful new environmental innovations. We have boilers using

woodchips that are providing hot-water services into the hospital. In Creswick there is a new ambulance station. We have biowaste in the Ballarat employment zone now becoming a reality with the green collection bins that will turn waste into energy.

I want to note a couple of other figures. In the 2014–15 budget the government delivered record health funding of \$15 billion, and with that more than \$4.5 billion worth of health infrastructure projects are underway. I refer to the wonderful new, innovative \$630 million hospital in Bendigo, which has the latest technology. It is a prime example of a good community project with the Victorian government, local government and community coming together to build what will be one of the best state-of-the-art, most technically equipped hospitals in regional Victoria. Following the floods in Charlton a new hospital has risen out of the waters. When Mr O’Brien and I became new members for Western Victoria Region one of our first duties was to support communities across the region that had been savaged by the floods.

Ms Tierney interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — I am sorry; I did not see you around, Ms Tierney. As a pre-election commitment we said we would invest \$56 million over four years for smaller capital projects in rural and regional healthcare facilities, and we are now seeing them being delivered. At the Mildura hospital \$5 million was provided in the 2011–12 budget to increase service capacity, \$630 million to the Bendigo Hospital, \$250 million to the Monash Children’s hospital and \$81 million to the Melton and Frankston hospitals.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Early childhood funding

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. In response to my question without notice on 29 May the minister said that she was expecting the draft report of the review into the national partnership in June. Given that the report is yet to materialise from the federal government, can the minister advise what progress she is making in her negotiations with the commonwealth to secure the ongoing funding of 15 hours for Victoria’s kindergartens?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — I thank the member

for her question. The commonwealth government maintains that future funding arrangements for the hours of kindergarten are dependent on the findings of its review. Originally the report was due in June, and we expect it to be tabled soon. I understand that commonwealth, state and territory officials have provided comments on the draft report to the people undertaking the review, and the draft is scheduled to be considered by state, territory and commonwealth ministers at the education council meeting this month.

The Victorian government continues to advocate strongly for the commonwealth government to maintain its commitment to this valuable program. The Victorian government is committed to continuing its contributive funding towards the 15 hours, which is 10 hours of funding. We have made it very clear from the start that there is no cut to any state funding in kindergartens and that the 10-hour funding will continue regardless of what the commonwealth decides to do. I recognise that Victorian kindergartens require certainty, and it is because of that that I have been strongly advocating to the commonwealth that it maintain its commitment to this program and also that it make its announcement as early as possible.

Supplementary question

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — I absolutely agree with the minister that there needs to be certainty for Victoria's kindergartens. I note that the minister recently attended an event in Victoria with the federal minister, so she had the opportunity to discuss that matter on that occasion. I ask the minister: did the federal Assistant Minister for Education, Sussan Ley, give her a firm indication as to what date that national review will be released? All of Victoria's kindergartens are waiting to hear what that date will be.

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — I take every opportunity, whenever I see my commonwealth counterpart, Ms Ley, to discuss this matter, and I have met with her on a number of occasions. I also saw her at the opening of the Connie Benn Centre. I note that Ms Mikakos tweeted after that, asking whether I asked Ms Ley for the report. The reality is that Ms Mikakos was invited to attend the opening of the Connie Benn Centre, and she failed to attend. If she had any interest in this report, she would have attended and asked the minister herself. In fact her colleague Richard Wynne was at the opening of that centre, and Ms Mikakos could have asked him to ask the minister on behalf of the Labor Party, but she is not interested in actually getting an answer; she is only interested in scoring cheap political points.

Ambulance officers

Mr D. D. O'BRIEN (Eastern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Health, the Honourable David Davis. Can the minister update the house on the recent progress of the ambulance paramedics enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA)?

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) — I thank the member for his question, for his strong advocacy on behalf of Gippsland and for his enthusiasm to see more paramedics in Gippsland and more services delivered in Gippsland. He can take great credit, along with the other members for Gippsland region, for the increase in activity in terms of ambulance outcomes in Gippsland, the significant work at Korumburra, the very significant increase in the number of paramedics and the very significant increase in the number of shifts. But he quite rightly asks about the progress with the ambulance paramedics EBA.

It is important to update the house, on its return this week, to changes the government has made in its offer to ambulance paramedics. The government's offer, through Ambulance Victoria, was a significant one: a doubling of the sign-on bonus to \$3000 and a 6 per cent pay rise up-front followed by two further tranches of 3 per cent to follow — a total of more than 12 per cent in increased salary. In addition, there is the capacity to have work value tested through an independent arbitration process. The hardline paramedic union has always requested that its work value be tested by an independent umpire in an independent arbitration process. Ambulance Victoria and the government have agreed to that.

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — What is hardline about it is that the union has sought to deny its members a significant pay rise. It has sought at every turn to block a significant pay rise. It is a hardline union. It is a donor to the Labor Party. It is very much in the pocket of the Labor Party, and it is working hand in glove with the Labor Party — there is no question about that. At the same time what is concerning is that it is denying its members a significant pay rise. But it becomes clearer why that might be. It is clear the union wants to ensure that the union facilitation clauses are preserved, and that means payment for union secondments and payments for union members to attend union meetings.

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS — Yes, hardline union meetings that people attend whilst being paid rather

than being on the road. It is interesting that while the union seems to have at least partially backed off from the initial \$1.3 billion log of claims, one part it has not backed off from is the expansion in the union facilitation clause that it wanted. The expansion would have seen more secondment — in other words, more ambulance officers taken off the road to put their feet under the desk at the union office. Instead of saving the lives of Victorians, they would have been paid by ambulance subscribers and government money to do union work at the ambulance union office. Mr McGhie admitted as much in a letter to me on 1 August. He said:

Mr Davis would go a long way towards solving this dispute ...

... agree to no change —

he says this now; that is at least a step —

to union facilitation practices ...

But we have said, and Ambulance Victoria has said, that the union facilitation process can be independently arbitrated by an independent arbiter at the Fair Work Commission. There is a lot of misinformation from the union out there, but it is clear that this is about union privilege. It is about getting people off the road and putting their legs under union desks. That is what this is about.

Early childhood educators

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is again to the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. The uncertainty around 15 hours is also impacting on negotiations on the enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) for early childhood educators. In the minister's negotiations with the federal government, has she indicated to it the impact that this delay in announcing an outcome is having on this EBA negotiation process?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — As the member well knows, the state is not the employer of early childhood teachers, and therefore it is not actually involved in the negotiations for the EBA. An EBA negotiation usually involves discussions around a 38-hour week, not necessarily around whether people are teaching for 10 or 15 hours, so I do not accept the premise that this issue impacts on the negotiations for the EBA.

Supplementary question

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — In light of Mr Davis's previous response on the EBA where the

employer is Ambulance Victoria, is the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development saying that the Victorian government and her department are playing no role at all in the EBA process for early childhood educators?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — Ambulance Victoria is actually a government sector agency, as opposed to independent kindergartens. The Victorian government is not the employer of kindergarten teachers. They are employed by kindergarten committees, local governments and community organisations, and the EBA is being negotiated by the Municipal Association of Victoria and by the Early Learning Association of Australia, which is the peak body for kindergarten committees.

Questions interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am delighted to welcome to the gallery today His Excellency Yerlan Baudarbek-Kozhatayev, who is the ambassador of Kazakhstan. He is accompanied by Andrew Fernyhough, who is the honorary consul of Kazakhstan in Victoria. We welcome you both to the Parliament of Victoria. Ambassador, we hope you enjoy your visit here. The ambassador is actually based in Singapore and is making his first official visit to Victoria, and he is certainly welcome.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Questions resumed.

Racial discrimination legislation

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, but in keeping with the cheerios — —

Mr Jennings — You've done your homework!

Mrs PEULICH — I have done my homework. I have been doing a lot of homework, Mr Jennings. In keeping with the cheerios for special guests, I thank the minister for informally meeting with my US intern from the University of Utah, Alyssa Gamble, who is returning home next week. We thank her for her service and wish her well for her future.

Can the minister inform the house what action the government has taken to support our multicultural communities through lobbying for the retention of

section 18C of the federal Racial Discrimination Act 1975?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship) — I start by also acknowledging our visitor from Kazakhstan. While I do not speak any Kazakh, I might be able to say to him: Добро пожаловать в Мельбурне и Австралии, which means ‘Welcome to Melbourne and Australia’.

Mr Somyurek interjected.

Hon. M. J. GUY — It is, but it is a language from the Soviet Union that my family from Ukraine would obviously understand, and it is one that might be understood across the lot. I do not speak Turkish, Belarusian or Kazakh, but that might be something that can show a bit of a divide, Mr Somyurek.

I acknowledge Mrs Peulich’s question. I first of all acknowledge the statement last night by the Prime Minister that the federal government will not proceed with any changes to the commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act. I think that is an eminently sensible move, and it is one the Victorian government welcomes. Indeed I am pleased to inform the house of a degree of work that the Victorian government, through Mrs Peulich, Mr Southwick, the member for Caulfield in the other place, and the former minister, Mr Kotsiras, the member for Bulleen in the other place, have been doing in this space for the last few months.

It is fair to say that the concept of multiculturalism is evolving and changing. Multiculturalism may not have been, as it was seen in the 1970s, about a policy of engaging new people to Australia. Multiculturalism is about all Australians, and here it is obviously about all Victorians, whether your family came to this great state from the Asian continent some 30 000 or 40 000 years ago as an Indigenous community, or indeed on the First Fleet, or with the first Chinese migrants in 1818 or with the first Islamic migrants to this country in the 1850s. However your family came to be in this great state of Victoria, multiculturalism is about embracing those cultures. That is why the Victorian government has been very active in relation to the Racial Discrimination Act and in seeking that there be no changes to what was achieved some years ago.

This government has been very deliberate through its policy *Victoria’s Advantage — Unity Diversity Opportunity* to ensure that it continually puts forward the concept that Victoria’s people are its greatest strength. We do not have a mining boom, we do not have the weather of Queensland, but we do have what

we believe is our greatest strength — our people, from whatever background they may be.

Comments made by Mr Kotsiras around Team Australia were greeted with some interest a few years ago and are now being greeted with mainstream support. I quote the former minister, who was reported as saying in *Neos Kosmos* in 2011 —

Ms Mikakos — You read it regularly, do you?

Hon. M. J. GUY — I try the English version, Ms Mikakos. I can do a bit of the Cyrillic, but not all of it, I am afraid. Mr Kotsiras said:

Football teams have players with different skills, different heights —

ain’t that the truth.

What I was saying with Team Australia is that while we have our own unique identity, our aim is to play together, to assist each other, and in doing so, to score.

He went on to say:

I don’t want any child to feel they are an outsider. That’s my fear. Every child should feel part of the community, part of Victoria, part of Australia. I don’t think of myself as an add-on ... We are Australia, all of us.

They are the words of the previous minister. I think they are important words. They back up the work that not just the government but all parliamentarians have done to support multiculturalism, particularly over the last few months. I welcome the federal government’s decision not to proceed with changes to the federal Racial Discrimination Act. I thank all members who have been strongly supportive not just of the concept of multiculturalism in this great state but also of ensuring that we have adequate laws to protect our great society.

Early childhood educators

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is for the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. I refer to the minister’s response to my previous question in which she indicated to the house a very hands-off approach to the enterprise bargaining agreement process in respect of early childhood educators. I ask: is the minister’s funding of Victoria’s kindergartens subject to Victorian government wages policy?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — As I explained to the member in my answer to her previous question, these agreements are being negotiated between the Australian Education Union and United Voice, which

represent the kindergarten teachers, and the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Early Learning Association Australia, which are the key bodies in terms of the running of kindergartens.

Kindergartens are independent organisations; they are not government sector agencies. We therefore have no role in the negotiation of the enterprise bargaining agreement. It is negotiated between the representatives of the kindergarten teachers and the representatives of kindergarten management. The Victorian government provides annual indexation in per capita funding for kindergartens. That is how funding is provided to kindergartens. It is not provided as part of an enterprise bargaining agreement.

Supplementary question

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — In light of the fact that the Australian Education Union is now taking steps to take protected action, I ask if the minister is being regularly briefed by her department as to the progress of these enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations between all the parties the minister referred to.

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — I can assure the member that I am regularly briefed by my department on a whole range of things to do with kindergartens.

Information and communications technology

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My question without notice this afternoon is directed to the Honourable Gordon Rich-Phillips, the Minister for Technology. Will the minister report on any recent progress in the ICT sector that highlights Victoria as a hub for technologically driven services?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Minister for Technology) — I thank Mr Ramsay for his question and for his interest in the Victorian ICT industry and for providing me with the opportunity to talk about the continued strengthening of Victoria as an ICT hub here in the Asia-Pacific region.

In 2011 I was delighted to open the Asia-Pacific headquarters — the Melbourne office — of a company known as Zendesk. Zendesk is a company that was founded in Denmark in 2007 and which subsequently relocated its head office to San Francisco. At that stage Zendesk was — as it still is — a company offering cloud-based help-desk or customer support services which had a customer base of around 10 000 customers globally. Zendesk recognised the strength and importance of the workforce available in Victoria, and

in Melbourne in particular, and it decided that its Asia-Pacific headquarters, initially established with 20 staff, should be in Melbourne.

Just 12 months later, in 2012, I was delighted to return to Zendesk's head office in Bourke Street to announce a doubling of its workforce, from 20 to 40. In just 12 months such was the strength of Zendesk's operation in the Asia-Pacific region that it had doubled its workforce in the Melbourne office.

Last month I was delighted to again return to Zendesk. I note again that this is a company founded in Denmark in 2007, a company only seven years old and a company that has had a presence in Victoria for three years and that has grown its customer base from 10 000, when it first was established in Victoria, to 40 000 customers globally. On that occasion last month I was delighted to open the new Zendesk head office in Melbourne. Having outgrown the existing facility in Bourke Street, Zendesk has now expanded in Bourke Street by taking over the building next door. That is a real testimony to the strength of the ICT industry in this part of the world and the role that Victoria plays in providing the skills base and the capability that companies such as Zendesk need.

Earlier this year Zendesk listed on the New York Stock Exchange as part of its global expansion. This office could have been anywhere in the world. It is a great testimony to the work that has been done in Victoria over decades in developing the capability of our workforce and in developing capability through our universities and other tertiary institutions that we have a highly qualified and highly skilled workforce that can provide not only the direct technical skills but also the type of innovation and entrepreneurship required to develop new and innovative products which are relevant and valuable to the customer base of Zendesk. It is a great testimony, as I have said, to our workforce in Victoria that Zendesk is undertaking rapid expansion in Victoria. This new office has the capacity for 100 additional staff.

As I said, Zendesk's customer base has grown from 10 000 customers three years ago to 40 000 customers this year. The Victorian government looks forward to working with Zendesk and companies like it as they continue to grow and strengthen the Victorian ICT industry.

Early childhood funding

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is again to the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. The minister has previously

advised the house that negotiations are underway with the federal government with respect to funding of an occasional childcare program. Can the minister indicate whether the government intends to abrogate responsibility for providing this program, passing it to the federal government, or whether the Victorian government will be directly operating the program itself?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — A draft national partnership has come through from the federal government on this particular program, and we are currently negotiating with the federal government over the final arrangements for that national partnership.

Supplementary question

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — Can the minister rule out this occasional childcare program being used to fund nannies and au pairs?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — Absolutely.

Commonwealth Games

Hon. R. A. DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Mr Drum. Could the minister inform the house on how Victoria's athletes performed at the Commonwealth Games?

Hon. D. K. DRUM (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I thank Mr Dalla-Riva for his question about Victoria's efforts at the Commonwealth Games. I looked through the weightlifters to see if I could see anything of Mr Dalla-Riva, but obviously he did not quite make the team, though I am sure he would have been thereabouts.

It was an amazing effort on the part of not just Victorians but Australians in general — by us as a nation — to win 49 gold medals, 42 silver medals and 46 bronze medals. To have been outnumbered only by the English was a very strong performance. It was a strong effort and a positive result for so many of our athletes.

From a Victorian point of view it was also a very solid effort, with 18 individual athletes bringing home gold medals. Some of those gold medallists were part of teams, such as the netballers, the Diamonds, who had an amazing win in the final, but I suppose nearly more important was their amazing semifinal win over England. Whilst many of the team members are just starting their careers, I am sure many people in this

chamber and many Victorians in general would have been delighted to see Bianca Chatfield win a gold medal in what turned out to be her last game representing Australia as a member of the Diamonds. Even more interesting is the fact that the Diamonds are coming to Bendigo to play a test match against England on 19 October. That will be a great event for regional Victoria that will build on the momentum that has been generated by an amazing semifinal at the Commonwealth Games.

A number of the medallists were at Parliament House at the launch in the lead-up to the Commonwealth Games, when \$450 000 was made available to the team to assist with the cost of going to Glasgow. At that event Premier Napthine was able to share with some of the athletes just how important their endeavours were, not just in what they were about to do but in making the sacrifice and putting themselves through the rigours of elite athletes and the life that goes with that.

Georgia-Rose Brown, Mary-Anne Monckton and Larissa Miller were very successful in winning silver medals in the gymnastics. Again, some of us were at the Swinburne University of TAFE precinct at Prahran just prior to the games, and it was good to see that so many Victorians from there had success in Glasgow as well. Seven out of the 10 members of the Australian team came from Victoria.

It is also worth mentioning Melissa Tapper, the athlete who captured everybody's imagination in relation to table tennis. That lady, who was previously in the paralympic team, forced her way through with outstanding performances over the last couple of years to now represent Australia in the able-bodied team. What an amazing event that was. She came home with a bronze medal. It was an absolutely outstanding event.

Matson Lawson won a bronze medal in the 200 metre backstroke swimming event. Matson was a very big part of our school engagement program, through which it was possible to make sure that the Commonwealth Games resource kit put Commonwealth Games activities into the everyday curriculum of many schools around the state.

We had an amazing games. The relationship that we have been building and continue to build with the Victorian Institute of Sport is making sure that, more than just having athletes representing the state, it is a genuine partnership, and we are delighted with their results.

Live music venues

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Planning, and it is with regard to the announcement regarding live music and the agent-of-change principle — that is, a new provision and practice note due, according to the live music action agenda, in August-September. Can the minister provide details of the particular provision and practice note and how these will be enforced in practice?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — Through the state planning policy framework.

Supplementary question

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — In what part of the state planning policy framework will it be inserted, and will that be enforceable via the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal?

Hon. M. J. GUY (Minister for Planning) — Once it is in the state planning policy framework, in its own section for the first time, we will see the live music sector having its own references.

Ms Pennicuik — When I will it happen?

Hon. M. J. GUY — As soon as the brief comes back to me and I sign the VC —

Mr Barber interjected.

Hon. M. J. GUY — What a revelation. Mr Barber should know how the planning system works.

Mr Barber — Putting the sizzle before the sausage.

Hon. M. J. GUY — President, I should not be distracted by the Neanderthals who are the Greens. I should focus on the question, through you, that has been asked.

The state planning policy framework is the process that governs the planning system in this state, as people would be well aware. We are putting in place a new section for live music in the state planning policy framework. As soon as that is drafted, I suspect, and the time lines outlined by Ms Pennicuik are accurate, that will come back to me, and through what is called a VC amendment I will sign that as law, and that will be done in the next few weeks.

Early childhood facilities

Mrs MILLAR (Northern Victoria) — My question is for the Minister for Children and Early Childhood

Development, Ms Lovell. Will the minister notify the house of any recent projects or announcements for the children’s facilities capital program?

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — I thank the member for her question and her ongoing interest in early childhood development in Victoria. This government has a very strong record of having invested more than \$120 million — record investment — in early childhood facilities in this state. Since Parliament last sat I had the opportunity on 27 June of finally announcing the last of our \$22 million grant round. The grants were made to three facilities in the Ballarat region.

Together with Simon Ramsay; Craig Coltman, the Liberal candidate for Wendouree in the Assembly; Ben Taylor, our candidate for Buninyong in the Assembly; and also representatives of the Phoenix P-12 Community College community, I announced a grant of \$648 934 to build a new early learning centre on the Phoenix college site. This will provide 27 early learning places at the Phoenix P-12 Community College. This is a school that services a very disadvantaged community, and this grant will produce a fantastic result for that community.

Also, together with representatives of the City of Ballarat, Simon Ramsay and our candidate for Ripon in the Assembly, Louise Staley, I announced a \$1.6 million grant for Lucas Integrated Children’s Centre. This is a new integrated children’s centre in a growing area of Ballarat that will provide 66 additional places. We also announced on the same day a grant of \$149 539 for an extension to the Cardigan Village kindergarten, which will provide an additional 33 places, again in a growing area of Ballarat.

Also, since 26 June six major capital projects have been opened. On 22 July the Minister for Planning, Mr Guy, together with the Minister for Community Services, Ms Wooldridge, opened the extension to Wonderland Childcare and Kinder. That \$239 800 extension provided 16 additional places at that kindergarten.

On 23 July, together with Gladys Liu, one of our candidates for Northern Metropolitan Region, and the member for Richmond from the Assembly, Richard Wynne, I opened the Connie Benn Centre in Fitzroy. I note that absent on that day was the shadow minister for children, Jenny Mikakos, who was still on holiday. This is a fantastic centre, providing 98 places, located on a public housing estate in Fitzroy, servicing a very disadvantaged community — it is also a community of

many refugees — and providing really great results in that community.

On 24 July I opened the Buninyong Children's Centre, together with Josh Morris, the mayor of Ballarat, and Ben Taylor and Sonia Smith, the Liberal and Nationals candidates for Buninyong. On 24 July we also opened Ararat North Kindercare, which had a \$250 000 upgrade, together with David O'Brien, a member for Western Victoria Region, and Louise Staley and Scott Turner, the candidates for Ripon. On 24 July I also opened the Yuille Park Children's Centre in Wendouree, which had a \$300 000 upgrade, and that was done together with Simon Ramsay, a member for Western Victoria Region, and Craig Coltman, the candidate for Wendouree. On 30 July the upgraded Swifts Creek Kindergarten was opened by Tim Bull, the Minister for Local Government, and that has provided an additional five places.

Together, the upgrades have provided an additional 167 places at those kindergartens. This is a fantastic result for communities and a fantastic result for families, and it shows the commitment from this Victorian government to early childhood development.

Ms Mikakos — On a point of order, President, earlier today I alerted you to the fact that I was going to raise a point of order about two questions without notice that I asked the Minister for Ageing, Mr Davis, on 25 June in respect of supported residential services. They specifically related to audits of supported residential services. I was seeking numbers more broadly in respect of supported residential service audits conducted in southern metropolitan region during the 2012–13 financial year, as well as audits and inspections in respect of Mentone Gardens, which was the subject of the take-note debate this morning. I also asked whether an audit of the finances of Mentone Gardens was conducted prior to the receiver being appointed and on what date this occurred.

On that occasion the minister responded that he was going to take note of these matters and provide me with those figures. In the course of those responses, Mr Lenders took a point of order seeking a time frame from the Leader of the Government. In your ruling, President, you indicated to the house that 30 days was a reasonable time frame. You said you certainly expected that I would be provided with the relevant information within a 30-day period. Given that period has now passed, I am seeking from the Leader of the Government responses to those questions without notice. I was hoping he would respond this morning during the take-note debate. Given that did not occur, I

ask the Leader of the Government for that information now.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I indicate that my remarks on the occasion Ms Mikakos referred to were not a ruling but guidance. In other words, the standing orders do not actually cover this matter, and therefore I was not in a position to deliver a ruling as such. But I certainly concur with Ms Mikakos that I provided guidance on that occasion as to what my expectation would be. She is correct in that sense.

Hon. D. M. Davis — On the point of order, President, I am informed that significant work is required to provide that information, but I am also informed that a response is close to finalisation.

Mr Tee — On a point of order, President, in a similar vein, I asked the Minister for Planning a question on 7 May in relation to Midfield Meat International, Mr Colin McKenna and any rezoning of land. On that occasion the minister said he would get back to me because he did not know the answer. On 11 June I asked again in this chamber whether or not there had been any progress, and on that occasion the minister said he was happy to follow up the matter. I raised the matter again on 25 June, and on that occasion you, President, indicated that you hoped an answer would be forthcoming. I am wondering whether the minister is now, three months later, able to provide us with an answer.

Hon. M. J. Guy — On the point of order, President, I understand that on the dates Mr Tee is referring to no requests had been made.

Mr Tee — I missed that answer.

Hon. M. J. Guy — I thought I would just answer Mr Tee's question rather than writing to him, but if that is not good enough, I will write to him as well.

Mr Tee — I apologise; I had not heard the minister's answer, which is that no requests had been forthcoming from the council. To be clear, I had asked whether the minister or his department were in the process of rezoning the land. I take it from that response that the answer is — —

Hon. D. M. Davis — You get one go at it; you don't get two questions.

Mr Tee — No, that was the question. The minister was answering the question of whether a request was made through the council. My question, President, is whether or not the minister or his department were rezoning land.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I concur with the Leader of the Government that Mr Tee has raised a point of order rather than entered into further discussion of the matter. It was a point of order, so strictly speaking it should have ended at that. The minister has indicated that on this occasion he is prepared to give Mr Tee a response that will presumably close the matter.

Hon. M. J. Guy — I wanted to clear this matter up very quickly for Mr Tee by providing an answer, but I will also put it in writing to make sure that he gets a proper written answer.

MEDICARE CO-PAYMENT

Debate resumed.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — I would like to make a few concluding remarks in relation to Ms Pulford's motion. Before question time I was outlining the significant investments the Victorian government has made into health services in Victoria, and I identified a number of upgrades and new investments in health care across Western Victoria Region, which I represent. I got to areas on the list which are in fact outside the region I represent but which are certainly part of the state I represent as a member of this chamber, and I talked about the significant redevelopment of the Frankston Hospital. Some \$81 million has been committed to that hospital.

I would also like to acknowledge the significant contribution that has been made to my other favourite city in the Western Victoria Region, which is Geelong. Some \$120 million in capital works are underway at the Geelong Hospital. I recently accompanied the Minister for Health on a tour of the new intensive care unit of the Geelong Hospital, which is another state-of-the-art emergency care unit in the hospital at Geelong. If anyone ventures down that way, what they will see — apart from the new lights at Skilled Stadium, which are now a significant part of the horizon in Geelong — are the cranes on top of our hospitals, both public and private. There is huge activity going on with the upgrade of the Geelong Hospital. St John of God Health Care has also received a significant investment to upgrade its Geelong hospital.

I was with the Premier, the Minister for Health and others at a sod turning at the new Epworth Hospital only a few weeks ago. That project will create over 400 new jobs for the Geelong region. Something that the member for Lara in the other place, John Eren, could never deliver is a new health service in Geelong North known as Barwon Health North. Residents who have

been sadly neglected by that member will now have a health service in the north precinct of Geelong. That was not committed to or delivered by the Labor government.

In the Geelong region good things are happening in relation to health care. In her contribution to the debate Ms Pulford referred to the upper house standing committee inquiry into the impact of the carbon tax on the Victorian public health service. Members will note that in my contribution I have often referred to the significant impost of the carbon tax on health services in Victoria. The hypocrisy of members opposite is clear when they talk about the tax impost of a co-contribution to a GP consultation fee but are more than happy to support a tax on health services in Victoria.

I refer to an electricity account that was provided to that inquiry by Barwon Health which indicated that the carbon tax cost to that health service was over \$7000 per month. I also refer to a document that indicates that for Bendigo Health the total cost for one year's energy use included an additional carbon tax impost of over \$17 000. There have been quite significant tax imposts to health services across Victoria in relation to the carbon tax. Members opposite supported the carbon tax as well as a reduction in national funding agreement payments of over \$107 million by the then federal Labor Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek. It is a bit rich for Ms Pulford to put forward this motion and then have Mr Melhem and Ms Hartland screaming foul in relation to a small co-payment of \$2 when they are happy to stand up and support a significant tax impost on health services across Victoria in relation to the carbon tax and a reduction in funds through the national health agreement.

I also acknowledge the ongoing and significant investments in Warrnambool, another of my favourite cities in Western Victoria Region. The Warrnambool health service, South West Healthcare, is enjoying new state-of-the-art upgrades. There was also the recent announcement of Peter's Project, which was largely driven by the community. There will be a radiology service based at Warrnambool for cancer treatments, and that will help alleviate the significant impost on people having to travel to receive those services in either Ballarat or Melbourne. It is a huge advantage for a small local community to have those treatment services available locally. I congratulate the state government and local communities on their work towards providing those significant and important services.

I also note the more than \$4.42 million upgrade of the Warragul hospital for East Gippslanders, which is a

significant investment. Then there is the Latrobe Regional Hospital with an upgrade at a cost of over \$73 million. We now have the world-class Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre. The redevelopment of the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital is happening as we speak under this government, as well as the allocation of \$15 million to expand intensive care maternity services at Sunshine Hospital.

Obviously it is not just about Western Victoria Region, though I am pleased to note that the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Wendy Lovell, said during question time that there is a significant investment in not only childcare services but education services across regional Victoria. Again I congratulate the minister on announcing considerable investments in the Ballarat region for early learning centres and kindergartens as well as investment in new schools like Phoenix College, to which this government has contributed over \$18 million. There is funding of \$1.2 million for an early learning centre and an \$8 million investment out of the state budget into Ballarat High School with a further \$10 million promised. I could go on and on.

There is no doubt that this government is fully committed to investing in education and early education facilities, as Minister Lovell indicated in her answer to a question without notice, but the government is also committed to investing in health care. I have spent some time explaining in detail the commitment and funds that have been given to the Victorian taxpayer through the Napthine government in relation to the upgrading of healthcare services across Victoria.

In conclusion, yes, it is clear that we will not oppose this motion, and yes, the co-payment as proposed by the coalition government is yet to be debated in the Senate. There is no doubt that our position is very clear, but we must keep in mind the fact that the previous federal government left a legacy of a net debt of \$350 billion to the incoming Abbott government. At some time some responsibility needs to be shown to draw back that debt. For long-term fiscal sustainability we need to provide for future budget surpluses so we can prepare for the next significant fiscal challenge.

I congratulate the Abbott government on looking at ways in which it can reduce costs without affecting services. There is no doubt that the revenue generated by the Medicare levy is far surpassed by the actual cost of the healthcare service provided through Medicare. I look forward to the Victorian minister having ongoing discussions with his counterpart, federal Minister for Health Peter Dutton, to look at ways to develop a long-term, sustainable model that will provide universal

health care for the Australian nation without creating an impost on those who are socially disadvantaged or would face significant challenges in paying for health services. I believe that trying to reduce the number of GP consultations was the federal government's rationale for introducing the co-payment.

Mr JENNINGS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — Thank you, Acting President, for the opportunity to speak in support of Ms Pulford's motion, which refers to comments made by the Victorian Minister for Health when he was asked in the Victorian Parliament at the end of May to comment on the Victorian budget, the stresses and strains in the Victorian hospital system and the impact of the federal government's 2014–15 budget. The federal budget restricts the amount of money coming to Victoria for future hospital care, and these federal budget cuts add to pressures on the Victorian budget. The introduction of a \$7 co-payment for all visits to GPs would lead to a reduction in GP services and an increased reliance on hospital care in the first instance.

The Victorian minister recognised that this would add to the pressures and strains within the Victorian healthcare system for which he is responsible. He acknowledged that the federal government's policy to introduce the \$7 co-payment was a bad one. He indicated in his comments, when he was pushed, that his preference was that the legislation that underpinned the commonwealth government's decision would not pass the Senate. That is what he indicated on the public record, but then, when he was pressed on whether he was advocating that Victorian Liberal and Nationals senators should support the Victorian government's view and vote down this federal budget item, he pulled up short. He pulled up short in terms of making any recommendation that Victorian Liberal and Nationals senators vote against the introduction of the co-payment for the very reason that Mr Ramsay has just contorted his arguments.

Mr Ramsay — Contorted?

Mr JENNINGS — He has contorted his contribution. Mr Ramsay's position is an accurate reflection of the difficulty that Liberal Nationals senators in Canberra are confronted with. If these senators are honest, they would recognise that the introduction of a co-payment will have a detrimental impact on the utility of primary health care in Victoria and indeed Australia. They would acknowledge that it will have a negative impact on pathology services, radiology services and diagnostic assessments of patients. This will inevitably lead to poorer health outcomes, because patients will not be receiving

medical care and treatment for their condition at the earliest opportunity. They will be delaying contact with the healthcare system, inevitably leading to more intensive costs being borne by hospital systems.

Indeed, the healthcare system will ultimately pay a huge price, both in terms of the impact upon the health status and conditions of Victorian and Australian patients and in terms of a cost shift to hospitals. This will occur at a time when better diagnostic assessment and clinical care could lead to a net reduction of patient care if health care is received at an early stage of illness or disease rather than at the later one, the acute stage, which inevitably leads to increased cost structures.

Liberal Party members in this chamber and in the federal Parliament probably know that a contrary dynamic has been put in play by these policy settings of the federal Liberal budget, which will lead to a pyrrhic reduction in the amount of primary health care. There appears to be a reduction in the number of Medicare transactions, but ultimately this change will lead to the increased use of hospitals, and a higher cost structure for health care which would flow from that impost.

The Minister for Health in Victoria recognises that dilemma. He realises that the co-payment is a disincentive to better primary health care and better healthcare outcomes. He knows that, and he is an advocate of protecting Victorian patients and protecting the hospital system. He calls on other members of this chamber on the government benches to support him in that argument, but they pull up short in relation to the logical extension of this. They indicate that their preference would be for the co-payment aspect of the legislation not to pass the federal Parliament, but they are hamstrung by their ultimate commitment to the Liberal-Nationals federal government. They are obviously compromising their ability to call on their colleagues in the Senate to vote down this impost, and they have to have a variety of arguments, such as the minefield of an argument that Mr Ramsay was trying to find his way through.

Mr Ramsay was trying to acquit his obligation to his federal brothers and sisters and at the same time protect Victorian patients and the Victorian government. He had great difficulty in doing so, but he was trying to identify where there are good outcomes in the Victorian healthcare system. If there are any good outcomes in the Victorian healthcare system, then all of us should rise up and celebrate that, but at the moment that has not been the history for Victorian patients, and it certainly has not been the case for the last three years, if not longer. For the last three and a half years the outcomes for Victorian patients have continued to be

eroded in terms of the quality care and timeliness of care in the Victorian healthcare system.

This is one of the reasons I have some degree of sympathy for the Victorian health minister — because, one way or another, in the next term of government, whoever is in government and whoever the health minister is, there are going to be monumental difficulties in balancing the books in the healthcare system. That is because of the combination of the reduction in commonwealth support in terms of commonwealth grants coming to Victoria to support health care and the extraordinary impact of what is coming out of the forward estimates, which is a reduction somewhere of the order of \$1 billion in funds coming from Canberra to Victoria to support Victorian health care between now and 2018. After 2018 a further \$12.5 billion reduction in the commonwealth contribution to health care in Victoria has been earmarked in the forward estimates.

We are on the cusp of those impacts. We are also on the cusp of the double whammy of not only a reduction in hospital funding being provided by the commonwealth but also a difficulty in the structure of the Victorian budget to fund for adequate health care in our hospitals as it is, compounded by the impact of the co-payment having a detrimental effect on the utility of primary health care and diagnostic care into the future, which will inevitably lead to a greater burden being shifted into emergency departments and into the tertiary aspects of hospital care in Victoria. We will have the double impact of the reduction in hospital budgets and the additional burden of a shift from primary care to tertiary care in the health system in Victoria.

That is the reason the Victorian health minister knows he is in trouble at the moment. He knows that next year he will have the monumental difficulty of satisfying the budget requirements and delivering better health care in Victoria. That is the reason it is crucial that we stand up and oppose the co-payments in the Victorian Parliament and the federal Parliament. The co-payments have to be defeated. I support all politicians around the nation rising up to support their communities to receive better quality health care and oppose the co-payment, and that is the reason I support Ms Pulford's motion today.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.04 p.m.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I rise today to speak on the motion of Ms Pulford. I wish to make it very clear at the beginning of my contribution to this debate that the government will not be opposing this motion. I know that the Labor Party has some sort of

formula that it uses to distinguish between not opposing and supporting, and if somebody over there could tell me what it is, I will apply it at this time.

Mr D. D. O'Brien — John Setka tells them.

Mr FINN — John Setka does tell them what to do a lot, and I understand he is going to tell them what to do a lot more in the not-too-distant future, when he will perhaps have a more personal contact in here. But that is a matter that we will deal with at another time.

The government does not support the introduction of the proposed co-payment. That is an indisputable fact; it is something that nobody can get away from. One thing that we have to discuss here today — and I think Mr Ramsay touched on it briefly in his contribution — is that it is the role of the Senate to decide whether we get this co-payment, or indeed anything at all, and nobody knows what is going to happen with the Senate.

Mr Ramsay — The nutters.

Mr FINN — The nutters, as Mr Ramsay says — the greatest collection of misfits and other types that you have ever seen in your life.

Mr D. D. O'Brien — That's just the Greens.

Mr FINN — It is just the Greens. If Mr O'Brien wants me to start on the Greens, we could — —

Hon. M. J. Guy — Lee Rhiannon.

Mr FINN — Lee Rhiannon — Ms Palestinian Terrorist 2014. What a great job she is doing up there!

Mr Barber — On a point of order, Acting President, first of all on the basis of relevance, Mr Finn has simply gone off on a tirade about a Greens senator. Secondly, he has referred to her as, or seems to want to associate her with being, a terrorist, which would be out of order under previous rulings and guidance that we have received in this place.

Hon. M. J. Guy — On the point of order, Acting President, Mr Finn has mentioned four words about a senator. Firstly, Mr Barber is claiming relevance, but I think for Mr Barber to object to Mr Finn using four words that he finds somehow not relevant is the thin end of the wedge. Secondly, I see no difference between the reference Mr Finn has made to a federal Senator and some of the other references made in this chamber to other federal Liberal MPs, particularly the former Prime Minister.

Mr Ondarchie — On the point of order, Acting President, incredibly Mr Barber impugns Mr Finn's

contribution when no more than 30 seconds earlier Mr Barber made some utterances about former Senator Helen Kroger across the chamber.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem) — Order! Without entering too much into the debate, I understand that Mr Finn used some unparliamentary language. Mr Finn should go back to the motion and refrain from diverting from it.

Mr FINN — I thank you for your guidance, Acting President. I was referring to the Senate, which is a very important part of this debate because, quite frankly, if the co-payment does not get through the Senate, what we are talking about here today is a total waste of time. It is probably a waste of time anyway; it is Wednesday after all. I was raising the issue of a number of senators and Mr Guy raised the name of Lee Rhiannon. She may well not be Miss Hamas Terrorist 2014; she may have been the runner-up. I am not sure, but time will tell.

We have in the Senate a group of diverse individuals, to put a very charitable outlook on it. We see the Greens up there. You have your moderate Greens, you have your extreme Greens, you have your environmental Greens and you have your foreign affairs Greens. There are more factions in the Greens than there were beers in the Richmond cheer squad last Saturday, and that is the truth.

The bottom line is that unless the Senate can agree to this proposal, it is just not going to happen — —

Mr Barber — You hope the Greens will solve the problem for you — is that it?

Mr FINN — I can assure Mr Barber that never in my life have I thought the Greens would solve a problem; that is not something that has ever entered my head — not even once, not even slightly. I do not think that is a possibility in this situation. As the situation stands we have a Senate that looks like it will probably reject the co-payment, which makes this debate today irrelevant. At best it is hypothetical, but it is quite irrelevant.

I wish that members of the opposition would find a more constructive way to spend their Wednesdays. For nearly four years now we have been putting up with what has become colloquially known around this building as wacky Wednesday.

Ms Pulford — We came up with that.

Mr FINN — Ms Pulford said that the Labor Party came up with 'wacky Wednesday'. It may well be that the Labor Party came up with it, but

let me tell members this: Labor improved on it beyond measure. It has refined wackiness into something to behold —

Mr Ramsay interjected.

Mr FINN — An art form indeed, Mr Ramsay. By the time we have finished we will have spent pretty much all day discussing something that is not going to happen. What a waste of time. If you are looking for a waste of time or space, the ALP is the place to find it because it has plenty to share.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr FINN — Are you taping this? No? Members of the ALP are masters of the obsolete and the irrelevant, and they are proving it yet again. As we know, the Labor Party is very big on history. In fact in Canberra at the moment they are history. Its members like to talk about the achievements of the Hawke government. The shining light on the hill is the Hawke government. They talk about the economic reforms of the Hawke government; they talk about this of the Hawke government and that of the Hawke government. They like to talk about the economic prowess of the man they call the world's greatest Treasurer, Paul Keating —

Mr Leane — Hear, hear!

Mr FINN — Mr Leane said, 'Hear, hear!', which is a strange thing to hear from a trade unionist, given Paul Keating was the one who gave us 1 million unemployed in this country —

Mr Ondarchie — The recession we had to have.

Mr FINN — He was Treasurer during the recession we had to have — I will get to that in a minute, Mr Ondarchie. There were 1 million people unemployed, and I assume many of them would have been in the electrical industry. They are the ones who will remember more than anybody else how Paul Keating and the Hawke government left Australia.

It is worth remembering that in the 1991 budget the Hawke government announced a co-payment of \$3.50. This was reduced to \$2.50 before it was implemented, but it was subsequently abandoned within months by Paul Keating. Was that after or before he knifed Bob? I am not sure. I will have to check on that —

Hon. D. M. Davis interjected.

Mr FINN — Paul Keating changed it after he knifed Bob Hawke. I thank Mr Davis for his assistance. As I am sure he would understand, it is very difficult to keep

up with the number of knifings that go on in the Labor Party. The number of leaders lying bleeding in the gutter at any given time is very hard to keep up with.

When the Labor Party comes in here and criticises the Liberal government for introducing a co-payment I find it very odd that its very own shining light, the great Hawke government, was responsible for doing exactly the same thing, and I would suggest it did so for a very similar reason, which is to answer the question: who is paying the bill? We see that members of the left in this country and indeed around the world are very good at spending other people's money. They are exceedingly good at spending money they may well not have. That is why currently we have this huge debt hanging around the necks of every Australian. Our grandchildren will be paying it off at the rate we are going. We have to ask the question: who is going to pay for our health system? It is a very good health system; it is one of the best in the world, if not the best.

It is very interesting to hear the crew opposite talk about industry and environmental sustainability. They are forever banging on about sustainability. Yet when it comes to economic sustainability, they are not even mildly interested; they have not got a clue. They have no idea at all and nor do they want to know. They just spend, spend, spend, and when they run out of money they tax, tax, tax. When we run out of money, they are still spending and the debt goes up. That is just the way the Labor Party operates. We saw that during the six years the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd governments were in power in Canberra — in between the occasional knifing of any given Prime Minister at any given time.

It is interesting to visit hospitals and large medical facilities in the western suburbs that have been improved out of sight since we came to government in 2010. It is interesting to see the equipment and be amazed when told how much these pieces of equipment cost. Those things cost millions. One piece of equipment will cost millions, but that equipment is very important because it keeps people alive. That is something we have to keep in mind on all occasions.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr FINN — As Mr Ondarchie says, we as a government would much prefer to use hospitals as places to treat sick people than as television studios. That might be novel to those opposite, but we believe hospitals should be used to treat sick people, to cure sick people and to get them back to their families and their homes, and not to shoot episodes of *Water Rats*. Was that the show they shot? It could be that show that

Sarah Hanson-Young, a federal Senator for South Australia, was using as an example.

Mr Elsbury — It was *Sea Patrol*.

Mr FINN — Thank you, Mr Elsbury; it was *Sea Patrol*. That is the one she was referring to, saying that you cannot have navy boats intercepting refugees, because she had seen it on *Sea Patrol*. She is no Lisa McCune, let me tell you. It is just extraordinary. I do not think we were referring to *Sea Patrol* being made at Sunshine Hospital. There is not a huge expanse of water anywhere near Sunshine Hospital unless it rains and the car park gets a bit damp.

The Labor Party, the Greens and other extreme left-wingers in this country have to take into consideration and take very seriously the question of where the money is coming from. If we are going to have the equipment that is needed to cope with an ageing population and if we are going to be able to provide the sorts of cures and treatment that modern medicine is coming up with every day, this question will need to be answered. It is amazing the number of diseases and complaints which, if you suffered from them just a few short years ago, would have been cause to ring Le Pine or Tobin Brothers to make an appointment. Now, however, doctors can treat people for those diseases, and people can recover. That is wonderful. It is great. But as a result of that the cost is going through the roof and continues to do so.

The Labor Party and the Greens, however, will never tell us where they are going to get the money from. It may well have been very responsible of the Hawke government back in 1991 to do what it attempted to do. Mr Elsbury is looking at me with that look on his face, and very unpleasant it is. I can understand why he would look almost horrified that I would be talking about something that the Hawke government got right. That government did get a number of things right — not many, but a number. This may well be something that it got right. But members will not hear the Labor Party talking about the Hawke government today. They will not hear the Labor Party talking about former Prime Minister Paul Keating when he was Treasurer or the 1991 budget.

Ms Pulford interjected.

Mr FINN — Ms Pulford is on her perch chirping away. What I would really love Ms Pulford to tell us when she rounds up her comments on this motion today is where we are going to get the money to make the health system in this country sustainable in the long term. That is what I want to know from the Labor Party.

That is what the Australian people want to know from the Labor Party. With an election in the offing in November, that is what the people of Victoria will want to know. All these promises will inevitably come from the Labor Party before the election. The question that will be asked and must be asked is: where will the money be coming from? How will you pay for these promises? How will you keep our health system sustainable?

It is a bit much to expect that the Greens would show any economic responsibility at all. In fact it is probably a bit much to expect any sort of responsibility on anything from the Greens. Do they have *Family Feud* on? That might be something that federal Senator Sarah Hanson-Young is onto now. We can put the Greens to one side because we can expect that their economic responsibility will be zilch. It is not something that can be taken into consideration. It is bit like the Loch Ness monster; it is often spoken about but has yet to be seen. That is the sad reality.

It does not matter what the Greens promise; they are never going to have to fulfil those promises. They are a rump in opposition — a very powerful rump when the Labor Party is in government. The Greens can be very strong indeed. As we have seen in Canberra in recent years, they can call the shots. Whilst they may be a rump, they are a very strong and powerful rump. That is something we must take into consideration in the lead-up to this election. The Greens will be saying, 'We'll spend this, we'll spend that and we'll spend something else', but they will never tell us where the money is coming from.

The Labor Party likes to tell us that it is economically responsible. Its members like to tell us that they left Victoria in good nick. We know that is nonsense, because we know that if the coalition government had not been elected in 2010, Victoria would be back in the state it was in during the early 1990s under former Premier Joan Kirner. That is a fact of life.

I challenge members of the Labor Party here today, particularly Ms Pulford when she sums up at the end of the debate, to give us some idea about where the ALP will get the money from to keep our health system alive. That question is absolutely crucial to the argument about the future of health in this country, whether it be the private or the public health system. Unless governments can explain where they are going to get the money to keep the system sustainable, they cannot be taken seriously, and if Ms Pulford cannot get up today and explain where the money is coming from, then she too cannot be taken seriously. She cannot be

regarded with any seriousness by anybody concerned about the health system in this nation.

Over the last 100 years or so we have seen in this nation the development of a health system that has picked the eyes out of both the British and the US systems. We know the British health system, the National Health Service — or should I say the infamous National Health Service in Britain — is almost entirely a government service. My understanding is that it is pretty poor. It certainly does not deliver the sort of health care that we have come to expect to be the norm in Australia. By any measure that would rule out more government control over our health services.

We do not want to replicate what the people of Great Britain have had to put up with for a very long time. We do not want that in Australia. But nor do we want the situation that exists in the United States, where unless people have health insurance they sometimes miss out altogether, which has led to the debacle over there called Obamacare. That system is threatening not just the sustainability of the health system in the United States but indeed the sustainability of the United States full stop, with a debt of some \$17 trillion. That is quite extraordinary, and that country is spending more by the second. We do not want to go down that path in Australia.

In Australia we have a pretty good balance between private and public health services. It would be good if those who can afford to have private health care, those who can afford to access the private health system, could avail themselves of that opportunity, because that would ease the pressure on our public health system and allow those who cannot afford private health to access the public health service. After all, that is what the public health system is for: it is for those who need it — not those who want it, but those who need it. These are matters that we have to take into consideration in what I would say is a vital national discussion on the issue. This is not something we should just pop up with and say, 'There's the solution'. We need to have an open, frank and clean discussion about the future of health care in this country. The future is bright if it is handled the right way. If it is not, then we might find ourselves in a fair bit of trouble.

Mr Melhem called on members on this side of the house to ring our Liberal and Nationals colleagues in Canberra, particularly senators, to urge them to vote against the proposed co-payment changes. I thought to myself, 'That is coming from a representative of a party that on a number of occasions had the opportunity to do exactly the same thing in the six years between 2007 and 2013'. Labor Party members had numerous

opportunities to do exactly the same thing — that is, to ring, to lobby or to visit their federal colleagues to try to convince them of the folly of their ways in Canberra, and God alone knows there was much folly in Canberra during those days. But members of the Labor Party did not do that. They did not pick up the phone or take the opportunity, and I will give an example — —

Mr Tee interjected.

Mr FINN — Here is John Setka's boy. He is firing up now, and I have not even mentioned the royal commission. I say to Mr Tee that with regard to the royal commission I have a feeling that the best is yet to come and he should stick around.

I am pretty sure that my memory is clear that members of the ALP did not pick up the phone and urge their colleagues to pass the scrapping of the carbon tax.

Mr Leane — How do you know?

Mr FINN — I do not think you did. In fact members of the Labor Party voted to keep the carbon tax, that is my recollection, even though the carbon tax was hitting hospitals and health services throughout the state.

Ms Pulford — My point of order, Acting President, is in relation to the question of relevance. Mr Finn indicated earlier in his contribution that he did not have much to say about the motion. This is a very narrowly framed motion around the Medicare co-payment and the government's and opposition's shared opposition to it. If Mr Finn has run out of things to say on Medicare, then perhaps he could let somebody else have a go.

Mr FINN — On the point of order, Acting President, if Ms Pulford had listened she would know I was referring to the carbon tax impacting on the cost of health care and hospitals in the state, which clearly relates to the motion. I am not sure what she is getting at, because the point I was making is very clearly ingrained in the motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem) — Order! Mr Finn has just linked his comments back to health, but I do not recall him making the link earlier. I take it that he is linking the carbon tax to health, but I think it is important that we go back to the motion. Mr Finn keeps straying into other areas. We have quite a number of speakers, and I am sure other people would like to contribute as well.

Mr FINN — Acting President, I was referring to comments made earlier by you during your contribution on the motion, and given the opportunity I will have a

word to say about what you may or may not say in future when you speak on such motions.

After almost four years of the coalition government the health system in this state is fairly healthy. For example, in the western suburbs we have just had the announcement of a new cardiac unit at the Sunshine Hospital, which is going to be sensational for people in the west who have never had one before. While I had a short break recently Mr Elsbury joined the Premier and the Minister for Mental Health at a sod-turning ceremony at the Mercy hospital at Werribee. The Mercy hospital is turning into a quite significant health hub. It is turning into much more than a suburban hospital; it is turning into a significant contributor to health services and health provision throughout the outer west.

I recall going to the opening of the new maternity ward at the Werribee Mercy Hospital last year. I was very impressed with the facilities there. Over the journey I have visited a number of maternity hospitals, but I have to say this one was particularly impressive. It provides for the needs of mums and babies in a very big way. The Mercy and St Vincent's hospitals in Werribee are very much part of the efforts of this government, and I commend it on that.

I should also add that there is \$15 million to expand the intensive care and maternity services at Sunshine Hospital, so there are more maternity services, which is entirely understandable given that the number of babies being born in the western suburbs is a struggle to keep up with. Mr Elsbury may have some numbers in his head that I do not have at my fingertips — —

Mr Elsbury — It is 72 a week in Wyndham.

Mr FINN — It is 72 a week in Wyndham alone.

Ms Hartland — It is 5300 at Sunshine Hospital.

Mr FINN — It is 5300 at Sunshine Hospital.

Ms Hartland — That is why it needs a complete rebuild.

Mr FINN — We are working on it. I am working with the CEO of Western Health on that particular project. The hospital has come up with an impressive plan that will see the rebuilding of Western Hospital, Footscray, and major changes to Sunshine Hospital, which will provide the sort of health services that we need in the west well into the future. That is something I am sure a re-elected Napthine government will be addressing. I know that because I will ensure that it is brought to the attention of the Minister for Health in the

new government. Indeed I brought it to his attention in previous months following a meeting I had with the CEO. I was very impressed with the proposal she put to me.

I know that Mr Leane is keen to debate this matter. Not that I wish to prompt him in any way, but he might wish to explain to us why he was not as appalled by the Hawke government's decision to impose a co-payment as he clearly is now by the Abbott government's decision to do so.

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr FINN — I do not think you would do that. I have a feeling Mr Leane might be having a lend of us and taking us for a fairly extensive ride just at the minute. He might like to tell us why he was not appalled then. He might also like to pre-empt — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr FINN — Ms Hartland mentioned the rebuilding of Sunshine Hospital, and I have already said that I believe the Footscray hospital should be rebuilt. My concern is that the future of these hospitals and their rebuilding would be under major threat if the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) got control of the building industry in the state. Clearly under a Labor government that is exactly what would happen, because the man who would become planning minister is a member of the CFMEU. That is something Labor cannot get away from. If the CFMEU is in charge of the building industry, we will not see new hospitals in Footscray or Sunshine — or anywhere else, because most builders would leave the state — for a very long time.

To get back to what I was saying to Mr Leane, I invite him to explain to us — to pre-empt Ms Pulford, if he will — where he will get the money from to pay the doctors and nurses and to pay for the extraordinary and expensive equipment we now have in our hospitals. I urge him to explain to the house where he and the Labor Party would get the money from. It is a basic and very important question.

As I said earlier, we on this side of the house will not be opposing the motion, but I urge serious, sober consideration of the sorts of issues that I have raised here today, because I think the economic sustainability of our health system, not just here in Victoria but throughout Australia, is something that is of extreme importance. We cannot have a situation where governments spend, spend, spend and allow our health system to fall into disrepute and indeed fall over altogether. I ask opposition members, whether it be

Ms Pulford or Mr Leane — whoever it may be — to explain to us where they are going to get the money from and what their plan is to make the health system in the state and the country economically sustainable and viable so that that service can provide health care for us, our children and our grandchildren into the future.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank Mr Finn for inviting me to speak on this motion. I also support the motion, just as he did. There are a few things members of this chamber would not accuse Mr Finn of. The first thing is being boring, the second thing is being relevant — he is usually not relevant, and once again today he was not — and the third thing is leaving any doubt in the minds of members as to his position on things. However, today I find myself in a great deal of doubt about Mr Finn's position on this motion.

After having listened to Mr Finn speaking for 35 minutes on why members should not vote for this motion, he declared to the chamber that he will be supporting it. We have sat through a unique event over the last 35 minutes, because while Mr Finn never leaves us in any doubt — whether it be in relation to what he thinks about climate change or a number of other issues — he has left us in a great deal of doubt about the contribution he has just made. I am sure Mr Finn will return to enlighten us on many things in the future, and we all look forward to that.

In his argument against the motion he was supporting, Mr Finn asked where the money would come from. But when it comes to health, the coalition, which went to the 2010 election with promises for the health portfolio, could have been asked the same question. There was a commitment for 800 new hospital beds, and that commitment has not been fulfilled. The question the government asked itself when it won the election was, 'Where will the money come from?'. There was a commitment to slash hospital waiting lists, and obviously the waiting lists have blown out, so that commitment has not been fulfilled. When the coalition went to the election and made that bold commitment, it never asked itself and never expected to be asked where the money would come from. There was a commitment to improve ambulance services, and as we know, ambulance times have blown out considerably, so that has not been achieved.

When it comes to health, this Victorian government has not got a great record in backing up what it says it is going to do. The minister who has carriage of the health portfolio presides in this chamber. He has been asked a number of times where the new hospital beds will be located, but we have never had one straight answer

from him. I am sure that if you looked up 'weasel words' in the dictionary, there would be a picture of David Davis, because that is all we ever get from him in response to any query on health issues.

There was a big commitment for 800 new hospital beds. On the how-to-vote cards handed out by coalition candidates in 2010 there was a commitment to 1600 beds statewide. There was a commitment for 100 new beds in the first year of the term, which did not eventuate, and then 800 new hospital beds over this term — which obviously, as we all know now, have not eventuated.

I find it quite amusing that after the recent federal budget brought down by Mr Hockey, Denis Napthine, David Davis and a number of Victorian government members said they were disappointed. They were disappointed with the co-payment and the federal government's slashing of funding to health and education. The motion before us deals with health, and there was disappointment that the federal government would cut funding to health. The irony, showing how moronic that was, is that this Napthine government over the journey has cut more than \$835 million from the health portfolio. I cannot understand how there could be outrage against their federal colleagues when Victorian government members actually led the charge on cutting funding to health services.

Politically I understand that the Premier and his government are trying to distance themselves from the Abbott government's huge cut to funding for health and education. Politically I understand why the Premier and the government might distance themselves from the announcement of the Medicare co-payment, considering their term is coming to an end. But we went through this farce where Denis Napthine pretended to be really angry. He was angry with Tony Abbott, and he rang him up and told him he was angry. That went on for a day and a half. The next thing we read in the newspapers was that Denis Napthine and Tony Abbott were at a Liberal fundraiser and were just about holding hands. We could see the love in their eyes and the smile they shared. It was a farce. Denis was angry; he was angry with Tony; he was angry that Tony had cut funding; he was angry about the co-payments; and he was going to give Tony Abbott a piece of his mind. If that was a picture of Denis Napthine giving Tony Abbott a piece of his mind, that was the softest, loveliest piece of mind that anyone who was angry could ever deliver to someone.

The Napthine government cut over \$835 million to health. When the Gillard government made a funding cut to health, state government MPs were angry about

those cuts — and rightly so. We are all angry about the cuts the Abbott government made, and we saw the outrage from David Davis in this chamber about that particular cut, even though after a time the Gillard government put the money back in. Has the Napthine government put the \$835 million back in? Has the Abbott government put the billions of dollars of cuts back in? No.

Where is the health minister? Where is David Davis now? Question time after question time government members bowled him Dorothy Dixers about federal health funding, and he showed outrage over the money that had been cut. Even after the money was put back in, he was still outraged. Then the Abbott government came along and introduced a co-payment, which it said was going to cut billions of dollars from the health portfolio. And Mr Davis has turned into a pussycat.

He had been a tiger. He had been roaring. He had been so angry he was throwing his arms around. He had been so angry his spittle was coming all the way from that side of the chamber towards us. We were considering bringing in umbrellas at the time. We knew one of the members across the chamber there would ask him a Dorothy Dixer about federal health funding and that he would go off tap. With this minister when it comes to certain types of federal funding cuts he roars like a lion, yet in this instance, which involves billions of dollars, he comes in and pretends and basically says, 'Meow'. That is all he says. He turns into a pussy — a pussycat.

As we know and as a lot of people in this chamber would acknowledge, David Davis has failed in the health portfolio. I do not think the way he has handled the day-to-day running of the health system in Victoria gives us any encouragement or any optimism about him being the person we need to go and fight the Abbott government and bring back the cut funding. He has shown his duplicity a number of times over the journey, and I think that is a sad thing.

We welcome the whole house supporting Ms Pulford's motion, though in doing so we also acknowledge there are a number of election commitments in the health area that the Napthine government is still to deliver in the next 100-odd days. We will not hold our breath on those. We look forward to this health minister firing up when it matters, not carrying on when he gets thrown a Dorothy Dixer in this chamber. Outside this chamber, with no Dorothy needed, he should get into the federal government ministers' ears and do the right thing by Victorians, especially when it comes to their health care.

Mr RONALDS (Eastern Victoria) — I must say that when I heard about the co-payment I was not at all happy. I will not be opposing this motion, but it does bring me to the reasons the federal government would even consider such a measure. As I travel around my electorate I hear many questions, and one of the big questions I get asked is, 'Why?'. The why can be summed up, I think, in a very simple way — that is, as the simple figure of \$1 billion, because that is the amount of money the federal government pays every single month as the interest bill on the debt left by Labor in the form of the Gillard government. To put that amount in perspective, this government has just announced a \$250 million upgrade for the Monash Children's, which is a fantastic announcement, and just the interest bill left by the federal Labor government represents an amount that would allow us to do four such upgrades — four — every single month all year. That brings it into perspective and says a little about the responsibility we as a government have to run a responsible budget.

To make it clear, I note this government does not support the proposed co-payment. It definitely will not be supporting any introduction of a co-payment in emergency departments in our hospitals. We are strongly fighting our colleagues in the federal government about this. Let us also be very clear, however, that none of us knows what will happen with this legislation given the current Senate situation — how would we?

A couple of things are very important to keep in mind at the moment. When we look at the state health budget of \$15 billion we see that it represents a 32.2 per cent increase during our time in government. That is a very significant figure. In the 2014–15 year the health services budget is going to go up on average by 5 per cent — that is, 5 per cent on average across all of the hospitals in this state. I think that is a very significant figure. That can be put in contrast to the \$107 million pulled out of hospitals by the federal Labor government in 2012. If I look at that amount in relation to the hospital in my own region, the Latrobe Valley, that would have represented a \$7 million drop. Instead in this coming year that budget is going to go up under the Liberal Napthine government.

I will also just point out a few things that are very important in the health area in my electorate. Obviously the \$250 million for the Monash Children's is very important. At the moment a sister of a friend of mine is in the Royal Children's Hospital in Parkville, and the family has to travel about 2 hours, depending on the traffic, to get there. This upgrade will make a massive difference for family and friends visiting patients — to

be able to go to the Monash Children's. This will make a big difference for people in the east.

There is also the \$81 million redevelopment of the Frankston Hospital. Where I live there is the \$4.42 million emergency department upgrade for the Warragul hospital. That is money wisely spent; it means that if you need to go to the emergency department in Warragul, you can get service so much more quickly than you could under the previous government. This is very important. As I mentioned this morning in my members statement, I think this makes a real difference to people's lives.

There is also of course the \$73 million for stage 2 of the Latrobe Regional Hospital redevelopment. This is an amazingly massive investment in health for the Latrobe Valley and Eastern Victoria Region. I just note again: no, as a government we do not support the introduction of a co-payment. We do not think it is the right thing, and we are doing whatever we can to make sure it is not introduced. We certainly hope the Senate does not pass it.

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I too welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion, and I welcome the support for the motion of government members. I suppose what surprises and bothers me, and what I cannot understand, is the contradiction of members opposite. Government members in this place oppose a co-payment, and yet they support the Liberal Party that gave us the co-payment. They oppose the co-payment and yet they support a Prime Minister whose policy is to deliver the co-payment. They support a Prime Minister who uses the co-payment to punish the vulnerable. They support a Prime Minister and a Liberal Party that punish families with kids. It does not get much lower than that.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr TEE — I say to Mr Finn that government members in this place cannot distinguish themselves from the very party they support. They are judged by the party they support. The members in this place might try to dissociate themselves from the actions of the federal Liberal Party. They might say, 'We hope this measure fails in the Senate so that Victorians can be spared the atrocities caused by the Liberal Prime Minister', but that will not wash in the electorate. It will not wash that all that members opposite have to offer Victorians is the vain hope that this measure will fail in the Senate. It is Liberal Party members who will vote for this measure in the Senate. It is a Liberal Prime Minister who has put up this outrageous proposition.

Hon. D. M. Davis interjected.

Mr TEE — All right. The health minister said by interjection that it is probably a whole range of people. That is right. The Nationals at the federal level will stand up and vote for this co-payment. The federal Liberals and Nationals will stand hand in hand and vote for this outrageous proposal. There is no basis on which the government members in this place can get away from that, because they stand by the party that delivers this co-payment. They will not support it because they cannot support it. They cannot support a measure that is this awful. They cannot support a measure that does so much harm to the most vulnerable in our community. It does not get much lower than a measure which punishes and kicks our sick people. It is a measure that will hurt families that have kids who have to go to the doctor. So of course members opposite are obliged to support this motion.

However, that does not get members opposite off the hook, because they are associated, hook, line and sinker, with the party that is trying to force this co-payment on us. The government members in this place might try to wriggle out of it by hoping that the Senate opposes it, but people will see through that. They will see that government members in this place are of the same party and that they support the Prime Minister that has introduced this.

The fact that Victorian coalition members try to dissociate themselves from the excessive behaviour of their federal counterparts does not relieve them of their responsibilities; it does not remove their link with the federal government. They cannot simply duck this responsibility. They cannot simply walk away from this cruelty, because they come from and are part of an organisation that has bred this.

Mr Elsbury interjected.

Mr TEE — You come from and you are part of a Liberal Party that has brought this policy to us. You have chosen; you are in that club.

This proposition should be defeated. It should be opposed. It is anti-family, it is anti-kids, but members opposite cannot hope to get out of this simply by hoping that the measure is defeated in the Senate. That is not good enough. Their only strategy appears to be this optimistic hope — and certainly it is an outcome that we would like to see — that their colleagues in the Senate are defeated. I do not think that argument flows or that it has any consistency or logic. I do not think that argument will be supported by the electorate.

I do not think government members in this place can pull the wool over people's eyes by standing here, crying crocodile tears, with their hands on their hearts, pretending to care about the impact of this terrible policy when they are so closely associated with the party that has delivered it. So while I welcome government members' support for the motion, it does not mean they can abrogate their responsibilities.

Mr ELSBURY (Western Metropolitan) — I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this motion. It is interesting to be able to follow the contribution of Mr Tee. I mean, there was more droning going on there than a bagpipe conference. In any case, we have just been lectured, by a man who was a member of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), about those in this place agreeing with the actions or decisions of organisations in Canberra of which they are members. But ipso facto I suggest Mr Tee agrees with all of the actions of the CFMEU. He must agree holus-bolus with all the things that union has done and all the issues it is currently facing. With no questions asked and no qualification required, he agrees with everything the CFMEU has done or has ever wanted to do, and whether it is legal or illegal, he has been more than complicit in all those actions.

Mr Tee does not believe in a democracy made up of a federation of states. We have a federal government that is taking action to do what it thinks is right to remedy a budget issue caused by the previous federal Labor government. The Victorian government does not have to agree with everything the federal government does. That is because we have different interests from those of the commonwealth government. We are allowed to have a difference of opinion in the Liberal Party. We are allowed to have a difference of opinion with our federal colleagues.

The lecture we have just heard came from someone who has supported the carbon tax, a tax which caused such great devastation upon the people of Victoria and held back our industry. It came from someone who was willing to fight to the last day to retain a carbon tax in this country. Mr Tee caused great damage to our economy here in Victoria. That economy relies on the cheap energy that we can produce. Mr Tee should not lecture members on this side of the house about doing what is in Victoria's best interests.

The Premier and the Minister for Health have made very clear their points of view on this matter, and I join with them in not supporting the introduction of a co-payment for treatment at a doctor's surgery. I also do not support the introduction of any emergency department co-payment fee that might be suggested by

anyone. It does not make sense. It would cause greater damage to people seeking medical assistance in our state. As a member representing Western Metropolitan Region, an area that relies very heavily on Medicare, I would find abhorrent the idea of people having to continue to pay for medical treatment in such a manner.

On the other hand, I have capacity. That is why I have private health insurance. That is why when I go to see my GP I pay to see him. I put down my co-payment because that is what I can do; I have that capacity. I am fortunate, but not everyone in my electorate has that capacity. I want to make sure that people in my electorate have the base medical care they need so they can live long and fruitful lives.

I will now use the vernacular of those opposite: we will not be opposing this motion. So many times I have heard that phrase said by those opposite, and I finally get to use it. In any case, we are very serious about providing health care in the state of Victoria. Certainly we were very serious when the federal government decided to remove \$107 million midway through a budget cycle. We were serious about that because it caused great damage to health services in this state. Those opposite continued to defend their friends in Canberra. They continued to stand by their man — or should I say their woman. After Kevin Rudd became Prime Minister again there was a bit of flip-flopping by Labor for a little while, but Labor members certainly decided to stand by Julia Gillard in ripping \$107 million from the Victorian health budget.

That did not go unnoticed by health services in the western suburbs. I have a quote here — a bit of a convoluted quote — from Ralph Willis, a former federal Labor minister who was then chair of the board of Western Health. This statement was quoted by the Premier, Dr Denis Naphine, and I sourced it from the website of Christine Campbell, the member for Pascoe Vale in the Assembly. According to the Premier, Ralph Willis said this about the loss of federal payments:

This reduced Western Health's budgeted funding for 2012–13 by \$6.5 million ...

He said it was:

... extremely difficult to manage, especially coming, as it did, in the middle of the financial year.

He went on to say:

A service reduction program was eventually devised, which necessarily impacted particularly on our elective surgery program.

That is the damage that was caused by the withdrawal of \$107 million in funds midway through a financial year. Those opposite are attacking the federal government for reducing funds in a budget, but that is something that can be planned for; it is something we can actually work with.

Mr Tee — That makes it all right!

Mr ELSBURY — I point out to Mr Tee that this \$107 million was removed in the middle of a budgetary year. Imagine if I said to Mr Tee that I was going to give him \$20 — and God knows why I would — but then only gave him \$7. It does not work like that. As we saw, and as was illustrated by Mr Willis, this impacted on patient treatment. There were impacts on their lives.

There were also impacts on the staffing at those hospitals. Hospitals had made plans for how much surgery they could perform in that financial year. They had made plans for how many staff they needed, what equipment they needed and what materials they needed to conduct surgeries throughout that financial year. When \$6.5 million was ripped out of Western Health that year, all of those plans went against the wall. They were gone. Those opposite will say, 'Yes, but we gave it back', as if that is a wonderful thing. Good on them; so they should have. That is what the former federal government should have done. But when it comes down to it, the damage had been done. People did not receive their treatment when they were told they were going to. They did not receive their treatment in a timely manner. They did not get the care they were due.

During the time period in which we were having a political skirmish with a Scrooge-like federal Labor government, people went without; but the government then gave the money back, so it would all be okay. The next day all the hospitals had to do was go and get their doctors and nurses back and buy all the equipment they needed. Labor members thought you could do that. They thought you could just ring someone up and say, 'You know that leave we were giving you, we want you to come back now' or, 'You know how we had you on a non-ongoing contract and we sacked you — we couldn't keep you on because we didn't have the money anymore — would you mind coming into work tomorrow?'. It does not work like that at all. People's lives were put into disarray — not just patients but professionals, including technicians and many other members of staff who are required to keep the hospital running.

We are serious about the delivery of health care in the western suburbs. It was a Liberal government that

converted what was being used as a film studio at Sunshine Hospital into an intensive care unit (ICU). We have got that project underway now. Labor had an ICU at Sunshine Hospital in 1999 — a legacy of the Kennett government. It was almost ready and it could have been operating if Labor had decided to fund it. The equipment was there; all we needed was the doctors.

In 1999, to the great detriment of the people of Victoria and the people of the western suburbs, Labor took power. Not only did it take power but it took liberties with what should have been an ICU, changing it into a film studio. You could contact Film Victoria to gain access to this ICU. You could not contact your doctor or the Department of Health; you had to contact Film Victoria. That was the legacy of Labor in the western suburbs. We had an ICU that was better for television than for treating patients. What a disgrace. The Liberal government contributed \$15 million, and the ICU is now under construction.

Not only that, but this unit will provide maternity beds as well, so that patients with complicated or high-risk births will be able to receive the treatment they so richly deserve in the hospital they choose. As we heard earlier, around 5000 babies are born at Sunshine Hospital every year. We will be providing a new level of care for those children and for their mothers, and I am proud as a member of this coalition government to be able to do that. Not only that, the intensive care unit has now received another \$10 million boost. The Minister for Health recently announced another \$10 million for the provision of cardiac care services — and if I keep giving speeches like these, I may well need them.

In any case it is an important part of the care that needs to be provided to the people of the western suburbs. We need to have cardiac care and maternal health care in place in the western suburbs so that we are not relying on trips over the West Gate Bridge which, as we all know, can get clogged quite easily. Again those opposite oppose the very project that would bust that congestion. They oppose the east-west link. But that is a debate for another day, so I will not wander too far from the reserve on this one. In any case, we do not want to be relying on hospitals on the other side of the Yarra River to provide the people of the western suburbs with the health care they deserve.

The government has also contributed \$34.7 million to Werribee Mercy Hospital to build a new mental health unit, which will consist of 54 beds. This is doubling the current capacity of Werribee Mercy Hospital's mental health unit. Unfortunately the western suburbs and in particular the city of Wyndham has a very large number

of people with mental health issues. They deserve our support, and that is what the coalition government is doing. I was pleased to be able to join the Premier and Mary Wooldridge, the Minister for Mental Health, at the turning of the first sod on that site.

I drive past that hospital almost on a daily basis, and I look forward to seeing that construction rising out of what was once a car park to create a state-of-the-art mental health unit that not only provides more people with the opportunity to get the help they need but also provides women with a safe place to receive their treatment. A big concern of this government has been about the facilities that are available for women, especially in the mental health sphere, so that they are safe when they receive treatment.

We have also committed \$9.7 million to a dental clinic in Footscray. Again I look forward with great anticipation to this project going ahead, and I can tell the house that I have a sneaking suspicion that so does Museum Victoria, because when we get rid of the old dental clinic it will be able to grab the old pieces of equipment that are being used today to provide people with dental treatment. These chairs are not built anymore; the parts are hard to come by. I think they are over 30 years old. It is antiquated equipment that needs to be retired, and if Museum Victoria wants to send a truck around the day after we have opened the new clinic, I welcome it taking away that equipment so that it can show people just how things used to work. Some of these drills are almost hand cranked.

The government has also provided Williamstown Hospital with a fourth operating theatre — a \$3 million project. This funding has also enabled a refurbishment of the admissions area so that efficiencies can be gained for the other three operating theatres at the hospital. This is another key component of the health care that is being provided to the people of Melbourne's west.

Last but not least in the projects that are coming our way, St Vincent's Health Australia has announced that it will build a new private hospital in the East Werribee employment precinct, something that was dreamt of for over 35 years. People have been talking about what we are going to do there. If you go back and look at maiden speeches from people like the member for Tarneit in the other place, the Honourable Tim Pallas, you can see that he was talking about putting a technology precinct out there and how it was going to go gangbusters for everyone out in Werribee and the western suburbs. He was saying, 'Whoo hoo, check it out! We're going to get this done'. No. Nothing happened. As per normal for the western suburbs when a Labor government is in charge, it is a case of 'Who cares?'. They just leave us

out there to loaf around by ourselves. They say, 'What do we have to do that for? We've already got them, apparently'.

Mr Pallas did nothing about trying to get that patch of land, the East Werribee employment precinct, up and running. Instead, not only has the coalition government already sold two gateway pieces of land for the site, allowing for development to start, but expressions of interest are now open for companies to look at what they want to do for the town centre.

The key to all this is St Vincent's Private Hospital moving into the area. I read some of the posts on my Facebook site when I announced that this was happening, and some people were saying, 'A new private hospital? That's just for the rich people'. I had to clean that quote up a little for you, Acting President. They were saying, 'It's only for the rich people'. No, that is not the case, because the specialists who will be attracted to St Vincent's Private Hospital are already going to be working with the Mercy hospital across the road. They will be able to provide their expertise in clinics at Werribee Mercy Hospital. St Vincent's Private Hospital and Werribee Mercy Hospital will work together to provide health care across the city of Wyndham and the wider area. They will be providing people with excellent health care and with opportunities to enter a private health facility close to home. These are all things that are happening in the west around health, and they are happening because of the coalition government.

Once again I point out that we are not voting against this motion; we will see it go through. But in any case we have a good record, a proud record, in health care in this state. We are working as hard as we can. We have made clear our position on the co-payments and have done so in every way, shape or form that we can. We will continue to fight for the people of Victoria. If the federal government does something else that we are not impressed with, we will let it know, just as we have in this case.

With those few words, I will conclude by saying that we do not automatically fall into lock step with our federal colleagues. We stand up for Victoria, and we are proud to do so.

Mrs MILLAR (Northern Victoria) — It also gives me pleasure to make a contribution to debate on Ms Pulford's motion. I have listened to the debate today, and there have been some great contributions. I will not cover all of that ground again, but I would like to outline some of the developments that are occurring in northern Victoria, which Ms Crozier mentioned this

morning. There are some significant investments in health in northern Victoria, which the debate should refer to today.

The government will not be opposing this motion. The Minister for Health, the Honourable David Davis, has made it clear in the house on many occasions that the Victorian government does not support the introduction of the proposed Medicare co-payment. The Victorian government has also said it does not support the introduction of an emergency department co-payment. Other government speakers have covered that in great detail, but it is a significant point and it is worth reiterating.

The state coalition government will continue to discuss with the federal government any proposed changes, and it will work through their potential impacts on the Victorian health system. This has also already been covered in detail. Victorians can be assured that this government will continue to have those discussions and to fight for a bigger share of the federal budget for the Victorian health system.

It is important to note that the Senate is yet to make a decision on this matter, so at this point it is an entirely hypothetical topic. Mr Finn discussed the composition of the Senate and the directions in which its members are likely to take us on this issue, but while we are discussing these matters I reiterate that this issue remains hypothetical.

It is worth reflecting on the fact that Victorian health services are in a healthy state. The Victorian coalition government has invested strongly in the health sector, and it has continued to grow health services budgets. Since being elected, this government has grown the health budget by 32.2 per cent, which is a significant amount. The growth in Victorian health services budgets from 2013–14 to 2014–15 is 5 per cent, which is not insignificant. This is in stark contrast to the funding cuts which applied under the federal Labor government, which have also been discussed at length today. The \$107 million cut to Victoria's health budget was announced at very short notice by then federal Minister for Health Tanya Plibersek and then Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard. The Victorian Labor Party and the Greens voted in favour of those cuts, which had a significant impact on the health budgets of Victoria at that time.

I will discuss the effect of those cuts on two hospitals in my electorate. The Bendigo Hospital had a \$9 million reduction in its budget as a result of those cuts. At Mildura Base Hospital the reduction was \$3 million. These are significant amounts. The state government

and Minister Davis in particular have always advocated strongly on behalf of Victorian hospital patients, unlike the Labor Party and the Greens. The federal Labor government cut funding to our hospitals, and the state opposition and Greens rolled over and agreed to the cuts.

The 2014–15 state budget delivered record health funding of \$15 billion, which is a significant amount. Concurrent with this, over \$4.5 billion worth of health infrastructure projects are underway in Victoria. I want to focus particularly on the strong investment in my own electorate of Northern Victoria Region. It is significant that Mr Drum, the Minister for Sport and Recreation, is with us in the house this afternoon. Northern Victoria Region is also Mr Drum's electorate, and he is very familiar with the investment that is occurring in northern Victoria. Hospitals that have been neglected over a long period of time are being rebuilt. It is of great importance and significance to these communities that these hospitals are being rebuilt. It is moving to visit these sites and see what their development means to these communities. This is an experience that Minister Drum and I have shared a number of times.

The most significant of these redevelopments is the one occurring at the Bendigo Hospital. This is the biggest redevelopment of a rural and regional hospital in Australia's history — a \$630 million investment. This project will generate more than 770 construction, industry and supply chain jobs, with at least 300 of these maintained for a minimum of three years during the peak construction period of the hospital. Visiting this site is truly amazing. There are currently four levels on which work is being undertaken. There are four cranes, and each of those cranes was named by one of the local children. Each time I have visited the site of the new Bendigo Hospital, families and in particular children have been standing at the gates watching the construction with great excitement. The new hospital will have 372 beds, 10 operating theatres, an integrated cancer centre, a mental health unit — which is very significant for the local community — and a helipad on top of the new multistorey car park. It will provide 75 mental health beds. There will be a 35-bed adult psychiatric unit, a 20-bed aged psychiatric unit, a 20-bed secure extended care unit and 5-bed mother and baby unit. This is very significant for Bendigo.

It does not end there. There are significant investments right across northern Victoria. In this year's budget I particularly welcome the announcement of the redevelopment of the Boort District Health facility, which is a \$40 million investment, meaning that Boort will get a new 32-bed hospital. Twenty-five of these

beds are for residential aged care, with seven acute and subacute beds. Again, I know that this is of great significance to the community in Boort.

I was recently at Castlemaine Health for the opening of a \$10 million project with Minister Davis. I know Minister Drum was with us on that occasion as well. The capital works included a second theatre and the refurbishment of the day-surgery area and urgent-care unit. Again, that is of much significance to that community.

Recently I was at Kyneton District Health Service for the turning of the sod with Premier Denis Naphine and Liberal candidate for Macedon, Donna Petrovich. Again, this was a very significant investment — \$7.4 million — for the development of an ambulatory care centre and for the delivery of general practice, community mental health and allied health services. I would very much like to congratulate the staff at the Kyneton District Health Service. A very good friend of mine who is currently being treated at the Kyneton District Health Service has reflected to me on visits how dedicated and wonderful the staff there have been. The health service has had some challenging times, but I know that the staff very much welcome the development of this new ambulatory care centre, which has just opened recently.

On 1 July I was at Echuca Regional Health with more than 400 local people who turned up to see the launch of stage 1 of the \$64.1 million redevelopment of the hospital. I pay tribute to local member Paul Weller, the member for Rodney in the Assembly, who was very significant in assisting this hospital. The community has waited over 100 years for this new hospital, and the Premier himself commented on this day that the old hospital was perhaps one of the worst examples he had seen right across Victoria. Paul Weller worked extremely hard to get funding for the redevelopment of this hospital. I pay tribute to the local community in Echuca, which raised the princely sum of \$2.6 million on top of the budgeted amount to ensure that the hospital would have the very best furnishings, fittings and artworks.

Close to my own heart is Kyabram & District Health Services. There is a \$3.5 million redevelopment of the wellbeing centre for the delivery of general practice and allied health services. Why is this hospital so important to me? Because my own beautiful husband, Rohan Millar, was born in it. For that reason this community is very special to me and my family. I know that this investment is very much welcomed and important to this local community.

At Swan Hill District Health there is \$80 million for a new 45-bed residential aged-care facility.

Hon. D. K. Drum — It can't be true. We can't be spending all this money, surely!

Mrs MILLAR — We are. In fact we are investing more strongly in regional and rural health services than any other government before us, Minister Drum. Again, prior to this the Swan Hill District Health residential aged-care facility was reflected upon as one of the most shameful, dilapidated residential aged-care facilities anywhere in Victoria, and this government, through the efforts of the Minister for Agriculture and Food Security. Peter Walsh, is delivering a new \$18 million residential aged-care facility. It is very much overdue for this community.

Expansion of the Mildura Base Hospital has commenced with a \$16.4 million investment into that hospital, which will allow for the expansion of the emergency department, the short-stay unit, the maternity ward and mental health services, as well as the development of accommodation units for trainees and visiting health professionals.

I know I have given the house a long list, and it is by no means the entirety of the works going on across northern Victoria, but I wish to touch briefly upon two more. One is the Seymour Health hospital. I had the pleasure of joining Nationals candidate for Euroa, Stephanie Ryan, at that facility. We were later joined by Cindy McLeish, the member for Seymour in the Assembly, for the turning of the sod on the new cancer and dialysis centre. Having oncology services and dialysis in particular located in local communities is very important for patients in rural and regional Victoria. I know that Stephanie was excited to join me on the day to ensure that this local community will be able to expand the services available to it locally.

At Kilmore & District Hospital I was again joined by Ms Ryan and also Georgie Crozier, who came for a viewing of the redevelopment works.

Ms Crozier — It is very encouraging.

Mrs MILLAR — It is very encouraging indeed, Ms Crozier. Again, the community is very proud of the work that is going on at this hospital. A former member of the board commented to me and Ms Ryan that he had left the board some years ago with no hope that this hospital redevelopment would ever occur. He was excited to see the works being completed — works that were overdue and needed for rural and regional Victoria. No other government has invested in health for its local, regional and rural communities in the way

that this government is doing. It is a record of which we can be truly proud, and it is worth putting on the record, as we have done today.

With a sense of pride I join with my colleagues in commending what is being achieved in health in Victoria at this time. We certainly are not opposing the motion, but it is a record that is worth reflecting on, as I have done today. We thank the government for its commitment to our constituents in our local communities.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I take this opportunity to thank all members for their contributions to the debate. It has been wide ranging, and members from all parties have expressed their views on a range of health-related topics. The question before us is very simply about the commonwealth government's intention to introduce a co-payment on Medicare. I am pleased that the government has accepted Labor's offer to take a bipartisan approach to this issue and that a number of government speakers indicated in their contributions that they will be supporting the motion. This is an opportunity for us to move forward as the Victorian Parliament and to send a very clear message to the Liberal and Nationals senators who represent Victoria in the commonwealth Parliament.

We believe the co-payment is not good for Victorian patients, it is not good for the wellbeing of the communities we represent nor is it good for the effective operation of Victorian health services. I thank members for their contributions to the debate. Along with all of my colleagues in this house I urge the Victorian representatives in the Senate to vigorously oppose the Medicare co-payment.

Motion agreed to.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr JENNINGS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house —

- (1) refutes Mr Bernie Finn's continual statements in this house that climate change (global warming) is a hoax;
- (2) notes that Mr Finn's statements are contrary to the objectives in the Climate Change Act 2010, which he and his fellow Liberal MLCs voted for, including recognition of the overwhelming scientific consensus that human activity is causing climate change and acknowledgement that climate change is a common concern of humankind and responding to it is a responsibility shared by all levels of government, industry, communities and people in Victoria;

- (3) further notes that Victoria is particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change; and
- (4) calls on the Napthine government and future Victorian governments to implement policies to mitigate the consequences of climate change for the sake of future generations.

I gave notice of this motion some time ago, on 25 March this year. I am not retreating from the motion at all in terms of its content and the importance of this chamber debating the issue of climate change or the obligations this generation has to try to take appropriate action to protect the environment now and into the future, and to create a sustainable Victoria in terms of environmental protection, the economic potential of this state and our contribution to the global warming challenge. I do not retreat from that for a second, and I am very happy for this motion to be seen as the crucible for that discussion.

I am not retreating from the content of the motion and the importance of this chamber debating the issue of climate change and the obligations that this generation has to take appropriate action to protect our environment now and into the future to create a sustainable Victoria in terms of environmental protection, the economic potential of this state and our contribution to the global warming challenge. I am very happy for this motion to be seen as the crucible for that discussion. However, I make it clear that whilst I totally disagree with the views of Mr Finn, I do not necessarily want to make this a personal attack on him. I could, but I choose not to.

In previous debates I have acknowledged that Mr Finn and I have very different views not only on climate change but also on abortion and euthanasia. On a whole variety of other bioethical and environmental issues, Mr Finn and I have fundamental disagreements. But I do support his right to hold and express those views. Increasingly those views will be understood to be novel. In my view they are minority views. Mr Finn will argue that he is representing a moral majority and a consensus. I would refute that. Nonetheless, it is a point of view that he is quite entitled to express. I do not want there to be confusion about my contribution, but Mr Finn can say anything he likes in relation to these matters. He can represent a constituency, a viewpoint and an ideology, and he has every right to do so.

My primary concern is about how persuasive he is within the government of which he is a part and how his arguments and those of the people who he has convinced within the government to take action in accordance with his views may in this context have a detrimental impact on the Victorian environment and

our contribution to the greenhouse gas challenge in terms of global climate change policies.

Mr Finn — Did you just say global warming?

Mr JENNINGS — Mr Finn may be able to draw attention to some graph that runs counter to the well-understood conventional wisdom within the scientific community that global warming is occurring; he may be desperately trying to convey this — —

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — Mr Finn can do his best to interject. I will not be responding to his interjections, and I will not bother to interject on him either. I am just indicating to him that he can do his best. He should mount his arguments and see how he goes in terms of his scientific credibility.

As recently as last night I expressed my concern in the chamber about a bill introduced by the government which reduces — in fact obliterates — a program that was designed to make a positive contribution to reduce the energy consumption of Victorian households. It is a moderately priced program that supports households across Victoria, and low-income households in particular, to implement energy efficiencies within their homes so that those citizens can reduce their energy consumption and price to their hip pockets and also make a contribution in reducing the demand for energy generation in Victoria. All of those impacts make a positive contribution to the amount of emissions that are occurring within our community.

They also play a positive role in relation to job creation. At the moment the scheme that is about to be obliterated by the actions of this government employs more than 2000 Victorian citizens who help to implement those energy efficiencies within Victorian households. From my vantage point I see that the actions of the Victorian government are consistent with the views of Mr Finn in relation to whether climate change should be a priority for government policy programs or not. In fact Mr Finn's views are very persuasive within the government; it is acting in accordance with Mr Finn's views. That is my concern, because it leads to adverse outcomes for Victoria — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr JENNINGS — Absolutely. This is not personalising Mr Finn; it is the collective responsibility of which he is a part that is my primary concern. Members should think about the disingenuous policy settings of the Liberal Party. At the 2010 election the Liberal Party said it would support the objectives and

implementation of the Victorian Climate Change Act 2010. That act committed Victoria to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 — —

Mr Barber — No, it didn't.

Mr JENNINGS — Mr Barber should not worry about my contribution; he should look after himself. In terms of my contribution, a program was outlined within that legislation. A series of programs were designed — —

Mr Barber — No, there wasn't.

Mr JENNINGS — Mr Barber may be desperate to pretend that his actions in 2010 to confuse the Victorian population about whether there was an intention to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Victoria did not have anything to do with his short-term political objectives, but there was no tangible support given by him or the other side in relation to the adaptation strategies embedded within that act. It played no role then and it plays no role now in driving down the reduction of greenhouse gases in Victoria. It transformed the Victorian economy and made a positive contribution to environmental protections.

There were many measures in terms of driving our capacity to adapt to a sustainable future. In fact other parties in this place played no positive role. A very disingenuous presentation was made during the 2010 election about the consequences of not returning the Labor government and preventing the implementation of the Climate Change Act 2010.

In 2010 the incoming government said it would support the intentions and the programs of the Climate Change Act. What has it done since? It has acted in accordance with the policy settings and positions of Mr Finn. The cabinet's decisions have obliterated the Climate Change Act in Victoria. It has deserted programs that were designed to assist the Victorian economy to try to make it more sustainable, culminating in a bill before the Parliament that is punctuated by this sitting day. We debated the obliteration of the energy initiative program — —

Mr Elsbury — There was no debate; you were just giving a speech. No-one else had a go.

Mr JENNINGS — I had just started my contribution to that debate. It will be concluded tomorrow, and then you will have an excellent opportunity to nail your colours to the mast. I would suggest that your colours would be very similar to Mr Finn's colours — brilliant yellow, which is the colour that Mr Finn wears.

Mr Finn — Only with some black.

Mr JENNINGS — Okay. It is a brilliant demonstration of the pride with which Mr Finn shows his colours. I have no doubt as to where Mr Finn hitches his colours and the way in which he pursues everything with vigour. Whether it be football or public policy settings, Mr Finn shows determination. In that regard I give him some credit. What I do not like is the disingenuous and mealy-mouthed approach by some of his fellow travellers in the government — —

Hon. D. K. Drum — Name them!

Mr JENNINGS — The Minister for Environment and Climate Change may be one of them. He may have been someone who pretended to the electorate that he was supporting the climate change agenda. He was the shadow at the time — —

Mr Finn — It was an agenda, was it?

Mr JENNINGS — It was an agenda that the Liberal Party — and The Nationals for that matter — had in 2010 when they wanted to be elected. So they locked in to a piece of legislation in 2010. They pretended to the Parliament and to the people that they supported that agenda.

They reduced their political exposure by saying, ‘No, we’re with the program addressing climate change. We’re supporting the program and this piece of legislation. We’re supporting the emissions reduction targets. We’re supporting the programs designed to reduce our energy consumption, drive down demand and make a positive contribution to our emissions profile’. In 2010 those opposite pretended that they were with the program, but Mr Finn never articulated that pretence — never! He always showed a degree of honesty, and in fact he was resisting. I am sure that within the rubric and the comfort of his party room he was insisting that his party not be disingenuous — that is, that it be honest and come clean to the Victorian public — but no, that was not the approach that pervaded his party at the time. The party was disingenuous then, and it is disingenuous now. Its members still pretend when it suits.

When we come back to the debate tomorrow about the abolition of the Victorian Energy Saver Incentive scheme, I will put on the public record that at the same time the government is introducing a bill to dismantle that program it is issuing a press statement extolling the virtues of it. As recently as June of this year, there was a great deal of confusion in the office of the Minister for Environment and Climate Change and in the press statements issued on his behalf. He could not work out

whether he supported the retention of this program or its abolition. He is extolling its virtues at the very same time that he is introducing a bill to dismantle it. How confused is that? How disingenuous is that? I suggest that it is extremely disingenuous.

This government had an obligation to be honest then, and it has an obligation to be honest now. It should not hide its convictions; it should be honest with the people of Victoria about what it really stands for. If the government is honest about what it really stands for, it may not be so electorally appealing because the people of Victoria will know once and for all where it really stands. In this instance, in practice, those opposite stand with Mr Finn. In practice that is exactly what is happening across the landscape of environmental policy in Victoria. Mr Finn is at the centre of the actions and policy settings of the government.

Whilst this resolution may put Mr Finn in the frame, it is a frame that fits around the political necks of his colleagues. Mr Finn probably understands that dynamic extremely well. There are some members, particularly in the other chamber, who are reminded each and every day of that frame around their necks and of their electoral viability. Because of the disingenuous positions that they adopt on a whole variety of issues — pretences they take to their constituency — we should throw a bit of light on them. We should throw a bit of light on the real centre of gravity in this government. Mr Finn is pretty close to being at the centre of gravity of the policy settings of this government. Whilst other people may say he is a rogue and maverick, I say he is pretty much at the heart of the action. In that regard — —

Mr Finn — Mainstream.

Mr JENNINGS — I think the stream has, in effect, been shifted so that Mr Finn is pretty much the centrepiece of the policy settings of the government.

In the last few weeks he has shared that mantle with a couple of other members of the government in the other place. They have drawn attention to that, and they have commented on the social policy settings of a number of Mr Finn’s colleagues in the other place. I will not go there, because that is not the nature of this resolution. This resolution is about climate change and environmental policy, and I am sticking to that. This dynamic, however, does get played out in other policy settings of the government. It is a great challenge for the government to reconcile those policy settings.

Earlier today we had a discussion about the challenges in health policy created under the malevolent and

detrimental policy settings of the federal Liberal-Nationals government and the impact they may have on the Victorian healthcare system. I believe there is probably great tension between the Victorian branches — or any state branches — of the Liberals and Nationals and the federal government in terms of the consequences for policies in health care or in other settings. It could be in education policy in relation to the implementation of the Gonski reforms, in dealing with disadvantage in education in Victorian now and into the future or in health care now and into the future.

There will be great tension between the state and federal Liberal and Nationals parties, just as there are policy divisions that may be evident in terms of the positions that are adopted not only in the environment space but in health, education and other areas. I would imagine it is quite fascinating every time Mr Finn and the federal Minister for the Environment, Mr Hunt, get together to discuss environmental policy. It is extremely ironic that Mr Hunt dances to Mr Finn's tune. That would not be the popular perception in most Liberal Party circles, but I understand who is actually calling the shots.

Every time I hear Mr Hunt speak I understand the net effect of his contribution. He is looking in with Mr Finn every single day. It may be causing embarrassment. It may cause some degree of confusion for Mr Hunt's traditional followers, but I am pretty clear on what Mr Hunt is saying, and I know the net effect of it. I know what a huge success Mr Finn has had in influencing Mr Hunt and the other cohort in the federal and state governments about environmental protection and policy.

Whilst this motion may look like a backhander to Mr Finn, it is really a monumental backhander to members of the Liberal Party, state and federal. It is a backhander to them because they do not take collective responsibility for better environmental policies or for commitment to sustainability in terms of our economy or in terms of supporting households in the real costs of energy consumption. This scheme is being dismantled by the Victorian government as we speak. It is in the Parliament, and it will be back tomorrow. We will be obliterating a program that has been designed to support Victorian households to do something about their energy consumption and their contribution to the challenge of climate change.

This government stands condemned for its actions. Let us not worry too much about whether or not we condemn Mr Finn; let us just worry about the actions of the government. Let us worry about the policy settings, the programs and the priorities of the government. Its

priorities and policy settings are wrong. Mr Finn has a right to express a view based on his view of science, his ideology and his perception or whatever prejudice he has. He has every right, but what is wrong in this regard are the actions and outcomes of the government, and that is why I have moved the motion today.

Mrs MILLAR (Northern Victoria) — I am pleased to rise to oppose the motion. It is a motion that covers a range of issues, some of which it must be said are of greater importance than others. The first part of the motion is about Mr Finn's statement in relation to global warming being a hoax, although Mr Finn has told me that his actual wording was, 'Global warming is a scam'. On this subject I have to speculate that Mr Finn has achieved what he no doubt set out to achieve, and that is to get under the skin of those who sit on the opposition benches. Having known Mr Finn for a very long time, probably longer than most people in this chamber, I can say with some certainty that I have no doubt that he would have been humoured to see the motion appear and would have taken great delight in knowing that he was causing such a stir among those who sit on the other side of the chamber. Far be it from me to say to Mr Jennings that he has played right into Mr Finn's hands.

I do not always agree with Mr Finn. In fact I would go so far as to say that there may be a significant number of things that Mr Finn and I would not agree on, although I must declare that we both support the same football team in the mighty Richmond Tigers, and we do so unwaveringly. However, there are other matters on which I very much doubt that Mr Finn and I would hold the same view. But the fact that I do not agree with Mr Finn does not lead to any need on my part to wish to single him out or silence him, as Mr Jennings seeks to do with his motion. Mr Finn is entitled to his views, and it is having this depth of debate and a range of views on different subjects which characterises our party from those across the aisle.

The Liberal Party is often described as a broad church, and I use the term quite deliberately. We are a party of individuals. We value the individual — individual freedom — and also freedom of speech. We believe in the inalienable rights and freedoms of all peoples. Further, we believe in the most basic freedoms of parliamentary democracy: the freedom of thought, worship, speech and association. It is no good to say that you believe in these things if you then cannot tolerate any variation of views. You need to not only tolerate but welcome and celebrate the diversity of thought.

This is in stark contrast to those on the other side of the chamber, whose philosophy is based on the role of the collective, on needing to standardise responses in accordance with trade unions or political faction orders. In this type of philosophy you do not go outside the box. There is discipline to enforce the norm; it operates by ensuring that everyone sticks to the factional line and by showing your vote to a factional colleague to ensure that you vote the right way. This is the kind of mindset that leads to this type of motion — that anyone who has a different view must be sanctioned or brought into line. In the Liberal Party there is room for individualism, there is room for freedom of thought and there is room for Mr Finn.

I may not believe every word Mr Finn says, but members had better believe that I will defend to the hilt his entitlement to hold those views, which I know he holds passionately. While he may ham it up for those on the other side, Mr Finn is very genuine in his beliefs. Mr Jennings referred to Mr Finn pursuing issues with vigour, and indeed he does. The misplaced attempt of Mr Jennings to censure and silence Mr Finn is disrespectful of Mr Finn's entitlement to express his views and to his freedom of speech.

When we come to climate change, and even leaving aside for a moment the views of Mr Finn, there are a wide range of views even within the scientific community on this subject, and we all know this to be true. The motion would have us believe that every person adheres to the fact that climate change exists and that it is causally linked to human activity. But even amongst scientists there is a wide body of literature and research of all shapes, sizes and qualities on whether climate change exists and, if so, what its causes may be. The history of science teaches us with great precision that we should never be afraid of this debate, and what this motion attempts to do is silence the debate.

The motion then moves on to more serious ground as it looks at the government's sustainability initiatives, which is a more significant topic. Years ago when I was an undergraduate I studied an economics subject on the allocation of scarce resources. This was many years before the words 'climate change' or even 'sustainability' were contemplated. The subject was about the principles of good economic management of scarce and precious resources, things which are finite in their population — for example, fish populations or the mining of a limited commodity such as oil or gold. Another term we could use for this is 'stewardship', which is based on the principle that well managing our scarce resources makes good sense from an economic perspective and also potentially for a range of other motives.

Sustainability under any name is and will always be important in the management of those resources and assets given to us in trust to be held as stewards for future generations. I have used this learning over and over, and I hope that I and my colleagues, who I know also apply these principles, will always be faithful stewards.

According to our party's platform of beliefs we believe in 'preserving Australia's natural beauty and the environment for future generations', and so we do. As my time in this place will show, we will never cease to act to be faithful stewards of our environment to preserve these precious places for future generations. Working with the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Ryan Smith, and the Minister for Planning, Matthew Guy, has been a great privilege in this respect. We have been working on some hugely significant initiatives with people of both passion and intelligence. The problem for those who only have passion is that you need to have both good thinking and firm beliefs.

I wish to touch on some of the climate change and sustainability initiatives that our government has implemented and will continue to implement. There is a significant body of work, and I will only touch on some of the initiatives. The Victorian government recognises that there are risks associated with a changing climate and a need to support national and global action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In 2012 the coalition government released a report on climate change science and greenhouse gas emissions in Victoria, which included a synthesis of scientific observations of changes to Victoria's climate and the impact of those changes. The report recognises that the Victorian weather and climate can change due to a wide range of factors, which may include natural and human factors.

The Climate Change Act 2010, which the motion refers to, was enacted under the Labor government at a time when there was no national framework for emissions reductions. In March 2012 the coalition government tabled its response to the independent review of the Climate Change Act. As a result of the findings of the independent review and guidance from the Select Council on Climate Change the government has been moving ahead with a clear and distinct role in implementing climate change policy, managing and adapting to climate risk and increasing the resilience of government and private assets against extreme weather events, such as bushfires, very significant floods and reduced snowfall, by supporting the Victorian economy to adjust to commonwealth emissions reduction efforts and reducing the cost of abatement activities by helping

Victorian businesses and households to become more resource efficient to manage their bills.

In March 2013 the coalition government released Victoria's first climate change adaptation plan, which is the most comprehensive plan in Australia. The plan details decisive action being taken by the coalition government to strengthen our management of climate change risk by protecting Victoria's critical infrastructure, including, significantly, our waterways, transport, energy, healthcare and emergency response systems. The coalition's plan provides important guidance on roles and responsibilities across all levels of government, business and communities to facilitate coordinated action on adaptation planning. The first plan establishes a strong foundation that will increase our resilience against heatwaves, floods, drought, sea level rises and other extreme events.

I recently attended a number of the public forums in Wangaratta and Bendigo on the flood plain management strategy. This is a massive achievement. Such planning has never been done before in Victoria. I acknowledge the work of the Interdepartmental Stakeholder Reference Group, its chair Sharyon Peart and the Department of Environment and Primary Industries staff who have contributed to this significant piece of work. At this point I also acknowledge the Minister for Water, Peter Walsh, and the role he has played in bringing this large piece of work together to the point where public consultation is now occurring.

The successful first year of the Victorian Climate Change Adaptation Plan has focused on developing partnerships, making climate risk management a part of everyday business and taking action to build our resilience as a state. For example, we have released two coastal hazard assessments, developed emergency management tools to help tourism businesses adapt to crisis events related to the natural environment, provided \$6 million in funding to conduct research on heatwave impacts on wheat and invested \$1.24 million to develop seed varieties suited to Australian conditions. These projects and initiatives, and others like them, have allowed for planning at a level not seen before.

I also note the separate initiatives under the commonwealth's direct action plan. We as a state will welcome opportunities to fund Victoria-based emissions reduction projects based on the Abbott government's establishment of a \$2.55 billion Emissions Reduction Fund to allocate money in response to project tenders designed to reduce carbon emissions. All money will be spent on Australian green projects, not foreign carbon credits, to keep more jobs

in Australia. We are avoiding Labor's wasteful duplication and scattergun approach that would have left Victorians worse off.

In conclusion, our government's record is a proud one, with much work occurring at the moment but with more work yet to be done. This type of work never ceases. We will be opposing this motion today. I urge other members to likewise oppose the motion, which is a misconceived attempt to silence the debate.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

GAMBLING REGULATION AND CASINO CONTROL AMENDMENT BILL 2014

Second reading

Debate resumed from 25 June; motion of Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan).

Mr ELSBURY (Western Metropolitan) — In relation to this bill, I understand its origins and intent but question whether it will be as effective as its proponent feels it will be. I say this as someone who actually gambles. I have a Powerball ticket in my pocket right now, and on Friday night I went to my local club and put some money through a machine. It is what people do quite a bit all over Victoria. They decide to wager, whether it be at a poker machine or through a lottery — —

Mr Barber — How much did you lose?

Mr ELSBURY — It was \$6 in the end. I limited my gambling. I took a fistful of dollars with me, and I fed them into the machine. By the time I had had enough of working on the machine, I had lost most of it, and then magically I got \$20 back. So I know the risks of the game — that is, that I will take the money I have and lose it. How I choose to lose that money is a form of entertainment, as it is for the majority of people who use poker machines or who gamble on horseracing, on the dogs or on any of the multitude of games that are available. Singling out poker machines as being the great evil once again brings questions to mind.

The idea is to change the \$5 maximum bet limit that was introduced in 2010 — it came down from \$10 to \$5 — to a \$1 maximum bet limit, the lowest bet limit in the country. That sends the message that we just do not trust people to make decisions about their own actions. We do not trust them to decide how they choose to gamble using an electronic gaming machine (EGM).

However, it leaves exposed the multitude of other ways people can gamble.

Mr Barber — So seatbelts and airbags are part of the nanny state, are they?

Mr ELSBURY — Seatbelts are not a nanny state measure, Mr Barber. I am so glad he decided to interject with such a frivolous piece of information. I cannot even think of how I will respond to that, so I will not. I will just stick to the actual premise of this bill, which is to lower maximum bets on poker machines — or EGMs, I should say — to \$1. We question whether or not there is any conclusive evidence at all that suggests this would actually assist in reducing problem gambling.

At the venue I went to on Friday night there were four \$1 machines sitting against the wall. There were only four \$1 machines in that venue; the rest were 1 cent, 2 cent, 5 cent or 10 cent machines. There is a multitude of combinations in which you can gamble your \$1 bets. You can go multiple lines, so you pick 10 lines on a 1 cent machine and set it up so that you will lose 10 cents per throw. You can increase the credits you are going to use and you lose that amount of money, but it is limited at the moment to \$5 across the board.

If I were to go up to the \$1 machine, it would only allow me to bet \$5 at a time. I did not do that, and nor did anyone else for the 2 hours I was in the gaming area at that venue. Over that 2 hours I gambled \$26 and I received \$20 back. All in all, that was my choice, and I was willing to lose that money. I am not a big gambler at all. We encourage people to set limits, and some people choose to be bigger gamblers.

There are other machines in Victoria that are exempt from the \$5 limit, and those machines are at the casino. The reason is that high rollers might decide they want to go to that casino and gamble on an EGM. I cannot think of anything worse, to be brutally honest. If I had the money to put on high-stakes bets, I would prefer to play a game I had some minor skill in — I would want to sit at a table. But some high rollers might decide they want to sit down at a poker machine, put their money into it and use the random number generator inside the machine to play a game of chance.

The bill before us today restricts the ability of high rollers at the casino to decide to participate in high-dollar bets. It would reduce the large amount of money that comes into the casino, which is an entertainment complex that provides thousands of jobs and requires suppliers to come into the city. If you stop the high rollers from spending their money there, they

will find another casino somewhere else to spend their money in. They will go somewhere like Wrest Point casino in Tasmania, or they will go up to Jupiters on the Gold Coast or to Lasseters in Alice Springs. In any case, this bill restricts the ability of the casino in Victoria to supply people who choose to be high rollers. I can only imagine how many jobs would be lost at the casino, as an entertainment complex. It is not just about gambling; there are other entertainments such as various shows and concerts, as well as nightclubs, restaurants and such. Reduced numbers of high rollers coming through the casino would impact on that venue and certainly on Melbourne and Victoria.

Of the 25 000 machines that Crown Casino has at its disposal, 1000 are set up for high rollers to use. The rest have the \$5 limit placed on them permanently. There are 1000 machines in high roller rooms around the casino for the use of various people who come from all over the world — people who come here to gamble, or people who come here to stay and choose to gamble.

The interesting point is that this bill impacts on the casino and, as has been highlighted in Ms Hartland's second-reading speech, an impact is also predicted for clubs and hotels. In her second-reading speech Ms Hartland claimed there would be a 10 per cent reduction in revenue for clubs and a 20 per cent reduction for hotels. This is based on numbers provided to a parliamentary inquiry by the Tasmanian Treasury in 2010. Can you tell me what RSL club is going to wear a 10 per cent reduction in revenues? What services will it have to cut? What groups will it have to stop funding? It is going to be felt across the board. This is not just going to reduce problem gambling; it is going to reduce choice for people who can afford to take those risks and who choose to lose that money — people like me, although probably people who are less frugal than I am.

So you have a 10 per cent reduction in revenues at RSLs, at footy clubs and at other community organisations, such as workers clubs, that have poker machines on the premises. That 10 per cent reduction would suggest to me a 10 per cent reduction in staffing, a 10 per cent reduction in the services those clubs provide or a 10 per cent decrease in the cheap food they are able to provide to numerous people in the community who do not have the financial wherewithal that you and I have and who go to such venues to have a roast on a Sunday or something like that. I know such clubs do that: the Williamstown RSL does it, the Hoppers Crossing club does it and numerous other venues right across the western suburbs also provide those sorts of cheap meals for pensioners — and an

outing they would not normally have. That does use the revenues generated through gambling.

Then there are the hotels. This was the main point made by Ms Hartland: she spoke about the multimillion-dollar revenues they are able to generate. They are her main target in all of this. We do have to recognise, however, the community organisations that would cop it in the neck as a result of the implementation of these changes to the legislation.

Considering Ms Hartland referred members to Tasmania in providing information about the predicted reduction in revenues for these clubs and pubs, I will turn to a report made in Queensland. An analysis of Queensland gambling in 2006–07 indicated that of all of the problem gamblers in the state of Queensland only 5 per cent made bets of more than \$1 a spin. I say again: 5 per cent of all problem gamblers in the state of Queensland made a bet of higher than \$1 per spin. That leaves 95 per cent of problem gamblers who would not receive any benefit from this proposed change to legislation; 95 per cent of problem gamblers would continue to have problems even if this legislation were passed. I suspect that even the 5 per cent of problem gamblers would still have issues with gambling in this context.

I would much prefer an approach that works — an approach that will actually assist people. Rather than playing nanny state I would much prefer to provide problem gamblers with real assistance. That is what the coalition government has done. Since coming to office we have established the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation with funding of \$150 million over four years, an increase of 41 per cent on the funding that was being provided by Labor. We are giving the foundation real resources to undertake the many measures it takes in assisting problem gamblers in the state of Victoria. In fact Victoria is leading the nation in precommitment technologies. Legislation will be coming through in the next few weeks to assist us with precommitment technologies, because the new regime of multiple agreements between multiple venues has brought a complexity we need to deal with.

We have reinvigorated the Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council, and we have enabled greater community consultation with that organisation. We have established the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation. Doing so recognised that where you have a gambling venue, in most cases you would think there would be liquor being sold. I cannot think of a venue that I have yet come across where there is just gaming, with no alcohol involved.

Joining the two areas together has increased the number of inspectors available to check on gambling in venues.

We have also removed ATMs from gambling venues across Victoria, and we have been able to restrict other methods that had been invented to allow a person to receive funds without human interaction. That is the key. Having human interaction between the gambler and a member of staff reduces the gambler's desire to get more money to gamble more. There is a stigma the gambler feels. There is a psychological barrier they have to breach to be able to get that additional cash. They have to face up to another person and say, 'I'll have another \$200' — or \$300 or \$400 — rather than just plugging the numbers into a machine and taking the cash it spits out. We have done that; we have got rid of the ATMs and the alternate methods of getting cash through machines that people were using, because we recognised the issues that come with having cash readily available without this psychological barrier in place.

We have also acted to stop gaming venues encouraging parents to gamble while their children are in the venue. Members may remember that a few venues decided they would build a play area for the kiddies, with a nice glass window separating the games room from the playgrounds — very considerate. It was also completely wrong, but this is the ingenuity we have had to work with in the sector. Certainly we acted when we saw this was a problem. We ensured that venues could not construct an area where the kiddies can play while the parents put their money through the machines.

The government has amended the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to prohibit lobbying activities in respect of winning gambling or wagering licences — another restriction to keep in check and in balance the gaming industry in Victoria. We have maintained the cap on gaming machines in Victoria. This means there are now 5.77 machines per 1000 adults in Victoria. This is the lowest density of gaming machines of any state except for Western Australia, which allows gaming machines only at its casino site.

With all those measures we are doing a lot more to assist problem gamblers than we would simply by restricting people's gaming options. When it comes down to it, if we restrict the way people gamble through electronic gaming machines, they will find another way. They will go out and use the many unregulated gaming sites that are on the internet, and I have come across those before. I keep well away from them. They are dangerous. They restrict our contact with problem gamblers and make it difficult for us to provide them

with the information they need to be able to do something about the issue they are facing.

It is my genuine opinion that this bill, while put forward with the best of intentions, will not achieve the goals it is intended to achieve. It will not assist problem gamblers. The problem will continue. The 90 per cent of problem gamblers who continue to use gaming machines at under \$1 per bet will continue to do so. They will continue to do that unless we have the strong measures that have been brought forward here in Victoria: the education, the advertising on TV and the advertising online.

If you visit YouTube, you will see a Gambling Help Online advertisement. You will also see one if you visit the ninemsn website. You will find links to Gambling Help Online on a multitude of different news sites. The technology available these days is phenomenal. You will also see Gambling Help Online advertisements on TV and hear them on radio. That is a much more important way of dealing with this problem, and it does not restrict the responsible gamblers, the people who do not have a problem, in having a flutter and at times losing all the money they have put aside for gambling. But we need to give every bit of support we can to those unfortunate souls who have a problem, and I think the measures this government has put in place will do a lot more to assist them.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I welcome the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Labor opposition on the Gambling Regulation and Casino Control Bill 2014, which was introduced into this place by Ms Hartland before the winter recess. I note Mr Elsbury's comments on behalf of the government. He attempted to paint a 'Nothing to see here; everything's rosy and fine' picture of the government's approach to problem gambling. With respect to Mr Elsbury, this bill is not about the \$20 Friday night gamblers. It is about the people the Productivity Commission's gambling inquiry report referred to — those who are losing up to \$840 an hour.

The bill does not seek to address how recreational gamblers tend to blow their dough, be it at the track, on a poker machine, at the casino or in any other form. It is important to note the increasing online opportunities for people to gamble. Indeed, like every other online endeavour, online gambling is increasing at a great rate and posing challenges for legislators, who need to respond quickly to a rapidly changing society.

Mr Elsbury suggested that a \$1 bet limit would restrict choice and that all gamblers have a choice and are able to enter a gaming venue with a set bet limit and a plan

about how much they can afford to lose. Of course everyone has a flutter with a plan about how much they would like to win. But this bill is really about seeking to address the lack of choice and the lack of control experienced by those whose gambling is out of control. Like the current government, the former Labor government sought to implement a number of measures to address problem gambling.

Problem gambling and debates around how to control and regulate electronic gaming machines often go hand in hand, because electronic gaming machines are the gambling method of choice for a greater proportion of problem gamblers. Of all the people who spend time on an electronic gaming machine over the course of any period of study that you care to contemplate, the people who are losing the most are the people who perhaps have the least to lose and whose addiction causes them to sit at the machines for very long periods and lose very large amounts of money.

I welcome the debate. I believe the Victorian Parliament has a duty and responsibility to address harmful behaviour and to do so in a way that is effective and goes to the point or the location of the problem.

This legislation is straightforward. It seeks to change the method by which bet limits are set for gaming machines. At the moment they are set by regulation, but Ms Hartland proposes that bet limits be determined by legislation. The second aspect of the bill is to set that limit, using the new power, at \$1 for gaming machines from 2020 for large approved venues and by 2022 for venues with fewer than 10 machines.

There are a great many venues in Victoria that have electronic gaming machines. Pubs and clubs have held licences to operate electronic gaming machines for a couple of years. They are 2 years into a 10-year licence, which is a result of the former Labor government's decision to move to a venue-based model. This is a significant transition from the Tattersall's and Tabcorp duopoly on the operation of electronic gaming machine licences that existed since the Kennett government signed Victorians up to these arrangements in 1995. Indeed, some recent decisions in the Supreme Court have brought into question some issues about the way electronic gaming machines operate, how licences are awarded and the consequences of those decisions. I will come back to those in a few moments.

The bill is reasonably straightforward in its execution. It is based on a number of pieces of research, most notably a Productivity Commission report from 2010. In her second-reading speech Ms Hartland notes a 2013

Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission report suggesting that the cost of problem gambling to Victorians is in the order of \$2.8 billion a year. I note a report published in the *Age* just last week stating that the latest figures show that last year a total of \$2.5 billion was lost on poker machines in Victoria. The report notes that this is a significant drop, pokie spending in 2012–13 being down 7.1 per cent from \$2.7 billion in the previous year. These are very large sums of money indeed. The analysis referred to in that media report by Craig Butt also found that around half of venues recorded a drop in losses on poker machines and half of venues recorded an increase — so it is not an across-the-board reduction; it is patchy at best.

The government indicated in June that it intended to review the duration of gaming machine entitlements. The 10-year licence period that was awarded operates from August 2012 to August 2022, so it does not expire for a while. Yet in mid-June the Victorian government declared to the world that it would review the duration of entitlements, that it would like everybody to give their considered opinions within two weeks and that it proposed to determine a new policy approach on this and implement it by the end of the year.

There is a great degree of uncertainty on this question that I think we need to resolve. The introduction of \$1 bet limits would no doubt have a significant impact on venues. Ms Hartland has already had her go in this debate as the mover of the bill, but I imagine she would say that that is precisely the point. There are questions around the exposure of the state to legal action by venue operators arising out of the introduction of \$1 bet limits that we would like to know the answers to and have a considered discussion about. We would also like to know the answer to the question of what the government's plan is on the extension of licences. Are we talking about a 25-year period? It certainly seems to us in the Labor Party that this mad-dash review and what could only be the rushed implementation of a policy in the lead-up to the election is really about bringing extended licences to book in a way that must be about propping up the budget before the election or banking the revenue against some project or other that we are still waiting to hear about from the government.

So there are still a couple of big questions we would like the answers to that go straight to the question of the impact of Ms Hartland's bill. I seek to move a referral to the Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee — a brief referral: it would not hold up the Parliament's consideration of this question for terribly long. We would like to know from Ms Hartland, as the proponent of the bill, what evaluation she has been able

to make of the risk to the state of legal action from venue operators. Accordingly, I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted with the view of inserting in their place 'this bill be referred to the Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee for inquiry, consideration and report by 2 September 2014, and —

- (1) in particular, the committee should give consideration to —
 - (a) the risk of legal liability to the state; and
 - (b) the impact of the government's approach to extending electronic gaming machine entitlements on the operation of the provisions in the bill; and
- (2) the bill not be read a second time until the committee has reported to the house.

We believe it is important to find the answers to these questions, to hear from the government about its intentions on the extension of machine entitlements and to hear from the mover of the bill what advice she is able to provide or has received on the question of legal liability. This is in the context of ongoing legal action in the Supreme Court between the Victorian government, Tatts and Tabcorp, which members who follow these issues closely will be familiar with.

We are very conscious of the need to address the causes and consequences of problem gambling and to do so in a meaningful way. We note the increased prevalence of gaming online and the decrease of losses on poker machines, but we also note that the losses to Victorians through poker machines are very significant indeed. We despair at the lack of support for those who suffer from gambling addiction and for those who seek assistance with addiction, who have been poorly served by the cuts to mental health funding that have occurred under this government. As I indicated, we are concerned about the unquantifiable risk to the state of legal action from existing licence-holders and concerned about the impact on venues and on jobs of ongoing uncertainty in the industry. We seek assurances on these issues through the committee inquiry if my reasoned amendment is successful, in particular on the question of legal liability and the government's panicked review into entitlements.

The government's approach to this portfolio in so many respects — for example, the tax slapped on during the course of the budget and the panicked review of entitlements — has combined to provide an environment that is not conducive to meaningful reform that addresses the risks of problem gambling, particularly problem gambling from poker machines. I would be grateful to receive the support of members of the government and the Greens for this referral motion

so that we can answer these two very important questions and proceed following that to further consideration of Ms Hartland's bill.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I will be quite brief because I believe I prosecuted the case for this bill when I made my contribution to the second-reading debate, but there are a few comments I would like to make. I was somewhat disappointed at Mr Elsbury's contribution because I do not believe he understood what was being attempted here. He did not go to the purpose of the bill. This is a bill about the 12 per cent of people who cannot control their pokies addiction. It is not about the 88 per cent of people who go to venues to have a good time with \$10 in their pocket and manage to spend only that money. I am talking about the people who do not have that control.

I point out that it was the Greens who negotiated the removal of ATMs from pokie venues in the previous Parliament. It was indeed the current government which implemented their removal, but it was the Greens who negotiated with the former minister in the previous Parliament to have ATMs removed from gambling venues. I would also like to point out that it is not only the Greens saying this; we are talking about the 2009 Productivity Commission report which makes it clearly evident why \$1 bets would work.

We will support referral of this bill to the Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee because the Greens clearly support the committee inquiry process. We think it is a good way of looking at any problems that any side of this house has with a bill to make sure that it is exactly as it should be. Therefore I think it is quite important that the referral motion be supported. I know the government has a history of not supporting referrals because it never wants to look at seriously at these matters. I hope the government will take a different position today and support the referral.

Hon. D. M. DAVIS (Minister for Health) (*By leave*) — The reasoned amendment seeks to refer this bill to the Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee for consideration. The government on this occasion will not support the reasoned amendment, but the government will oppose the bill. We see this as tinkering, and I do not believe that a great deal will be achieved by supporting the reasoned amendment on this occasion.

House divided on amendment:

Ayes, 17

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

Noes, 20

Atkinson, Mr	Kronberg, Mrs
Coote, Mrs	Lovell, Ms
Crozier, Ms	Millar, Mrs (<i>Teller</i>)
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	Ramsay, Mr
Guy, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Koch, Mr	Ronalds, Mr

Pairs

Peulich, Mrs

Viney, Mr

Amendment negated.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 3

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

Noes, 35

Atkinson, Mr	Melhem, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Coote, Mrs	Mikakos, 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
Eideh, Mr	Ondarchie, Mr
Elasmar, Mr	Peulich, Mrs
Elsbury, Mr	Pulford, Ms
Finn, Mr	Ramsay, Mr
Guy, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Jennings, Mr	Ronalds, Mr
Koch, Mr	Scheffer, Mr
Kronberg, Mrs	Somyurek, Mr
Leane, Mr	Tarlamis, Mr
Lenders, Mr	Tee, Mr
Lewis, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	Tierney, Ms
Lovell, Ms	

Motion negated.

REGIONAL RAIL SERVICES

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house calls on the government to commit to providing passenger rail services between Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong and the intermediate communities.

This government got elected promising to develop a lot of rail lines and passenger services. This government got elected promising a Doncaster rail line. This government got elected promising a Rowville rail line. Maybe it promised a study, but most people seem to think this government promised passenger services between Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong and the intermediate communities, as this motion suggests. As we know, the government did not deliver, and now at the forthcoming election it hopes to promise a different set of rail developments to a different group of voters and maybe suck those voters into voting it back into office.

However, people are getting smart. They are getting wise to this government, which is a do-nothing government. With 114 days to go, all it can do is make announcements about things that it reckons it might do or release more studies into things or maybe artist impressions of them, but everybody knows this government has not delivered, and nobody thinks it is going to change its spots.

There is no doubt that public transport was the biggest vote-changing issue in the last state election and may very well be in the coming one. The fact is that we were promised a banquet and given a tin of baked beans. Some people at least are still out there campaigning in their communities for the re-establishment of passenger rail services. On Tuesday I tabled a petition from a group of citizens calling on the government to provide passenger rail services between Melbourne and Mildura via the Yelta rail corridor. Of course that was a promise of the Labor Party — or at least a promise from the Labor Party to the former Independent member for Mildura, Russell Savage. We have no real idea because you would have to get both The Nationals and the Liberal Party into the same room at the same time and interrogate them on whether they do or do not support the return of passenger rail services from Mildura.

Recently a report by GHD was released that appears to go with this announcement of \$200 million for the upgrade and standardisation of the Mildura line. I say 'appears to' because there is no \$200 million; there is \$14 million for maintenance works along the line that are way overdue and there is an IOU for the rest. If I follow the story correctly, the government is now consulting us about what it might do along the Mildura line. When this government wants to implement a policy, it rams it through the Parliament in record time. When this government does not want to implement a policy, it starts consulting people, and it consults them to death. It will probably consult us on this one all the way through to 2018 if it is given the opportunity.

If you read the GHD report, you see that in fact the two ideas are linked; the connection of the Mildura line back to Melbourne for passenger and freight services and the proposal to reinstate passenger services between Geelong, Ballarat, Maryborough and Castlemaine and then on to Bendigo, if possible, are in fact intimately connected. The GHD report says nothing about passenger services except to suggest that they might get in the road of freight. It is pretty clear from that that the government has asked the wrong question.

There is some information in the GHD report that points us in the right direction: the so-called option 4, which is a bit more expensive than the other options but nevertheless creates greater opportunity in the future for rail freight and passenger rail movements right across central, north-west and western Victoria. That must be the future we are heading towards. I hope the government does not go for the el cheapo option of standardising part of the Mildura line and then cutting off the southern half and making a new connection, because if it does that, it might save itself some money now, but it will damage the prospects in the long term of having a healthy passenger and freight network of rail across the whole of western Victoria, which is a really exciting opportunity when you think about it.

From the figures I have seen we are expecting a significantly increased grain harvest this year, if hectares planted is anything to go by. We know from past experience that local roads, let alone state-owned roads, can get absolutely hammered during that grain harvest, and the damage can be done in very short order. This government has no plan to improve that. It has set up a grain freight and logistics task force, but it has only listened to those recommendations that are about more roads and bigger trucks moving faster through more neighbourhoods. It has found it impossible to grapple with the issues around rail, and that is why there has been nothing but a few small — but in some cases valuable — projects.

There has been no grand vision, and now, as the government approaches the election and desperately wants to position itself in the marginal seat of Ripon, where many of these rail lines I have just mentioned happen to intersect, suddenly there is the big splash, the duelling press conferences between the Premier and the Deputy Premier and the candidates out there running around and trying to shake every hand they can, but there is nothing more than a large dollar figure with no plan, no direction and no promise.

There is no barrier to instituting rail services between Maryborough, Ballarat and Geelong now. A few weeks

ago a bunch of citizens and I, as well as the Labor, Liberal and Nationals candidates for Ripon, took off from Maryborough station on a rented locomotive and travelled the entire route from Maryborough down to Geelong, demonstrating that it is possible to implement those services immediately, if a government had the will. The citizens self-funded this activity to create a very powerful symbol of the feasibility of getting these services back.

The intermediate stations of the communities along the way are not available for use at the moment, so further work is needed before those passenger services could be reinstated to benefit local communities, such as Meredith. But the government has produced a study which shows how it can be done. It is something in the way of a Rolls Royce model, but if —

Mr D. R. J. O'Brien — It's what we promised to do, so we've delivered our promise.

Mr BARBER — Here comes a member for Western Victoria Region, who is going to tell the citizens of western Victoria, 'No, we never promised you passenger services, we just promised you a study. Here is your study'. Maybe they could frame it and put it on their walls as a memorial to the brief time that Mr O'Brien spent in the upper house before returning to private practice.

The study points to a fairly Rolls Royce model, and it is probably a good thing that we looked at all the options there. If money is the impediment, I do not see why it should be, because for the price of an \$18 billion road tunnel from Footscray to Collingwood you could pretty much build a dream public transport system for Melbourne and regional Victoria and still have some money left over for schools and hospitals. But if money is the object, certainly there are cheaper ways to achieve the same outcome — to get passenger services reinstated and to start building community support for the extra options in that study. So far as Mildura passenger rail goes, no-one knows what the government's position on that might be. At least some of the options put forward in the GHD report would make it less likely that convenient passenger services would be reinstated.

I am going to sit down now and let The Nationals explain to the citizens of western Victoria — and particularly to people in the Assembly seat of Ripon, who are at the crossroads of the proposals mentioned in my motion and in the petition that I tabled yesterday — what their vision is and how long we will be waiting.

Mr ELSBURY (Western Metropolitan) — Mr Barber makes many assumptions in this place. The first in his contribution was that only The Nationals would get up to speak on this bill. We are a coalition that believes in providing services for all Victorians, whether we are Liberals or Nationals. I am glad that I am part of this coalition government, because it is delivering for the people of Victoria in spades. Through Western Metropolitan Region there are gleaming ribbons of rail currently going from Wyndham Vale in the west all the way through Footscray to Southern Cross station. That is the regional rail link, a very important piece of infrastructure.

Mr Lenders — Thank you, Mr Brumby.

Mr ELSBURY — Mr Lenders interrupts and says thanks to Mr Brumby. Thank you, Mr Brumby, for mismanaging that project; thank you very much for making it so that there were not going to be any signals on that project; thank you for not buying any rolling stock for that project; thank you for not providing any money for the Anderson Road level crossing removals; thank you for not providing any of the money to build any of the train stations on that rail line. I take up the interjection, although I did not mean to, because I was going to allow my Nationals colleagues to have a bit more of a say than what I will now unfortunately allow them.

In any case, we have a project that was in dire straits under Labor. It was ill thought out, and it took a Liberal-Nationals coalition government to repair that damage and get the project back on track — pardon the pun. We will be able to deliver this project not only on time, because it is looking very much like we will open it before 2016, as in the original time frame, but also under budget — so much so that we will be able to improve the St Albans level crossing with the savings. That is another rail project that will help to save lives at a deadly level crossing that those opposite chose to ignore for 11 years. That level crossing should have been removed after the 1999 election, as Labor promised. Instead it left St Albans bereft, neglected yet again by Labor, because Labor neglects the west — and that was our slogan at the last election. But the west is winning under the Liberal Party, because we will deliver at that level crossing.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr ELSBURY — There is no 'gonna' about it; the funds are allocated and work has already begun. We have already got the stabling occurring at Calder Park to allow for the main construction at St Albans to take place. But I digress.

There are those opposite who talk about rail projects. These are the guys who were going to provide us with fast rail to our regional centres. That project was supposed to cost somewhere in the region of \$80 million. They did not get it for \$80 million. We could always have a bidding war because they did not get it for \$100 million. They did not get it for \$400 million. They did not get it for \$800 million. They ended up hitting \$919 million for a project that was supposed to cost \$80 million, which created a marginally quicker rail network — if you catch the first train in the morning. It is ridiculous to waste that amount of money on a project, when it should have been delivered for \$80 million.

In any case we are not here to talk about those projects; we are talking about providing a rail service between Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo. Once again I will use the vernacular of those opposite: we do not oppose this motion. It is a good aspiration to have. In future years it is something we will genuinely need to put in place. We have three major regional cities that will need to be connected which do not have that capacity at the moment. That is why \$2 million has been spent on a feasibility study — to develop a plan for how this project would actually work and what we would need to do to bring it forward.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr ELSBURY — The interjections just keep coming. These people are whingeing about a train station that Henry Bolte did not build, yet they have had two periods of government since when they could have built it. They wasted 11 years. Cain and Kirner destroyed this state and left us at a point where people were saying, ‘What is the capital of Victoria? About 50 cents’. This ridiculous group of people over there just waffle absolute rubbish at us while we try to contribute to debate in this house.

What we have found through the feasibility study is that it would cost between \$760 million and \$935 million to be able to return passenger trains to this route. That is the estimate. We have not come out and said it will cost \$80 million, but the actual costing is closer to the actual amount it cost to provide marginally quicker rail between Geelong and Melbourne, Ballarat and Melbourne, Traralgon and Melbourne and Bendigo and Melbourne.

The former government not only did that, but it also committed an atrocity against the people of Bendigo by truncating the rail service out of Kyneton. From Kyneton to Bendigo there is a single track, reducing the capacity of that train line and its ability to have freight

rail come down it because there are now fast trains that have to use it. The former government reduced the capacity of the rail line and we ended up with the huge problem of needing to provide the people of Bendigo with the rail services they so richly deserve.

We have also found that developing the rail line between Geelong and Castlemaine would cost \$550 million to \$715 million. Do I have to say ‘myki’? I will just say ‘myki’ and leave it at that — —

Mr Leane interjected.

Mr ELSBURY — Honestly, ladies and gentlemen, this is absolute tripe. What is coming out of Mr Leane’s mouth right now is worse than an abattoir. In any case absolute tripe is coming across the chamber right now — without any protection, I might add, but I will continue to speak because I have the call, apparently.

The Victorian government is committed to improving rail services across the state. We have also reopened the lines between Dimboola and Rainbow, in partnership with Graincorp, and Toolamba, Kyabram and Echuca, in partnership with Sunrice, to allow for these lines to be used for the freight of grains out of those regions to improve our capacity. These are things we will have to consider into the future as we build the new port of Hastings — to be able to bring the produce that we develop to the port and get it out into the global market, to be able to service the economies of Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong and to be able to allow those town centres to thrive.

The new Epsom train station just north of Bendigo was given a new lease on life. We also have the Waurm Ponds train station, previously Grovedale, on the Warrnambool line just past Marshall, which will be very welcome. If I were still going to Deakin University at Waurm Ponds, that would be especially welcome, as would some assistance at the moment, Acting President — in any case it seems to be falling on deaf ears.

We have invested in maintaining Victoria’s country passenger and freight rail networks, undertaking \$138 million of works. We also announced in the 2014–15 budget that we will commit to the Mildura basin rail project, which will cost \$180 million to \$220 million. These are the commitments we have made; this is the work we have done. But as I said, we will not be opposing the motion. In any case I will allow the members for the area most affected an opportunity to speak to this motion.

Mr LENDERS (Southern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on this motion. I have just listened to an

extraordinary speech by Mr Elsbury. I will go through what he said. Leaving aside being so excited about freight trains running through Bentleigh, Prahran and a couple of other areas — and I am sure local Assembly members Ms Miller and Mr Newton-Brown will be delighted that Mr Elsbury is espousing all that coming from the port of Hastings, considering what it would do to their neighbourhoods — let us just go through a little bit of what he forgot.

Mr Elsbury started off by complaining that Labor did not do enough on rail in regional Victoria. He talked about financial management and said there was not enough done and too much spent. He seems to forget that he is from the party that closed the Mildura line. He is from the party that closed the Bairnsdale line. He is from the party that stopped the trains. You could virtually name any country town — and what would happen there? The coalition would close the train lines.

Mr Elsbury clearly has not heard of the Lonie report — the Victorian Transport Study — brought out by the Thompson Liberal government, which started the dismantling of regional rail —

Ms Crozier interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Ms Crozier says, ‘A very good government’. She has family reasons to believe it was a very good government; I am sure she was proud of that government. I think anybody with a history who remembers the Lonie report would know it was the first marking of the toenails of the state that came from a certain Jeffrey Gibb Kennett, who was a minister in that government. The Lonie report started the closing of rail lines.

Then we come to the next iteration of the Liberal-Nationals governments and we see the closing of the Bairnsdale line. It is good to see Mr O’Brien is in the chamber today representing that area. The Nationals were either asleep or enjoying the smell of leather in ministerial cars, because the closure of the train line to Bairnsdale was, to quote Mr Elsbury, ‘a transport atrocity’. It was not just Bairnsdale; the line to Mildura was also closed, as was the line to Ararat. We could go through town after town. We had the dismembering of services to Warrnambool and the partial privatisation of the network. Under the Liberal Party and The Nationals we have seen town after town and place after place where train lines have been closed.

I was born on 1 October 1958. If anyone wants to see what else happened on that day they would find reference to Henry Bolte in the papers after his big announcement the day before — on 30 September

1958 — saying they were going to build a railway station at Monash University. I am now 55 years old. That railway station has been promised by the Liberals and The Nationals seven times, including at the last election, with the scoping study for a railway line to Rowville, which was purported to be coming past Monash University. In my lifetime — and I invite any member opposite to challenge me on this — that railway station has been promised seven times.

Moving a motion here today calling on the government to honour the promise of building a railway station from Bendigo to Ballarat and to Geelong is about as relevant and reliable as Henry Bolte’s promise on 30 September 1958.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Auditor-General: Prisoner Transportation

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General’s 2014 report on prisoner transportation. The Auditor-General found five key areas of deficiency in the government’s handling of prisoner transportation. As usual, this government’s left hand does not know what its right hand is doing. There is inadequate communication between Corrections Victoria and Victoria Police and a lack of overarching and coordinated oversight of prisoner transportation across the justice system. In a system that handles the movement of at least 58 000 prisoners every year, this state of affairs is simply unacceptable.

The report notes that neither Corrections Victoria nor Victoria Police collects information about the total number and cost of prisoner movements across the justice system. Consequently they cannot assess whether current contractual arrangements minimise the cost and maximise the efficiency of prisoner transportation.

The Auditor-General identified five main areas of deficiency in the current administration of prisoner transportation: the lack of oversight in the system, the fact that the full cost of prisoner transportation is unknown, the manner in which the current system fails to drive greater efficiency, the fact that the manual scheduling of prisoner transportations is causing greater inefficiency, and the fact that the current prisoner transportation contractor has failed to separate prisoners 21 times since 2009, thereby jeopardising prisoner safety.

The contract between the Victorian government and the prisoner transportation contractor clearly establishes that there should be zero tolerance for failing to adequately separate prisoners. Failure to separate prisoners can lead to violence between prisoners and, at times, fatal outcomes. The response from Corrections Victoria has been to force the contractor to improve staff training. This has failed to prevent further incidents. Contract obligations have not been met, and the official response has clearly been inadequate.

Regarding the scheduling of prisoner movements, the report found that 50 per cent of scheduling is done manually, creating considerable inefficiencies for both Victoria Police and the contractor. The Auditor-General noted that the manual scheduling, particularly of ad hoc requests, delays the transportation process, increases the risk that routes are not scheduled in the most efficient manner and increases the risk that prisoners are not appropriately separated.

Broadly speaking the status quo of current arrangements do not drive efficiency. The report notes:

Prisoners are not always delivered when or where required. Between September and December 2013, 824 movements to court were cancelled because of inadequate police cell capacity. Around 26 per cent of prisoners were delivered late to court locations between October 2009 and September 2013 ...

It also notes:

Corrections Victoria paid \$822 000 in performance-linked payments over four years ...

but that the Auditor-General found:

... it is not clear how these incentives have enhanced performance.

The report seriously questions the effectiveness of performance-linked payments made to the contractor, stating that once the contractor reaches the threshold for each indicator there is no ongoing inducement to drive further efficiencies.

We call on the government to implement the Auditor-General's five recommendations in full. In addition we call on the government to introduce contractual obligations for contractors to utilise automatic scheduling as well as finalising and releasing the tender documents for the new prisoner transportation contract, which the government has now delayed multiple times.

Rural and Regional Committee: opportunities for people to use telecommuting and e-business to work remotely in rural and regional Victoria

Mrs MILLAR (Northern Victoria) — It gives me much pleasure to rise to make a statement in relation to the government's response to the inquiry into the opportunities for people to use telecommuting and e-business to work remotely in rural and regional Victoria. The inquiry report, which was tabled on 5 February 2014, contained a number of significant recommendations to assist our rural and regional communities to harness the huge potential of telecommuting or teleworking and developing e-business opportunities.

This was one of the themes of my inaugural speech last August. There is great potential at this time to make a difference by shifting quality jobs and income-producing opportunities and activities to rural and regional communities, ensuring that where a person lives no longer determines the work they do.

The government response notes:

These trends are challenging the traditional notion that employees need to be located in a designated office to undertake their work.

Teleworking can be either partial, in the sense of being able to undertake some of the work from a remote location, for example on one or two days per week, or it can involve working entirely remotely. It represents a shift in employer or client mindset to focus on the output or deliverables of the work rather than on supervising the work as it is being carried out. It is a matter of trust.

Telecommuting saves supervision time and office space rental. It gets traffic off roads and takes pressure off public transport, significantly lessening environmental, health and wellbeing impacts. Telecommuting allows for the crisis-proofing of organisations. It also allows workers to focus more fully in a space free from the distractions of an office environment — going out for coffee, chatting at the photocopier and talking about the football tipping — allowing people to focus more fully on the tasks at hand. Most significantly, telecommuting increases job satisfaction and self-determination.

Teleworking offers significant advantages for those who may face barriers in attending traditional workplaces, including those disadvantaged by distance — as people are in rural and regional communities — those with carer responsibilities and those with a disability. Teleworking allows the skills

and potential of such people to be fully utilised for their own benefit and for the economic benefit of the state.

Teleworking is a critically important issue to me. It is important to ensure that rural and regional communities are in a strong position to take advantage of these opportunities and to harness this great potential. To achieve this, however, some infrastructure investment is needed. The federal government's announcement of \$100 million to increase digital communications through the national broadband network with a focus on rural and regional communities was very welcome. The state coalition government, through the Minister for Technology, Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips, has also invested significantly in this, with a further \$40 million announced in the most recent state budget. I was very pleased to be able to make two submissions to the federal program while it was still open — one for the Blackwood community and one for Darraweit Guim. Both communities are experiencing great difficulty with telecommunications, and both communities face significant bushfire threat over the summer period. They have a great need for effective telecommunications.

The government's response to the inquiry supports the nine recommendations: two of them in full and seven in principle. Importantly, where the report supports the recommendations in principle, this is due to further work currently being undertaken. The recommendations include establishing a telecommuting policy with a view to increasing economic productivity across rural and regional Victoria; developing a government-wide telecommuting strategy for the public sector; encouraging all employers, including the private sector, to establish formal telecommuting policies; and undertaking a regional industry scan to determine current uptake of ICT and e-business solutions by non-metropolitan businesses.

While this is not the most highly publicised report to be handed down this week, I would go so far as to say that it may be the most significant for rural and regional Victoria, and it deserves much further consideration into the future.

Ambulance Victoria: report 2012–13

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise to make a statement on Ambulance Victoria's annual report for 2012–13. At the outset I acknowledge and congratulate three experienced paramedics — Jon Byrne from emergency management, Kerry Power, who is a mobile intensive care ambulance paramedic, and Tony Oxford, who is a group manager. They were awarded the Ambulance Service Medal in the 2013 Australia Day

honours list for making a lasting difference to the communities in which they work. All three come from very different backgrounds, and their contributions are highlighted in the report in a multitude of areas.

I also take the opportunity to thank the 850 volunteers in our auxiliaries. There are 74 auxiliaries across the state, dating back to 1918. They have always been there and they do an enormous amount of work in fundraising and connecting local communities with the service as well as local ambulance personnel.

Turning to operational matters raised in the report and issues I have concerns about, the report hints at the crisis in respect of the lack of funding in the area of ambulance services. Most alarmingly, on page 4 the report notes that more than 25 per cent of code 1 calls — that is, the most urgent category — do not receive a response within 15 minutes. In spite of this, Ambulance Victoria and its staff perform admirably, given the extraordinary lack of resources provided by the state government. There are numerous reports from major cities in western Victoria, such as Geelong, Ballarat and Warrnambool, as well as rural areas, of astonishingly poor service provision stemming from the underfunding of ambulance services by the Napthine government,

Ramping, a system whereby ambulances are forced to wait at emergency departments for patients to be admitted, is putting additional strain on the service, particularly in Geelong. According to the *Geelong Advertiser* of 18 March, at peak times there have been incidents where patients suffering suspected spinal injuries have had to wait up to 3 hours for an ambulance to arrive. The average wait for a code 1 response is 11.2 minutes, the highest of any state, with 10 per cent of patients having to wait up to 23 minutes. Data from Ambulance Victoria shows the ability for the service to respond to a call within 15 minutes has decreased from 82 per cent in 2007–08 to 74.8 per cent in 2011–12. That is documented in the *Australian* of 28 October 2012.

In terms of my electorate, the Warrnambool *Standard* of 6 November last year reported on an elderly Koroit woman who had suffered a fall and had to wait over 2 hours for an ambulance on a Friday afternoon. Cases requiring an ambulance in Barwon south-west have increased by 30 per cent since the 2009–10 period.

Ramping is a significant issue, with Geelong Hospital being the worst in the state. Ambulances waited 531 hours a month to transfer patients during the last financial year, up from 301 hours in 2010. The *Geelong Advertiser* of 25 June 2013 asks us to compare those

figures. Nine per cent of patients have to wait more than 40 minutes to be transferred into the emergency department. An ambulance from Geelong was forced to go to Ballarat as no other crews were available. That was also reported in the *Geelong Advertiser* of 21 June 2013.

All of this has been happening in conditions where the paramedics involved have created an epidemic of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder within the force, which creates a significant toll and has an impact on the state's finances in the form of additional WorkCover claims. There is so much work that needs to be done in this area. We need to repair the situation, and we need to provide a better service for all Victorians.

Department of Human Services: report 2012–13

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — I have a great deal of pleasure and pride in speaking on the Victorian Department of Human Services annual report 2012–13. There is much in the report that is to be welcomed. I have spoken at length on various other elements, but tonight I would like to speak about Services Connect, which is an initiative of the Minister for Community Services. I will paint a very simple picture before I go into some detail.

In the Department of Human Services (DHS) there are many people in a whole range of areas who need support. We have housing, community services, disability and a whole range of services in the area of child protection. What we found was that people in a family situation with drug and alcohol issues could have a number of case workers. It would not be unusual for there to be 8, 9 or even 10 caseworkers, each working individually with a person in the family group and each having their own relationship with that individual but not looking at the whole. It was really important to look at how efficient this system was, and it was not efficient. Most of all it was not helping the people at the centre of these situations, and so Services Connect was created.

As it says in the report, the Services Connect delivery model includes:

one assessment so that people only have to tell their story once ...

How many of us in this chamber have heard people saying that they had to tell their story to DHS so many times that they got sick to death of it? It is a bit like ringing Telstra; you just get halfway through to an operator and they cut you off, and you have to start all

over again. That was what was happening, and people were getting very frustrated with the services at DHS. The model includes one key worker who works with individuals and families most in need, one plan focused on building people's strengths and capabilities, and different levels of support to meet people's needs as they change over time.

In 2012–13 a key part of the Services Connect model, the new client support service, was tested at three sites — Dandenong, Geelong and the South-West Coast. In these areas the client support teams took this new approach to working with families and individuals who need moderate or high levels of support. The results are promising and indicate that both clients and practitioners are benefiting from the new approach. One example is of a family with a single parent, and in this instance the single parent was the father. There were four children, and there were 10 different caseworkers dealing with the family. Under the Services Connect model one person became responsible for the family and the benefits for this family were really tangible. The children are engaging with school and their community again. The father is happily back at work. There is so much support. It was a terrific win-win situation.

But these types of programs need funding, and it is important to note the funding that has gone into Services Connect so far. The Victorian government has committed \$9 million over two years to expand partnerships to the community sector. Approximately \$30 million has already been committed to develop the Services Connect model.

The major objectives of Services Connect are to change the way individuals and families are supported so that they can achieve lasting positive outcomes based on their personal goals and aspirations, and to improve productivity by reducing duplication and fragmentation across the human services system. As I said, it has to be backed up by funding. That \$30 million has gone a long way towards achieving these objectives, and it was pleasing to see the additional \$9 million committed.

The opportunities offered by Services Connect are varied and multiple. It improves access to systems and reduces duplication for families to get them the right coordinated response. For high-risk families, once safety is established key workers will coordinate around the family. The benefits for the children and the links between adult and child family services are really important. We are seeing a number of these issues.

Last month it was pleasing to read a media release from the Minister for Community Services, Mary

Wooldridge, calling for submissions from community sector organisations to form Services Connect partnerships that offer expertise across a range of services, such as child protection, family services, social housing, homelessness, family violence, mental health, alcohol and drug treatment, and disability services. I wish this program the best of luck.

Cancer Council Victoria: annual review 2013

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on an important organisation within our state, Cancer Council Victoria, which each and every year continues to produce vital research, increase its advocacy and prevention work, expand its support services and reach further heights with its fundraising. The council has once again produced a very detailed annual review for the 2013 year. I thank and congratulate the president, Professor Margaret Hamilton, and the chief executive officer, Todd Harper, for their hard work and dedication to this organisation; members of the board under the leadership of Professor Andrew Roberts; and Ms Maria Trinci, who leads the team on the finance, risk, audit and compliance committee. In addition, I thank all the council's staff and volunteers. It is their daily contributions and hard work that ensures that the council reaches its milestones and ultimately spreads its message and raises awareness of this frightening disease. I have said it on many occasions before: cancer affects us all. At some point it will touch our lives or our families or friends who suffer from this illness.

I would like to bring to the attention of members the family who appear on the cover of the annual review. Dr Jenni Jenkins and her brother Mark Dunstan have Lynch syndrome — hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer — and Jenni's daughter Lauren, who appears with the siblings on the cover photo, is also facing a future suffering from this disease if she carries the gene mutation. Mark was the first in the family to bring the hereditary condition to the family's attention when he was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 33. His mother also suffered from the condition; sadly, she passed in 2002. In 2006 Jenni underwent a double mastectomy after being diagnosed with breast cancer. Dr Jenkins bravely outlined that:

Carrying a genetic mutation has never defined my identity or health and I think the rest of my family feels the same. The ability to provide accurate genetic diagnosis is incredible for so many reasons. It's been a real privilege to have access to this information for so much of my adult life, and my daughters will also opt to have genetic testing done.

I wish the family all the very best and thank them for sharing their story on behalf of Cancer Council Victoria

to not only raise awareness but also highlight how important genetic testing is in ensuring an early diagnosis.

Cancer Council Victoria had many highlights during the previous year, including advocating for all playgrounds, swimming pools, skate parks and children's sporting events to be smoke free by 2014. In May Quit Victoria unveiled its emotive Last Dance campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of smoking. On the 21st anniversary of Australia's Biggest Morning Tea 7600 hosts across the state held a morning tea to raise \$2.8 million for Cancer Council Victoria. In August a Daffodil Day Garden of Hope was constructed to raise cancer awareness. In November leadership training was held for the first Aboriginal community cancer support group. The events I mentioned make up just a small fraction of the many highlights and milestones Cancer Council Victoria achieves every year, and last year was no different.

I commend all those who were part of the past productive year for Cancer Council Victoria. I am excited to see what highlights will be produced this year by all the organisation's hardworking staff and volunteers. I commend the review to the house.

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

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I will make some comments on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development annual report 2012–13. Looking through the report and reading the secretary's foreword I noted some comments in particular on the early childhood education area. I understand that the department brings together a range of services for Victorian children in their younger years and in their early adulthood — and higher education and skills encompasses a later age group than that — but I want to concentrate on the early childhood development area in this report.

It is pleasing to see some of the facts in the secretary's foreword, where it states:

74 per cent of rated Victorian early childhood services exceeded or met the national quality standard, compared with 56 per cent nationally.

To support the rollout of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, more than 1000 early childhood professionals attended Bastow Institute leadership programs and 4000 attended face-to-face development modules.

The report talks about a number of early childhood services. I was pleased that it notes various areas where

we have exceeded expectations but also where there is room for improvement. There are a couple of areas I wish to speak on.

In 2013 access to a kindergarten program in the year before school increased from 10 to 15 hours per week while maintaining Victoria's already high participation rate by national standards. There are more places for children with a disability or developmental delay. An additional 500 early childhood intervention service places were created to provide support for children with disabilities or developmental delay — a critical need for those children.

There are centres for Aboriginal children and families. I would like to comment on Bubup Wilam for Early Learning, which I had the pleasure of visiting some weeks ago, situated in the city of Whittlesea. It has signed on to the Healthy Together Victoria program and is doing tremendous work out there. It really is a great credit to all those involved. It has taken great leadership in providing significant services to the community. It was tremendous to visit and see what that community and that centre have been able to achieve. I see you nodding in agreement, Acting President, because that is your area and you are familiar with the services Bubup Wilam provides. It is a tremendous centre that provides early childhood education going into preschool, as well as other sporting and recreational facilities. It provides a terrific overall facility for children in that area of Melbourne.

I am pleased that since we have come to government, we have taken early childhood education very seriously. It is a critical time for a child to build the foundations of numeracy and literacy, and the minister has been very focused on improving services right across the board. We have put in over \$120 million for the children's facilities capital program, \$84.9 million for maternal child health and, as I have mentioned, more than \$42 million for 1150 new early childhood intervention service places since 2011.

In March of this year the government announced \$8.4 million over four years for the development of the Early Years Strategic Plan. It sets out the government's direction for the early years from 2014 to 2020 in line with its overall strategy to make Victoria a world leader in young children's learning and development. There are a number of allocations to ensure that we meet those targets. There is much to do, but the initiative so far and that additional funding provide great encouragement for all those involved. There was also \$1.2 million for the very important rural playgroup initiative for vulnerable families.

There are many other things I would like to comment on. I commend the department and the minister for the work they have done so far, and I hope to speak to this report again.

Auditor-General: *Recreational Maritime Safety*

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak to the Auditor-General's report *Recreational Maritime Safety* of June 2014. Victoria has approximately 1200 kilometres of ocean coastline and more than 3000 square kilometres of inland and enclosed waters. The maritime leisure industry generates around \$4.5 billion per year and employs over 7000 people in manufacturing, wholesaling and retailing.

Of the \$201 million collected for licensing and registration fees during 2012–13, total allocations to fund enforcement activities for the boating safety facilities program (BSFP) amounted to \$56.5 million. The only funding source for most waterway managers is through the annual \$5 million BSFP administered by the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure. The BSFP allocates small grants to eligible agencies, including waterway managers, mainly for the installation of boat ramps and jetties, for which approximately \$3.4 million was allocated in 2012–13. This leaves only a very small amount for improving navigational aids and boating safety signage, for which approximately \$425 000 was allocated in 2012–13.

Responsibility for maritime safety is divided between multiple government entities; after reading the report my thoughts are that this is most likely to be the root cause of the problems outlined in the report regarding non-effective communication and interaction between relevant agencies. Transport Safety Victoria, the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure, the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Parks Victoria, the Goulburn-Murray Rural Water Corporation, the Gippsland Ports Committee of Management, the Gannawarra Shire Council and Victoria Police all share aspects of marine safety.

It is clear from the report that inadequate funding is one of the core reasons for the failure of the director of transport safety to fully comply with the Marine Safety Act 2010. There appears to be no framework or measurement tool to indicate either inherent failures or the effectiveness of the current system of minimising safety risks. Inappropriate funding arrangements spell disaster. The safety system, if we can call it that, is in a

shambles, and according to the report this is mainly due to insufficient funding. The Auditor-General states:

... the safety director cannot demonstrate that he is effectively and efficiently regulating marine safety as he has no framework for assessing the impact of his regulatory approach, including performance of related parties in minimising safety risks.

Accidents are just waiting to happen, and the authority responsible has no idea when. This is a critical situation that must be remedied quickly and effectively before a needless tragedy occurs. People who enjoy boating or marine pastimes will not be so keen to pay hefty registration and licensing fees if they become aware that safety measures are not in place to protect them from preventable accidents.

The Auditor-General's report contains 14 recommendations all of which are worthy of support and implementation.

Auditor-General: *Managing Victoria's Native Forest Timber Resources*

Mr D. D. O'BRIEN (Eastern Victoria) — I rise to speak on a report of the Victorian Auditor-General of December last year, *Managing Victoria's Native Forest Timber Resources*. I do so with great pleasure, because this is an industry that I support very strongly and an industry that is critical for my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region. The report contains a number of interesting facts about the industry and about the way it is managed in Victoria.

One matter it deals with in particular is the area available for harvesting in Victoria. There are a couple of relevant facts here. One is that state forest represents 44 per cent of all public forest. In other words 56 per cent of Victorian forests are already in parks and reserves. VicForests has identified that of the 58 per cent of state forest available for harvesting, only about 815 000 hectares is suitable or potentially suitable for commercial harvest. Within this area only 3300 hectares was harvested in 2013 — and the proportion is about the same each year. That is less than 0.2 per cent of state forest and is 0.05 per cent of the public forest area. I raise these figures because it is important to recognise that the vast bulk of Victoria's forests are already protected.

What are we doing, though, with the rest of it? The Auditor-General looked at whether harvesting was being managed to protect forest values throughout our state. In terms of VicForests, the answer is yes — it has been doing so. The Auditor-General concluded that VicForests has been responsive in protecting forest

values and addressing and correcting problems as they arise. In terms of the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI), there is more work to do, but VicForests certainly gets a tick in that respect. Equally earlier in the report in chapter 3 in terms of the sustainable harvest level, which is an absolutely critical element of the management of our forests, the report highlights that the approach of VicForests to estimating the sustainable harvest level is accurate and reliable, but it can further improve aspects such as thinning and profitability estimates. Those are a couple of highlights in terms of how VicForests, as one of the managers of our forests in this state, is protecting our forest values while also ensuring we get value from sawlog industry activities.

I would like to make a number of other points about this report. One of the things that struck my eye was on page 36, where the report refers to monitoring and assessment of the forest reserve system. The Auditor-General said:

However, until 2010 —

I will say that again —

until 2010 DEPI did not adequately monitor the reserves system to determine how well it protected values.

In addition to that it is interesting to note that the report also highlights that some 150 000 hectares were added to the reserves system throughout the term of the previous government. I raise this because it highlights that the previous government, a Labor government, was very keen to lock up land and leave it. It had a policy of basically creating new national parks and new reserves to look good in the cities and win over Greens and Greens preferences, but it did not do the right thing in relation to monitoring our forests and reserves. Labor government members did not care whether they looked after the animals or vegetation in those forests. They just wanted to put a ring around them and say they had fixed the environment. That is a difference between those opposite and us, and it has been very disappointing.

Among other matters itemised in the report are a number of Labor failures. The report highlights that there was meant to be no net loss of resources or jobs under the Labor Party's proposals, but that that did not happen. The Auditor-General has made that quite clear. There are one or two other myths I would like to highlight. I have heard them before from some in this chamber. One is that VicForests and the forest industry are subsidised. I read from page 45 of the report of the Victorian Auditor-General:

VicForests does not receive any government subsidies.

It could not be any more explicit than that. It does not receive government subsidies. The report also highlights that legal expenses caused by a marked increase in litigation by environmental groups have contributed to pressure placed on VicForests performance.

The industry is a good industry. It is a great industry for my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region. I support it strongly, and I look forward to VicForests and DEPI managing it well into the future.

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

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I would like to make a statement on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development annual report of 2012–13. I note its reporting on spending on school capital works, and I note that since this government took over from the previous one spending on school capital works has halved. That is an indictment of this government. Capital works spending on schools needs to be kept up.

There needs to be a program similar to what existed under the previous government, where all schools were looked upon as needing some form of capital works upgrade, if not more in the case of school buildings which were decades old, which we have all come across. It seems a bit ridiculous that we have gone through this period in recent years when funding for this particular part of the education system has been reduced by a vast amount. But I think there may be a silver lining on the horizon.

In recent days the Labor Party has made a number of announcements about what it will do and its commitments regarding capital works in public schools if it is successful in forming a new Andrews Labor government. The Labor Party in opposition has made many commitments in this area, and I will highlight some of those. They include the upgrades to schools that have been involved in the Maroondah education regeneration plan for a number of years now. The schools involved include Ringwood Secondary College; Melba College, which was formed after an amalgamation of two schools in that area; Norwood Secondary College, which was amalgamated with Parkwood Secondary College in recent years; and the Croydon Community School.

The regeneration plan was worked through when the previous government was in power, and it included the fact that there would be amalgamations and a plan for

those schools to share their facilities in certain specialty areas so the schools could work together and students could move between schools to pick up different skills. It was a plan that the school community, the parents and the students were involved in developing, and the previous government committed to funding the new buildings that would facilitate this type of arrangement among those schools. With the change of government the schools were forced to merge anyway, so the plan was pushed through by default, but there has been no funding for the capital works at those schools.

I am pleased to say one of the election commitments from the Labor Party is to recommit to funding those schools to get the process rolling. Part of the commitment relating to the Norwood Secondary College is to build a performing arts centre and a stadium that could be used by local basketball teams on the weekends as well. Part of the plan is for that new stadium to be shared with the Mullum Primary School, which is obviously nearby. It would be the primary school's building as well, so it would be a shared facility between the high school and the primary school in that spot. This is a great plan. It should have been supported by this government, and it will be supported by a new Labor government if there is a change of government in November.

Rural and Regional Committee: opportunities for people to use telecommuting and e-business to work remotely in rural and regional Victoria

Mr D. R. J. O'BRIEN (Western Victoria) — I rise to make a contribution on the Victorian government's response to the inquiry into opportunities for people to use telecommuting and e-business to work remotely in rural and regional Victoria conducted by the Rural and Regional Committee. As the current chair of that committee I commend, firstly, the committee for its excellent work in conducting such an important inquiry and producing such an excellent report. Secondly, I commend the government for, with this response, agreeing to accept or support the recommendations of the report. Indeed in many instances, which I will touch on, it has already rolled out policies that support the committee's excellent recommendations.

It is important to recognise the great opportunities that telecommuting provides for rural and regional citizens and businesses. It is a great environmental frontier or electronic frontier that can enable cutting-edge technology and lifestyle choices, as well as supporting primary production, mining and other rural-based industries, including manufacturing, education and tourism services, at their core and at their source so that

these communities can grow and achieve the potential that they have long strived for.

In commencing my remarks I should just thank the committee members and staff who produced that excellent report. I will start with Mr Paul Weller, the former chair of the committee, who did an excellent job as chair. He is still a member of the committee and he is still assisting me in my role. I also thank Mr Geoff Howard, the deputy chair, who also ensured that this was a bipartisan report, which is important in these matters. Mr Damian Drum was on the committee, but he is no longer a member as he is now the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and the Minister for Sport and Recreation. I also thank Mr Ian Trezise and Mr Andrew Katos, as well as the staff: the executive officer, Ms Lilian Topic, Mr Patrick O'Brien, the research officer, and Ms Laura Ollington, the administrative officer, who are still the secretariat assisting that committee.

I will briefly touch on some of the recommendations that the government has accepted to demonstrate the importance of this work. Recommendation 8 is:

That the Victorian government lobby the federal government for better mobile connectivity and rollout of the national broadband network to regional Victoria as a priority, particularly regarding towns not currently included on the fixed-line rollout schedule.

If there is a policy at a state and federal level that better articulates the hopeless approach of the federal Labor-Greens alliance government and the prudent financial management and also infrastructure delivery of the Victorian coalition government, it is the rollout of the national broadband network. When we read the report of the inquiry into the national broadband network that was conducted by former Telstra director Bill Scales, which was handed down only this week, we see that it is in fact a huge Labor mess. Regrettably it is a Labor mess of billions and billions of dollars that could have been spent rolling out the sorts of wireless telecommunications that many western Victorian communities are calling for.

The Scales report has found that, as is typical for Labor, it failed — under Mr Conroy, who was more concerned about his factional manoeuvrings than policy rollouts — to investigate and advise on proper business case development. Where have we heard that before? Labor failed to have an independent study and a cost-benefit analysis. They are the failures of the previous government.

I also note and commend the work of the federal member for Wannon, Dan Tehan, who has been

advocating for and achieving significant wireless delivery into areas of the western Victorian electorate that we share. I also commend the Victorian government for its announcement of a \$40 million regional connectivity program, which will assist these communities to achieve their potential with wireless communications.

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

Ms LEWIS (Northern Victoria) — I would like to make a comment on the 2012–13 annual report of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. I had the opportunity of reading through this document, and I found a paragraph on page 44 that was particularly interesting to me. It states:

From 1 January 2013, the department consolidated nine regions into four: north-western Victoria, north-eastern Victoria, south-western Victoria and south-eastern Victoria. Each region has responsibility for improving learning and development outcomes, and providing more effective and efficient planning and delivery of services for early childhood (birth–8 years), school education (5–18 years) and post-compulsory education and training (15 years and over).

I found this report and commentary interesting not so much for what it says but for what it does not say. I have searched in vain for details of the better services that were provided. Since the amalgamation of the nine regions down to four, regional budgets and staffing have been cut. The budget for large regions is now similar to that of a small secondary school. That leaves the regions without the ability to support schools with a range of services. One such support that comes to mind is the emergency services funding, and I will give a couple of examples.

A small rural primary school with a gas emergency had to spend \$8000 to fix the issue. The total school budget for the year is \$300 000. A medium size secondary school experienced storm damage, including fallen trees. The cost to repair the damage was around \$9000. A few weeks later there was another storm, bringing more tree damage and another \$9000 in costs. There was no regional funding that these schools could apply for to get reimbursement for a significant percentage of those costs. The money simply came straight out of the school's pocket. In the case of the small primary school, the \$8000 spent on the gas leak was the equivalent of the school's annual literacy budget.

I could not see anything in this report regarding emergency support funding for schools. The notion of school facility support seems to have disappeared. It seems to have been reduced to advice on compliance.

Regions appear to no longer have occupational health and safety or asbestos experts to call on for advice.

The report provides some data on literacy and numeracy achievements by students. However, there is no mention of the loss of literacy and numeracy coaches. Schools now need to draw on their own internal resources. This is very difficult for a small school that may only have three or four staff. These staff may have limited knowledge, skills and resources to share. Support is strongly needed from the regions for proper professional development opportunities — not just punitive assessments of teachers.

Regional offices provide staff who go under the heading of 'Senior advisor regional policy and planning', or SARPP. When there were nine regions there were some 75 to 80 of those people. They have now been reduced to between 16 and 17 across four regions. Each one of those people is now trying to provide support and assistance to between 70 and 100 schools. Instead of advice, support and help with referrals, they are now basically confined to being compliance officers following the so-called failing schools — schools with reduced resources that are failing according to a narrow database.

Principals of small school have combined classroom and administration roles. Most estimate that they do the work of 1.5 full-time equivalent people. They arrive at school around 7.30 a.m., return home by 7.00 p.m. for dinner, and from about 8.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m. they are back on their laptops working, simply because they cannot get the resources and advice they need from the regional offices.

Also missing from the report was any reference to alternative settings and safe placements for vulnerable students. This support and assistance seems to have been lost, with no regional structure to provide the necessary help and advice to find places for these vulnerable students.

The autonomy agenda has been about reducing services and sucking the resources out of schools. This includes schools that are in our most disadvantaged areas and have our most disadvantaged students. The reforms appear not to have been about providing better services to regional Victoria. In fact regional schools have not received better services; they have experienced regional abandonment.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (ENVIRONMENTAL UPGRADE AGREEMENTS) BILL 2014

Introduction and first reading

Hon. D. K. DRUM (Minister for Sport and Recreation) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Local Government Act 1989 and the City of Melbourne Act 2001 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Disability services

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — My matter this evening is for the Minister for Disability Services and Reform. The matter I wish to raise relates to urgent support for Danielle Phelps, a mother of two young girls aged 15 and 12, both of whom have a severe form of the rare genetic disorder Joubert syndrome. I will provide the minister with a letter that outlines the full identifying details of this family to protect their privacy. I am advised that both girls are severely physically and intellectually disabled. Both use wheelchairs and require full-time assistance with personal care in all areas of daily living and mobility. I have also been advised that despite waiting for more than three years on the disability support register, applications for individual support packages for the girls were only approved a few months ago.

I understand this situation is having an enormous impact on Ms Phelps's physical and mental health. She recently sustained a back injury which has only been exacerbated by the physical exertion required to attend to the physical needs of her daughters. This has further limited her ability to sustain the full-time level of care for her daughters without further support. Ms Phelps has advised that with the financial support she receives from Care Connect soon coming to an end, without further assistance from the Department of Human Services she will no longer be able to provide the necessary care to both her daughters and is considering relinquishing them to the state. This is a heartbreaking decision that no parent should ever have to consider making.

The 2012 Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission report *Desperate Measures — The*

Relinquishment of Children with Disability into State Care in Victoria estimated that up to 50 children are relinquished into state care every year. We know that the relinquishment of children with disabilities is the unfortunate consequence of a lack of available respite care. We also know that in this year's budget the Napthine government failed to invest in facility-based respite services.

In response to reports in the *Age* of 22 July that children with disabilities were being relinquished at the Royal Children's Hospital, Minister Wooldridge said she had been advised that respite would have been made available to the family mentioned in that particular article had it only been requested. If the minister is saying that she would have stepped in and stopped a relinquishment from happening, I am alerting her to one right now.

Ms Phelps is struggling to receive the support necessary for her to continue caring for her daughters. I am calling on the minister to urgently investigate this matter with a view to ensuring that Ms Phelps and her daughters are properly supported before she is left to make the unbearable decision of relinquishing her children.

Graffiti

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — The matter I raise tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Crime Prevention, Mr O'Donohue. It is a matter that I know causes great frustration for my constituents in Oakleigh, and it concerns the problem of graffiti. Not only is graffiti unsightly and at times offensive, it is also illegal. There are a number of highly visible sites across Southern Metropolitan Region that are continually being targeted with this illegal activity that is conducted by, quite simply, vandals. One of those areas is on Koornang Road, Carnegie, in the parking area behind the shops, where specific concerns have been raised about the level of graffiti appearing.

The coalition government is serious about responding to community concerns about graffiti and stamping out graffiti at a local level, and I commend the minister and the government for the various initiatives available to communities to tackle this scourge. The government has a range of excellent initiatives available to help communities address localised graffiti concerns, including an annual \$300 000 graffiti grants program to deliver local graffiti prevention and removal solutions, which I know a number of communities in my electorate have already benefited from, and the direct removal of graffiti by supervised offenders on community orders under the community correctional services graffiti removal program. I also commend the

minister for the Dob in a Tagger campaign in conjunction with Crime Stoppers, which I understand is targeted at young people who may have information about graffiti offenders on our freeways and public transport.

The challenge of graffiti is ongoing, and these initiatives go a long way in helping communities tackle this blight on our local landscapes. It is my understanding also that the government has further initiatives available to help local communities to respond quickly to concerns about graffiti. Therefore, the action I seek from the minister is that he provide me with some information on one of these other anti-graffiti initiatives that may be available to assist the local Oakleigh community.

Ringwood railway station precinct

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Public Transport. It relates to concerns around the new plans for the Ringwood railway station and bus interchange.

I have been contacted by Mr Woody Marriott, who is a well-known champion for people with a disability in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. His concerns are around the fact that the new plans for the station and bus exchange do not involve a flyover or a footbridge for people to get from the station to Eastland shopping centre and vice versa. He believes that traffic will increase because of this project or may be a bit more congested than it currently is, and it is already congested. He is concerned that pedestrian traffic will have to cross Maroondah Highway to get to the station from the Eastland side of the road.

Mr Marriott also has a concern about platforms 1 and 2, as he says there is a gap at the western end of platform 1. He reports that he has himself stumbled between the train and the platform at that particular spot and says it is a concern for children and people using crutches or with other disabilities. He says there are ways in which that situation could be addressed and that if that were done, it would create more car parking spaces — and, as we all know, car parking spaces close to public transport are at a premium.

Mr Marriott, together with a number of other people, is concerned that disability access such as lifts will not be prioritised in this project, as happened at Mitcham. It is apparent that there are a number of issues involved, and the action I seek is for the minister to respond to Mr Marriott's concerns through me and if need be meet

with him so that he can explain the problems personally.

Anti-Semitism

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is directed to the Premier. The world is expressing its concern about the suffering of the people of Gaza, as Israel responds to the relentless missile bombardment it has had to endure from the terrorist group Hamas. We deplore the loss of life and the suffering in this conflict, especially when children are affected.

What is of increasing concern to me and to many here in Victoria, however, is the rise of anti-Semitism nowadays, seemingly because of what Israel has to do to protect its own people. In Europe, and in France in particular, Jew hatred and unbridled violence have escalated. People are chanting 'Death to the Jews'. Frighteningly, the attacks on Jews are largely ignored by Western media with the always paper-thin excuse that 'We are just being anti-Zionist, not anti-Jew'. That excuse has now been stripped away.

What we face as a result of Israel defending itself is blatant anti-Semitism in its many grotesque forms. The lesson for us here, as writer Melanie Phillips puts it, is that:

Anti-Jewish hatred is not just directed against Israel and the Jews of Europe. It is fuelling the Islamic war against the West. It is often said that the Jews are the 'canary in the mine' —

for the West itself.

Right now a host of commentators are studiously ignoring the terror that Israelis live under, day in and day out, with thousands of missiles having been launched into populated areas of Israel since 2005. For me, this position defies all rational explanation. One has to ask, 'Why the selective memory? Why the total lack of understanding for the plight of Israel, surrounded by many enemies who state that they want all Israelis pushed into the Mediterranean?'

We are now seeing the worst scenes of Jew hatred since the 1930s. Even our own media in Australia has sanctioned that hideous 1930s Nazi-style cartoon just this week. By speaking out in Australia, where we still can, we can ameliorate the intensity of the fear the Jewish community feels by providing comfort and understanding. I grant that Hamas has won the public relations war, which is its stated intention. The people of Gaza have been brutalised by Hamas. They have been used as human shields and have been murdered

when they have worked against Hamas's terrorism-fuelled interests.

In a stop press, the Hamas tunnel network, which now comprises 40 tunnels underneath the Gaza-Israeli border, was set to be activated during the Jewish New Year holiday on 24 September this year, in a mass terror attack to result in tens of thousands of casualties with explosives placed underneath kindergartens in Israel. The action I seek of the Premier is that he decry anti-Semitism in all of its guises.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! I understand that a similar adjournment matter was put forward by another member last night, which the President ruled in order. Given my capacity as Acting President, I am going to refer that adjournment matter to the President for his perusal.

Medicare co-payment

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is addressed to the Minister for Health, the Honourable David Davis. It relates to the motion which was moved by Ms Pulford and passed by the house today. The motion concerned the Medicare co-payment, and it called on Liberal Party and Nationals upper house members in Victoria to oppose the Medicare levy. Without repeating what the debate was about, because everyone in the house is familiar with it, the action I seek from the minister is that he write to Victorian senators of all parties, advise them of the motion which was passed unanimously by this house and seek their support for it.

Sunbury municipality

Mrs MILLAR (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Local Government, the Honourable Tim Bull, and concerns the Sunbury Out Of Hume process, which has occurred over many months, allowing the people of Sunbury, Bulla and other parts of the city of Hume to finally have a say on whether to create a new and separate shire based around the town of Sunbury, which is an issue that has been raised in this community for over two decades.

It was my great privilege to chair the Sunbury Out of Hume Community Consultative Committee earlier this year, with the report from that process being delivered to the minister and the members of the local government panel in early May. Again, I thank the hardworking and dedicated volunteers who served on that committee with great professionalism and reported on the views of community on the specified terms of

reference. Throughout this process I had the opportunity to meet with many of the nearly 500 people who attended the nine listening posts and public forums held not only in Sunbury but also across the city of Hume. I understood, as I never had as completely before, the depth of feeling those in Sunbury have for their historic and proud community, and it was indeed a privilege to be appointed to a role where I could reflect these community views.

A few weeks ago, at the start of July, it was reported that the three-person local government panel had provided its report to Minister Bull, who together with his department is appropriately considering this important and significant matter. From my time on the Sunbury Out of Hume Community Consultative Committee, I am aware of the enormity of the task given to the local government panel of chair Brian Haratsis, Maxine Cooper and Kelvin Spiller, but I am equally aware that these three appointees bring with them huge expertise and professional experience in local government and planning, which is needed to report on this very significant issue.

Together with the Liberal candidate for the Assembly seat of Sunbury, Jo Hagan, who attended a number of the public sessions and is strongly focused on this issue, I know that many in the Sunbury community are eagerly awaiting the minister's decision following due and proper consideration of the panel's report. This is a very big piece of work. I thank the minister and also the former Minister for Local Government, the Honourable Jeanette Powell, for all the substantial work which I know they have both put in on this. Tonight I am calling on Minister Bull to provide an update on this process, which is indeed hugely important to so many people in Sunbury, Bulla and the surrounding communities.

Glenelg and Southern Grampians Local Learning and Employment Network

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Education, Martin Dixon, and it relates to the cuts to the Glenelg and Southern Grampians Local Learning and Employment Network. I am sure the minister is well-versed on the depth and breadth of our youth unemployment crisis, with Victoria's youth unemployment skyrocketing to 17.5 per cent in the south-west. Victoria has the highest youth unemployment in mainland Australia. The devastating reality is that of the 257 000 unemployed young Australians, over 80 000 of them reside in Victoria. I have spoken ad nauseam about how we need to start combating these figures. I have also talked specifically

about the value and impact of Victoria's local learning and employment networks.

The people of Glenelg and Southern Grampians have benefited from the local learning and employment network program, otherwise known as LLEN. It was founded in 2002 under the Bracks Labor government, and the Glenelg and Southern Grampians Local Learning and Employment Network has done a lot of important work in broadening educational opportunities and employment pathways for young people.

Through the establishment of the School Business Community Partnership Brokers program, multiple organisational bodies have been working together to provide innovative responses to youth unemployment in the region, including education and training providers, businesses and industry groups, local councils, and parents and families.

For more than a decade now this program has had significant success in finding satisfying, long-term solutions to youth disengagement. It should also be noted that the partnership brokers program has made vast improvements in the working relationships between the different sectors of the local economy, providing improved service delivery and reduction of duplication. Being a rural community, it goes without saying that our youth do not have access to the multitude of opportunities that are offered here in Melbourne.

The continuation of the program has been clouded by doubt and uncertainty, and the federal government has thus far refused to commit funding for the program beyond December. This would be another hit to Victoria's young people from a Liberal government. The Abbott federal government's budget has made education more expensive and employment harder to find, and of course this state government has already taken a knife to the TAFE system. I seek the minister's assurance that the government will make a strong funding commitment to the partnership brokers program. If this does not happen, it will mean that this LLEN, along with many others in this state, will be shut down before December this year.

Mount Buller—Mount Stirling road

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning. It relates to his decision to approve a road linking Mount Buller to Mount Stirling. The minister gave planning approval for this in March. This decision was then appealed to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and was listed for a directions hearing when

the minister decided to call it in, so in essence he prevented a review of his decision to grant planning approval.

Of course this is of great concern because there will now be no opportunity for any independent oversight. There is a concern because there have been previous development proposals in what is an iconic part of Victoria around the alpine region. It is of concern that this land, which is of high conservation value, will be fragmented and destroyed. No economic case has been made. There is also a concern about the safety risk posed by this road.

As I said, the explanation that was given to the *Age* was simply that the road raised important policy issues, and that is why the minister decided to call it in. My concern is that you have this iconic part of Victoria — this important area. You have a road that is going to go through it that is very controversial, and yet there is no capacity for any public evaluation of these issues. It is all going to be done now in the minister's office under a shroud of secrecy. I ask the minister if he will make a full and public statement explaining why he will not allow any independent oversight of his conduct in this matter and why he will not allow any independent evaluation of the arguments against this road proposal. It is simply not good enough to say that it is an important policy matter. The public would expect a more public explanation and a more rigorous analysis in order to justify the conduct of the minister. I ask that he provide that explanation and do so urgently.

Responses

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (Minister for Housing) — Eight members made contributions to the adjournment debate tonight. Ms Mikakos raised a matter for the Minister for Disability Services and Reform regarding a family with disabled children, and I will pass that on to the minister.

Ms Crozier raised a matter for the Minister for Crime Prevention regarding graffiti removal initiatives and was seeking information for the Oakleigh community. I will pass that on to the minister.

Mr Leane raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport regarding plans for the Ringwood railway station and bus exchange, and I will pass that on to the minister.

Mrs Kronberg raised a matter for the Premier regarding the conflict in Gaza, and the Acting President said that he will refer that matter to the President.

Mr Melhem raised a matter for the Minister for Health regarding co-payments for medical services. I will pass that on to the minister.

Mrs Millar raised a matter for the Minister for Local Government regarding the Sunbury-Out-Of-Hume process, and I note the great job Mrs Millar did of chairing the community consultation for that process. She has asked the minister for an update on the process, and I will pass that on to Minister Bull.

Ms Tierney raised a matter for the Minister for Education regarding the Glenelg and Southern Grampians Local Learning and Employment Network, and I will pass that on to the minister.

Mr Tee raised a matter for the Minister for Planning regarding the road linking Mount Buller to Mount Stirling, and I will pass that on to the minister.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Ramsay) — Order! The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.47 p.m.

