

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 16 September 2015

(Extract from book 13)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AM

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC, QC

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Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water	The Hon. L. M. Neville, MP
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Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Regional Development	The Hon. J. L. Pulford, MLC
Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence	The Hon. F. Richardson, MP
Minister for Finance and Minister for Multicultural Affairs	The Hon. R. D. Scott, MP
Minister for Planning	The Hon. R. W. Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary	Ms M. Kairouz, MP

Legislative Council committees

Privileges Committee — Mr Drum, Ms Hartland, Mr Herbert, Ms Mikakos, Ms Pulford, Mr Purcell, Mr Rich-Phillips and Ms Wooldridge.

Procedure Committee — The President, Dr Carling-Jenkins, Mr Davis, Mr Jennings, Ms Pennicuik, Ms Pulford, Ms Tierney and Ms Wooldridge.

Legislative Council standing committees

Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure — Dr Carling-Jenkins, Mr Eideh, Mr Elasmarr, Mr Finn, Ms Hartland, Mr Morris, Mr Ondarchie and Ms Tierney.

Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning — Ms Bath, #Mr Bourman, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr Davis, Ms Dunn, #Ms Hartland, Mr Leane, #Mr Purcell, #Mr Ramsay, Ms Shing, Mr Somyurek and Mr Young.

Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues — Ms Fitzherbert, Mr Melhem, Mr Mulino, Mr O'Donohue, Ms Patten, Mrs Peulich, #Mr Rich-Phillips, Ms Springle and Ms Symes.

participating members

Legislative Council select committees

Port of Melbourne Select Committee — Mr Barber, Mr Drum, Mr Mulino, Mr Ondarchie, Mr Purcell, Mr Rich-Phillips, Ms Shing and Ms Tierney.

Joint committees

Accountability and Oversight Committee — (*Council*): Ms Bath, Mr Purcell and Ms Symes. (*Assembly*): Mr Angus, Mr Gidley, Mr Staikos and Ms Thomson.

Dispute Resolution Committee — (*Council*): Mr Bourman, Mr Dalidakis, Ms Dunn, Mr Jennings and Ms Wooldridge. (*Assembly*): Ms Allan, Mr Clark, Mr Merlino, Mr M. O'Brien, Mr Pakula, Ms Richardson and Mr Walsh

Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee — (*Council*): Mr Elasmarr and Mr Melhem. (*Assembly*): Mr Crisp, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Nardella and Ms Ryall.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Council*): Ms Patten and Mr Somyurek. (*Assembly*): Ms Asher, Ms Blandthorn, Mr Dixon, Mr Northe and Ms Spence.

Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee — (*Council*): Mr Ramsay and Mr Young. (*Assembly*): Ms Halfpenny, Mr McCurdy, Mr Richardson, Mr Tilley and Ms Ward.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Council*): Mr Finn. (*Assembly*): Ms Couzens, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Edwards, Ms Kealy, Ms McLeish and Ms Sheed.

House Committee — (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), Mr Eideh, Ms Hartland, Ms Lovell, Mr Mulino and Mr Young. (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr J. Bull, Mr Crisp, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Staikos, Ms Suleyman and Mr Thompson.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Committee — (*Council*): Mr Ramsay and Ms Symes. (*Assembly*): Mr Hibbins, Mr D. O'Brien, Mr Richardson, Ms Thomson and Mr Wells.

Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee — (*Council*): Mr Eideh and Ms Patten. (*Assembly*): Mr Dixon, Mr Howard, Ms Suleyman, Mr Thompson and Mr Tilley.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Council*): Dr Carling-Jenkins, Ms Pennicuik and Ms Shing. (*Assembly*): Mr Dimopoulos, Mr Morris, Mr D. O'Brien, Mr Pearson, Mr T. Smith and Ms Ward.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Council*): Mr Dalla-Riva. (*Assembly*): Mr J. Bull, Ms Blandthorn, Mr Dimopoulos, Ms Kealy, Ms Kilkenny and Mr Pesutto.

Heads of parliamentary departments

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

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

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

**MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION**

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Deputy President: Ms G. TIERNEY

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Deputy Leader of the Opposition:
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The Hon. D. K. DRUM

Leader of the Greens:
Mr G. BARBER

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Atkinson, Mr Bruce Norman	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Barber, Mr Gregory John	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Morris, Mr Joshua	Western Victoria	LP
Bath, Ms Melina ²	Eastern Victoria	Nats	Mulino, Mr Daniel	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Bourman, Mr Jeffrey	Eastern Victoria	SFP	O'Brien, Mr Daniel David ¹	Eastern Victoria	Nats
Carling-Jenkins, Dr Rachel	Western Metropolitan	DLP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John	Eastern Victoria	LP
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Ondarchie, Mr Craig Philip	Northern Metropolitan	LP
Dalidakis, Mr Philip	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Patten, Ms Fiona	Northern Metropolitan	ASP
Dalla-Riva, Mr Richard Alex Gordon	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Pennicuik, Ms Susan Margaret	Southern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, Mr David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Peulich, Mrs Inga	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Drum, Mr Damian Kevin	Northern Victoria	Nats	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
Dunn, Ms Samantha	Eastern Metropolitan	Greens	Purcell, Mr James	Western Victoria	V1LJ
Eideh, Mr Khalil M.	Western Metropolitan	ALP	Ramsay, Mr Simon	Western Victoria	LP
Elasmr, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Rich-Phillips, Mr Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas C.	Western Metropolitan	LP	Shing, Ms Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Fitzherbert, Ms Margaret	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Somyurek, Mr Adem	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hartland, Ms Colleen Mildred	Western Metropolitan	Greens	Springle, Ms Nina	South Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Herbert, Mr Steven Ralph	Northern Victoria	ALP	Symes, Ms Jaelyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling	Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Lovell, Ms Wendy Ann	Northern Victoria	LP	Young, Mr Daniel	Northern Victoria	SFP
Melhem, Mr Cesar	Western Metropolitan	ALP			

¹ Resigned 25 February 2015

² Appointed 15 April 2015

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP — Labor Party; ASP — Australian Sex Party;
DLP — Democratic Labour Party; Greens — Australian Greens;
LP — Liberal Party; Nats — The Nationals;
SFP — Shooters and Fishers Party; V1LJ — Vote 1 Local Jobs

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Wednesday, 16 September 2015

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Ms Tierney) took the chair at 9.34 a.m. and read the prayer.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Auditor-General's Reports on —

Realising the Benefits of Smart Meters, September 2015
(*Ordered to be published*).

Regional Growth Fund: Outcomes and Learnings,
September 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

Planning and Environment Act 1987 — Notices of Approval
of the following amendments to planning schemes —

Boroondara Planning Scheme — Amendment C220.

Casey Planning Scheme — Amendment C202.

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme —
Amendment C261.

Knox Planning Scheme — Amendment C120.

Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme —
Amendment C84.

Moonee Valley Planning Scheme — Amendment C144.

Moreland Planning Scheme — Amendment C133.

Surf Coast Planning Scheme — Amendment C100.

Warrnambool Planning Scheme — Amendment C97.

Whitehorse Planning Scheme — Amendment C170.

Yarra Planning Scheme — Amendment C181.

Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme — Amendment C147.

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

The Clerk — I have received the following letter dated 15 September from the Attorney-General headed 'Production of documents — F1 grand prix'.

I refer to the Legislative Council's resolution of 25 February 2015 seeking the production of:

the contract, in full, signed by the Napthine government to host the F1 grand prix in Melbourne from 2016 to 2020.

I also refer to my letters to you dated 16 March and 20 August 2015, advising that the government required additional time to respond to the resolution.

There is no contract signed by the Napthine government to host the grand prix in Melbourne from 2016 to 2020. However, I note that the Australian Grand Prix Corporation (corporation) has signed a suite of agreements with members

of the Formula One group of companies (Formula One Group) to host the Formula One Grand Prix in Melbourne from 2016 to 2020 (agreements).

I refer to my letter to you of 14 April 2015, noting the limits on the Council's power to call for documents. Those limits centre on the protection of the public interest. In that letter I set out factors which the government would consider in assessing whether the release of documents would be prejudicial to the public interest.

The government has determined that the release of the agreements would not be in the public interest because they contain commercially sensitive information the disclosure of which would materially damage the state's financial or commercial interests. In particular, I note that:

disclosure of the agreements could cause significant harm to the corporation's relationship with the Formula One Group, risking one of the key pillars of Victoria's major events calendar and the state's capacity to attract and retain other major events; and

in 2014, major events generated around \$1.8 billion to Victoria's economy and provided 2617 full-time equivalent jobs.

Accordingly, the executive government, on behalf of the Crown, makes a claim of executive privilege in relation to any order properly made to produce the agreements to Parliament.

Ordered that letter be considered next day on motion of Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan).

MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Japan and China trade missions

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I rise to update the house on the outcomes of my visit last week to Japan and China. A week of trade engagement with our two largest food and fibre export markets focused on growing investment, strengthening trade and reinforcing Victoria's reputation as a premium supplier.

Three days in Japan — Victoria's second largest export market, worth more than \$760 million — saw meetings with Japan's largest supermarket chain, Aeon, and the promotion of Victorian lamb and meat with a number of investors, including Mitsubishi, which has recently invested through Kaiteki Fresh in Victoria's rapidly growing hydroponic sector.

I then spent four days in China, meeting with importers, retailers and Chinese government officials to strengthen important trade relationships in the world's fastest growing market. China is Victoria's largest food and fibre export market, accounting for \$2.7 billion of exports in 2013–14, including \$369 million of dairy,

\$361 million of meat, \$289 million of grains and \$233 million of forest products. Our food and fibre exports to China more than doubled over the last decade, with further opportunities expected as demand from China's growing middle class continues to grow and opportunities from the China-Australia free trade agreement are realised.

I had the great honour of representing our nation to open the Australian pavilion at the China Fruit and Vegetable Fair in Beijing and to launch Wine the Australian Way, a digital campaign that will reach 15 million people and broadcast beautiful images of regional Victoria.

I visited to the Victorian government-sponsored Now! In Season promotion of Australian citrus at China's leading health food store, MingKangHui, and among others, seized on opportunities from a recent visit to Victoria by leading Chinese e-commerce companies.

The Andrews government is taking the initiative, putting Victoria out there and attracting more investment to grow jobs.

Early childhood services

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I rise to update the house on the education state early childhood consultations, which are underway across Victoria. Last week more than 150 people — parents, early childhood service providers, and community members — participated in regional sessions in Geelong, Frankston and Bendigo. The website has been viewed over 4000 times, and the online discussion forum is already generating interesting debate about the priorities for the future of Victoria's early childhood system.

I also convened the first meeting of my Education State Early Childhood Expert Reference Group, which brings together Australian and international academic experts in the fields of early childhood education, health, wellbeing and development.

It is clear that Victorians are passionate about the future of early childhood in Victoria. Discussions are occurring across the state about how to embed learning even more strongly in the first few years of life, as well as ensuring that our early childhood services are genuinely welcoming and inclusive of all families.

On Friday, consultations will be occurring in Broadmeadows, and we already have close to 90 people registered across the afternoon and evening sessions. In early October forums will be occurring in Gippsland and Benalla. In addition, small group sessions will be

held for parents who are involved in playgroups, maternal and child health nurses, playgroup leaders for culturally and linguistically diverse families and other members of the community. I encourage those people in the community who have an interest in this initiative to register for the upcoming sessions and to contribute to the debate about the future of early childhood services in Victoria. More information about these consultations and the opportunity to participate in the development of these policy ideas is available on the Education State website.

Latin America education mission

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I am pleased to update the house on further progress in our relationship with Latin America in international education as part of the government strategy to grow the overall international education sector, currently worth some \$5.3 billion to the Victorian economy. We know that developing and strengthening long-term relationships with overseas target markets is vital to growing Victoria's international education industry. This is particularly the case with existing markets in China and India but also with new and emerging markets such as Latin America. It is an ongoing process, and the parties on both sides of this house are in it for the long haul.

So it is a great pleasure to report that 25 research fellows from Latin America are currently in Victoria in the middle of a productive and busy schedule of engagement with Victorian universities, with research institutes and of course with government. The Australia Awards Fellowships program is one of the major inbound education and trade missions that follow on from the education mission that I led to Latin America in April this year.

Through this program, jointly funded by the Andrews government and the commonwealth government, we are hosting visiting fellows from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. Partnerships are being developed, education and research collaborations are being explored and signed, and friendships are being formed. While the visiting fellows have a packed program, it is not all work and no play. I can report that 22 fellows also had the chance to experience an AFL final when they attended the Western Bulldogs-Adelaide Crows elimination final last Saturday. I am told it was a great event. For people who come from a country that is absolutely mad about soccer, watching Australian Rules was a treat.

This is an important delegation and inbound mission. Long-term engagement with markets like Latin

America is one of the major themes that have come from recent consultation around the *Victoria's Future Industries — International Education* discussion paper, which was conducted by the Minister for Industry, Lily D'Ambrosio, and me. A range of insights were generated through that process to guide us as to where we should go with our strategy.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! The minister's time has expired.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Federal government leadership

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — Today I want to make a short statement to draw attention to the change in our Prime Minister. Firstly, I want to begin by paying tribute to Tony Abbott. He is a person of integrity and decency. He is someone I know quite well and have dealt with over a long period both when he was Leader of the Opposition and later when he was Prime Minister and I was the Minister for Health. Through that period I found he was always focused on the interests of Australia and Victoria. I pay tribute to that integrity and decency.

It is important to note the free trade agreements that were signed under Tony Abbott's period as Prime Minister and to note the budget repair that his government sought to achieve — and it did achieve a significant measure of it, but that is not to say that there is not more work to do in that area.

Equally I want to welcome Malcolm Turnbull and say I have great faith in his capacity. He is a man of achievement. He is an erudite person and a great communicator. Again, I know Malcolm Turnbull and have a high regard for his capacity. I want to say that I believe he will put Australia in a stronger position. I believe he will understand the significance of Victoria, and I understand that he will be focused on delivering for all Australians — not the sectional interests that Labor focuses on.

Knox Historical Society

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — I had the great pleasure of attending the Knox Historical Society's 50th anniversary celebration in Wantirna. The society was established in 1965 to ensure that the history of the Knox region was collected, stored and treasured. The geographic area covered by the society includes the former Scoresby riding of the Shire of Berwick until 1889, the Shire of Ferntree Gully until 1963, the Shire of Knox until 1969 and subsequently the modern-day

City of Knox. The society's mission is to preserve, conserve and promote history. At a public meeting held in the Bayswater public hall on 14 May 1965 it was decided to form a Shire of Knox historical society. The inaugural meeting of the historical society was held on 21 June 1965. It was a tremendous celebration.

With that, I would acknowledge the society's president, Graham Hansen. Mr Hansen has been the one constant at the society, serving it for 50 years in a number of roles, including as editor of the *Knox Historian* publication, secretary, vice-president and president, as well as attending every annual general meeting.

In honour of his contribution Mr Hansen was presented with the Local Hero award by the Knox City Council, which is very diligent in its support of the society. I can only hope that under a rate-capping scenario we do not see valuable council support withdrawn from such an important community organisation, a custodian of the history of the region.

Men's sheds

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — The Andrews Labor government is a proud supporter of men's sheds, and many areas have benefited from Victorian government support for the building and refurbishing of men's sheds since Labor provided the first state government funding for them in 2006. Local men's sheds provide safe, friendly and inclusive places where men can work together on projects of interest and be connected to their community.

On 7 September 2015 I had the pleasure of officially opening the Melbourne Men's Shed, which is located at Federation Square. There I announced funding from a \$750 000 funding round to support the construction of new men's sheds in 15 high-need communities right across Victoria. Each of these projects is based on extensive community consultation and has a plan to grow the involvement of local residents and build strong partnerships with other community organisations, such as councils and neighbourhood houses.

One of the projects that will be funded is a new multicultural men's shed in Tottenham. Auspiced by the Australia Light Foundation, this new men's shed will engage multicultural communities in the western suburbs and reduce the social isolation that many residents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience.

All of these new men's sheds will offer men in their local communities the opportunity to participate in exciting new activities, such as trade-based activities, health and wellbeing information sessions and activities that connect participants to learning and employment opportunities, especially in building and trades.

This funding round brings new sheds to Ararat, Bannockburn, Bemm River, Colac, South Cranbourne, Dallas, Inverloch, Kyneton, Nagambie, Ouyen, St Albans, Tottenham, Trafalgar, Wahgunyah and Warragul.

Aboriginal flag

Ms MIKAKOS — On another matter, I want to register the pride I felt at the first and permanent installation of the Aboriginal flag above this building yesterday.

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

Fish Creek Netball Club

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — Sport plays a big part in community life in the town of my birth — fantastic Fish Creek — in the other AFL, the Alberton Football League. On Saturday coach Paddy Watkins supported the under-17s Fish Creek netball team to a resounding grand final victory. The team consisted of Kristy Wilkins, Emma Watkins, Kayla McGannon, Carmen Tracy, Ekarla Moore, Erin Howard, Breanna Byers, Paris Rogers, Belle Cocksedge and Alice Howard. Congratulations to them.

Leongatha Knights Football Club

Ms BATH — Sunday, 14 September, proved to be a successful grand final day for the Leongatha Knights Football Club women's soccer team, which defeated Drouin in extra time under competitive and hot conditions. Full marks to Lachlan O'Connor on his first season of coaching, and congratulations to team members Kathy Zacharopoulos, Cassie Stampton, Jess Burrows, Maddie Gatehouse, Pauline Grewer, Karli Blunden, Tammy McCaughan, Jordan Rintoule, Beth Milkins, Caitlyn Beath, Kara Schelling, Rachael Shirlow, Mimmie Ng, Ashael Heeney and Emily Cotterill on their exciting game and the spirit in which the match was played.

Mirboo North Secondary College

Ms BATH — Many senior male students from Mirboo North Secondary College proved their worth by winning their second successive premiership in the

under-18s Mid Gippsland Football League. Congratulations to the boys and their delighted supporters. It is great to see that sport is alive and well in Gippsland and that many of our young people are making active, healthy choices in their recreational time.

Aboriginal flag

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — It was an honour to be present yesterday along with members of Victoria's Aboriginal communities, members of Parliament and members of the public to see the historic raising of the Australian Aboriginal flag above Parliament House, where it will now fly permanently in recognition of and respect for all Aboriginal people, both past and present and into the future. Boonwurrung elder Carolyn Briggs gave a generous welcome to country, and her grandsons conducted the smoking ceremony.

Members of Parliament who spoke yesterday both at the flag-raising ceremony on the front steps and later in both chambers did so with goodwill. Some made the point that the occasion was long overdue and that there are differing views within Victoria's Aboriginal communities about its significance.

The Aboriginal flag was originally designed in 1971 by artist Harold Thomas for the land rights movement and was proclaimed an official flag of Australia in 1995, although it is reported that Harold Thomas said that the flag did not need any more recognition. The Aboriginal flag is now well known by the wider community. Its permanent presence above Parliament House will be a daily reminder to us all of what has been achieved but also that there is much work we still need to do to achieve reconciliation and recognition and to close the gaps that still exist in health, education, wellbeing and life expectancy.

I congratulate the government and the Presiding Officers on their work in bringing this about. Walking up Bourke Street this morning it was fantastic to see the Aboriginal flag flying in the breeze above Parliament House. I believe it will make a positive difference for people to see the Aboriginal flag flying above this place every day when it was not there before.

Country Fire Authority Devon Meadows brigade

Mr MULINO (Eastern Victoria) — It may not feel like it on most mornings, but we are definitely heading into summer, and from listening to the people I have discussed it with, it is clear that it is likely to be a

summer of very high fire risk, particularly in our regions. I rise today in anticipation of what is likely to be very important and courageous work over the summer and congratulate the Country Fire Authority (CFA) for all it does throughout the year. I also draw attention to one of the many CFA brigades in my electorate, the Devon Meadows brigade, and I congratulate it on the opening of a satellite station at Cannons Creek.

The Devon Meadows fire brigade has been in continuous operation since 1946, and in the period since then it has seen a number of devastating natural disasters in our state. The fire brigade has around 20 members and tends to just under 100 incidents a year. It is critical that this fire brigade have a well-functioning and fully serviced satellite station given the large area it services with such a small number of members and also given the number of risks it has to deal with in that area, which includes a number of traffic black spots and a very high bushfire risk.

This new satellite station, which benefited from just under \$300 000 of investment from the government, has a number of amenities, including a kitchen, but importantly it provides significant additional functionality for the Devon Meadows's second tanker. Congratulations to all members of the Devon Meadows brigade on the opening of this new satellite station.

Multicultural community events

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — One of the great honours I have as shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs is being able to attend a lot of events at which various multicultural communities celebrate significant occasions.

Last Saturday I had the pleasure of attending with Ms Colleen Hartland the Ethiopian Community Association of Victoria's celebration for the 2008 New Year, which was a sensational event that brought the community together.

I take the opportunity to wish our Hindu community a happy Ganesh Chaturthi 2015. This is a Hindu celebration in honour of the birth of Lord Ganesh, the lord of knowledge, wisdom and prosperity, and his day is celebrated by a significant number of Hindus.

I also take the opportunity to wish our Asian communities, in particular our Chinese communities, a happy Mid-Autumn Festival — even though we are in spring here in Australia — as well as of course a happy Chinese National Day, which is coming up soon. That community has some amazing events happening, all of

which are a good excuse for the community to get together and celebrate its talent.

I also take the opportunity to wish our Jewish community a happy Rosh Hashanah 5776. I have no doubt that my pronunciation could be better, but it is an important event for the Jewish community — may it bring them peace here, abroad and in Israel.

Lastly, Chilean Independence Day will be celebrated soon at the Fonda La Clinica, and I look forward to seeing many members of Parliament there.

Melbourne Market

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I am happy to report that Victoria's new wholesale fruit, vegetable and flower market in Epping has finally opened. This new market has been many years in the making, and I have no doubt the more than 4000 individual fruit and vegetable buyers representing independent greengrocers, supermarkets, restaurants and food processors will be patronising this beautiful new facility for many years to come. The Melbourne Market Authority is responsible for managing the site and its operations, including the wholesale fruit and vegetable market, the national flower centre and a range of warehousing and distribution facilities. This new facility provides a stunning home for Victorian vegetable and flower producers.

Bart Cummings

Mr ELASMAR — On another matter, on occasion I love to go with my family to enjoy a day at the races, so it was sad news to us all that a racing icon has passed away. Bart Cummings will be remembered for his string of 12 Melbourne Cup winners. My sincere condolences go to his wife and family.

Daniher's Drive

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — In the middle of October Daniher's Drive will take place throughout south-western, central and then north-western Victoria before heading back to Melbourne in an action-packed four days. Daniher's Drive has been organised by Neale Daniher as he continues his battle against motor neurone disease (MND). Neale's incredible effort to raise money in search of a cure for MND has so far raised over \$2.5 million. Daniher's Drive will continue to raise awareness of this horrific disease, and it will continue to raise money in the hope that a cure can be found.

On Friday, 16 October, Daniher's Drive will arrive in Bendigo and, true to form, the overnight stay in Bendigo will include a goal-kicking event at the Queen Elizabeth Oval with kids of all ages. Some of central Victoria's best goal kickers will challenge some of Neale's mates who are in the drive. Their best days may be well behind them, but they will still take some beating in any goal-kicking event. On the Friday night we are holding a fundraiser at the All Seasons resort, and we are hoping that over 600 people will attend this event. If people are looking for a table, they can go online or they can contact me to ensure that they are able to support this incredibly important event.

People from all the industries in Bendigo will be there on the night, along with Neale's friends from his Assumption College days and his Werribee days, and his friends from Essendon, Melbourne and the West Coast Eagles. There will also be about 240 people in the drive. There is going to be plenty of room for people in Bendigo to join with all of Neale's friends on this superstar-laden night, which will include appearances from some of the funniest comedians and football personalities in Australia. It will be a great opportunity for anybody to come along and support this event. I urge everyone to consider getting a table together to see if they can raise enough money to help find a cure for this despicable disease.

Anzac centenary

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — This year is of special significance from both the Australian and the Turkish perspectives as it marks 100 years since the landing at Gallipoli, Turkey, during World War I. On Wednesday, 9 September, the Australian Intercultural Society and Deakin University hosted a lecture and photography exhibition, Remembering August 1915 Offensive — Questions and Commemoration, to reflect on the Gallipoli campaign.

The presentation provided historical accounts from the Turkish perspective with the aim of increasing the understanding of the sacrifice made by soldiers who were trying to defend their homeland. It also provided an analysis of the Gallipoli campaign and its role in the birth of modern Turkey. The event was facilitated by ABC senior journalist Karen Percy, and a speaker during the presentation was Associate Professor Mesut Uyar from the University of New South Wales, who is an internationally respected Turkish military historian who has held positions in the Turkish military. Accompanying the presentation was an exhibition of photos depicting the struggles and sacrifices made by soldiers who were defending their homeland during a defining moment of history for all involved.

I congratulate the Australian Intercultural Society on organising yet another successful event which provided an opportunity to reflect on the sacrifices made by so many and on bringing us one step closer to better understanding this historical event from another perspective. I thank Deakin University and the Department of Premier and Cabinet for sponsoring this presentation.

Gippsland schools funding

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — I rise today to congratulate the many schools around Gippsland that have benefited from a total of more than \$15 million in extra funding in the 2015–16 budget as part of the Andrews Labor government's plan to make Victoria the education state. This has seen an enormous injection of new money in schools all over the area, which is the result of an excellent equity-based model around funding to determine the way in which money can be allocated in a smart and targeted way and in a way that will improve the educational outcomes and opportunities for kids all over the region. I congratulate the schools, parents and communities who have provided information that has enabled us to generate funding which is tailored to meet the shortcomings and gaps, and focus on areas of improvement. I look forward to continuing to visit the schools and to seeing how they progress their improvements over the coming months and years.

Gippsland ambulance stations

Ms SHING — The second item I raise today is the necessary funding which has gone to upgrade three ambulance stations at Traralgon, Orbost and Sale as part of a suite of announcements in the \$20 million investment to modernise and upgrade ambulance facilities across Victoria. It has been a great privilege and a pleasure to meet with paramedics at these three stations and throughout Gippsland to talk about the need to modernise facilities to make them safe and secure and to ensure that people have adequate training facilities to keep them at the cutting edge of best service provision across the region in what are often very difficult call-out situations.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house notes:

- (1) the grand final eve public holiday has not been supported by Victorian business;

- (2) the independent regulatory impact statement relating to the two new public holidays has confirmed that the costs outweigh the benefits;
- (3) the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade has confirmed that the government's calls for submissions relating to the regulatory impact statement is a sham consultation;
- (4) that under the Labor government, from the end of November 2014 to the end of August 2015, full-time jobs were down by 18 600;
- (5) the stance of the former Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade that advocating for additional public holidays was not consistent with his small businesses portfolio;

and calls on the Premier of Victoria, Mr Daniel Andrews, MP, to cancel the grand final parade holiday and focus on creating jobs, not cutting them.

I guess today is a day to celebrate because this is one of the few days for which Premier Daniel Andrews has not conceded and fallen over to union pressure and declared a public holiday in Victoria. We should celebrate one of the few days for which Daniel Andrews has not caved in to union pressure.

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE — It is interesting that 1 minute and 11 seconds into my contribution Mr Dalidakis is already interrupting.

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I am so looking forward to your contribution to this motion today. But I will tell you what: I am tipping you are not going to say a word about this other than by interjection. I invite you — —

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE — If you have something reasonable to say, we are looking forward to hearing it, because we know — —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Continue.

Mr ONDARCHIE — We know that when he was given the opportunity to be a minister, Mr Dalidakis became an advocate for the emperor with no clothes. We know that. We know he had to stand up and advocate for a public holiday which he does not believe in. He came into this place saying, 'I support small business'. We know he does not believe in it but he has to stand up and run the party line. Shame on you, Mr Dalidakis.

What does business say about the public holidays? The Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) said:

'On grand final Friday —

a day off for a parade for a grand final that is likely to be played by two interstate teams, the West Coast Eagles and Fremantle; a public holiday that is going to close Collins Street and close most of Victoria —

the cost to pay many of Victoria's almost 2 million full-time employees not to come to work could reach \$543 million for the day.'

Additional wages for the retail, accommodation, food services and recreation industries are estimated to cost small business owners \$105 million for the two holidays as wages can be 50 per cent higher on Easter Sunday and 150 per cent higher on grand final eve —

the grand final parade public holiday. Mr Dalidakis must be so proud:

The two new holidays widen the disparity between public holiday arrangements across Australia and will result in Victoria having a nationwide high of 13 days —

13 public holidays —

compared to states like New South Wales with 11 and Queensland and Western Australia with 10.

The only thing growing in Victoria is more days off for Daniel Andrews. As jobs fall away he is legislating so people can have more days off. It would be interesting for him to have a day on in this place.

What did Mark Stone, the chief executive officer of VECCI say? He said:

'It is a terrible decision that the government is continuing to go ahead with this plan.'

'The government must do the right thing by Victorian businesses, do the right thing by businesses trying to employ more people and trying to create jobs —

and not take away money from them. He went on to say:

'I regularly meet with the relevant ministers, the Premier, the Treasurer, and I keep reinforcing that the view of business in Victoria is that this is the wrong call. They need to retract it. They'll win a lot of support and business interest if they come back from this decision.'

'What Victoria needs is more jobs and this plan is only going to set that back.'

No truer words have been spoken than those by Mr Stone.

This is a government that purports that every job is valuable and that it will fight for every job, yet the first thing it has done is add two more public holidays in Victoria. Mr Andrews's job is to create jobs, not take them away.

What does Adept Printing, a small business, say? It said:

We as small business owners have struggled for the past four years to remain viable.

Should we close our doors you will have seven added to your unemployment woes.

Losing a day's production and paying our employees a full day's wage has a huge impact on our business.

I implore you to reconsider this useless public holiday.

FirstBite Dental practice has said:

It will already hurt us as we still have to pay the wages for the day.

But it is cheaper to shut down than it is to open. We lose less money that way.

Can you believe it? Business is saying to the Premier of Victoria that because of what he has done, it has taken the decision to lose less money. This is a government which said it is going to fight for every job. It seems that the only jobs those opposite are fighting for are those of their Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA) mates.

The Air Conditioning and Mechanical Contractors Association has said:

The loss of production would be significant. In an industry that already struggles to complete construction projects on schedule the last thing the industry needs is another unproductive day for the employees.

...

There is absolutely no benefit to employers in this industry.

What have others said? Cellina Little operates a small 66-room motel in regional Victoria. She has said:

The addition of these public holidays will ensure that our guest services are disrupted by being unable to offer breakfast and housekeeping services on these days. There will be 15 staff who will be impacted by loss of income through no work. Guests will not receive the usual high levels of services and negatively impact not just our motel but our area through the loss of repeat business.

Choice Fresh Meals said this:

We are a home delivery meal service predominantly servicing seniors —

older Victorians. It said further:

Despite the fact we open to deliver meals and take orders on the public holiday ... our customers get confused and some end up not ordering ... Thus our sales are lower on those days and some clients miss out on meals and go hungry.

The government should be so proud of itself for what it is doing!

Mr Dalidakis — You finished yet?

Mr ONDARCHIE — Mr Dalidakis interjects because he thinks it is funny to put people's jobs at risk. I wish Mr Dalidakis — as he beats his chest and says, 'I am the minister!' — would take some responsibility for this and recognise that he and his portfolio and the ministry he has been afforded are hurting business. He will get the opportunity to stand up today and apologise to those people, but I suspect he will not because his job is to stand as point guard for the emperor.

Evan Heller has said:

This may be the straw that breaks the camel's back and forces me to look at our staff numbers.

And Mr Dalidakis smiles and laughs at that response. We are talking about people's jobs. We are talking about people's livelihoods. We are talking about their capacity to pay their rent, pay their electricity bill, pay their gas bill, pay their phone bill, pay for their petrol costs, pay for food for their children, pay for school uniforms and shoes, pay for provisions for their families and, if they have a little bit left over, maybe pay for something for themselves. And Mr Dalidakis laughs at that. How dare he laugh at the welfare of Victorians? This is irresponsible.

Mr Dalidakis — So is your tie colour. I do not like it.

Mr ONDARCHIE — And his only retort is to make some criticism of my attire for the day. That shows irresponsibility at its highest degree. When he should be fighting for Victorian jobs, his only comment is on how I dress. Good for Mr Dalidakis!

The Geelong Chamber of Commerce said:

A survey of our members on this issue showed that:

the proposed public holidays will have a material impact on nearly 70 per cent of those surveyed;

more than 85 per cent of those surveyed do not support the introduction of these two new public holidays;

particular criticism was directed at the introduction of the grand final eve holiday —

the grand final parade holiday.

I am not sure if the coalition holds any seats in Dandenong; maybe they are held by the ALP. Let us see what those in the ALP's own area say about this decision. The Greater Dandenong Chamber of Commerce said:

These additional days off could result in the loss of employment across the state.

The two additional proposed public holidays will also reduce Victoria's competitiveness with the rest of Australia and globally.

James Baxter said:

The rationale that Victorians are working hard and deserve a day off is quaint, but not compelling. I work for a fixed wage, so an extra day off is appealing, but I also realise that my employer will face additional wage costs and lost productivity. In many industries labour is transferable, and I worry that my employer might consider sending work offshore rather than pay additional costs to have work completed here.

This is a pay-as-you-go employee who gets it. We are not just talking about businesses here; we are talking about employees who get it. I wonder why the Premier and his government do not get it, but maybe there is a bigger influence at play here.

Landscaping Victoria's staff work outdoors, and this is probably a good time of year for the company because it is coming up to the peak season — I know that because I am looking at some landscaping at home myself. It is a good time for Landscaping Victoria to be very busy, but Landscaping Victoria stated:

LV is of the opinion that the additional holidays are financially detrimental to the Victorian economy, and specifically the Friday before the AFL Grand Final, which will add significant and undue additional cost to our industry sector.

M. & J. Stewart Motors Pty Ltd said:

These two holidays are just making a further burden to small business who are mostly struggling to keep their doors open.

Why does the government not get it? Why will the government not understand that this is hurting the lifeblood of the Victorian economy, small business. Small business is the largest employer in the nation. And what is the government's first act? To go after small businesses and their workers. It is tragic at best; it is treacherous at worst.

I cannot believe that the Australian Labor Party, whose slogan in its election campaign was 'Putting people first', in fact put people last here. But as members have heard me say both in this place and outside, the Labor Party will say and do anything to get elected. To be fair to Mr Dalidakis — because I am a man of compassion — he got landed this hospital pass. As has been widely reported by those in government, it was one man's idea and they had to carry it forward. Poor Mr Dalidakis got blindsided here. They said, 'Here's a ticking bomb. It's yours to carry if you want to be a minister'. And that is what he has had to do. For a man who talked in his maiden speech about his appreciation for business and how important small business is, I know Mr Dalidakis is torn internally by this. I know internally he does not like this impost on small business, but he has to run with the party line. It was part of the deal — 'If you want to be a minister, you have to sign up to my great thought bubble'.

You can imagine the ALP campaign room and the parliamentary party room when the then opposition leader said, 'I know what we might do. Let's make the day before the grand final a public holiday for the parade'. You can imagine the heads of the ALP members in their hands, who would have said, 'What? He committed to what?'. And they have to carry it forward. So we appreciate that Mr Dalidakis has to be open and frank in his contribution today. We fully understand if he throws himself on the mercy of the Parliament and says, 'It was not my fault. It was landed on me'. We understand that.

The Paynesville Business and Tourism Association said:

We believe that these additional holidays will cost the Paynesville small business owners lost productivity ...

Importantly — and this goes to my point this morning and to a point I raised in my members statement yesterday about the situation of Dawn from Lalor, who is missing out on her casual shift in the Epping industrial estate because the industrial estate is going to be closed — the Paynesville Business and Tourism Association went on to say:

... casual workers will lose their shifts for these additional holidays.

How dare the government do that? How dare the government take money from these people? These are hardworking Victorians who rely on those shifts.

Shelley Sutton said:

I own a small business and won't be able to afford to employ someone to work on the Friday as I already pay a part-time person for 3 hours. She will be having the day off and I will need to work on my own for the day. Being Friday it can be one of the busier days so I will need to be open but will not be able to afford to employ anyone else ...

Her part-time worker has a day off that day and is probably not getting paid. There are many small businesses, and others will refer in their contributions today to people from some of those businesses.

Quite frankly this is a thought bubble that has become a tragedy beyond all proportions. We know government members are embarrassed by this. We know they have been backed into a corner by this. We know it has been forced upon them because one man came up with a thought bubble and said, 'I know, we might do this' and forced his colleagues into this position. But what do they do?

To be fair, the government said, 'Let's go through a process. Let's employ and engage an independent assessor to assess the impact of these public holidays'. So they engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers to undertake an independent regulatory impact statement on these public holidays. And what did PricewaterhouseCoopers advice to the government say? It said:

Overall, the estimated costs of the new public holidays outweigh the quantified benefits ...

I will say that again. PricewaterhouseCoopers, the independent assessor for the government, told the government:

Overall, the estimated costs of the new public holidays outweigh the quantified benefits ...

The government is ignoring its own advice. It took independent advice on this, and despite its own high-level advice warning that the economic cost could outweigh the benefits, it is going ahead anyway.

It promised a new holiday. The plan was to formally gazette it but to do some investigation and call for people to submit — 'Give us your ideas: we're going to do a study on whether this works or not'. The PricewaterhouseCoopers report said that there are significant increased labour costs for employers. It also said that the government could consider introducing the Easter Sunday holiday in 2015 but delaying the implementation of the grand final parade public holiday until 2016. Despite receiving this independent advice, the government said, 'No, we're going ahead anyway'. Why? Because the emperor decided. We might not agree, but the emperor decided and it is going ahead.

The independent report by PricewaterhouseCoopers, commissioned by the government, said:

The loss of economic output from the Friday before the AFL Grand Final public holiday is estimated to be significantly higher at between \$680 million and \$852 million.

The economic cost to Victorians: \$680 million to \$852 million.

Let me just get the logic here. The government had an idea, or perhaps one person had an idea. The government went ahead, but it said, 'Before we implement this, let's go to the market. Let's get an independent assessment. Business, tell us what you think. Individuals, tell us what you think. We'll engage PricewaterhouseCoopers to undertake an impact statement for us'. It did that, and the answer came back, 'No deal. It's a bad idea. Significant economic impost on Victoria. It's going to hurt employers and employees'. Overall the business community and the employees were saying, 'This is a bad idea'. Casual employees were saying, 'Thanks very much: I'm going to lose money that day — money I rely on for my rent'. Everybody said it was a bad idea. Out of 109 submissions 105 said, 'Bad idea'. And what did the government say? 'We're doing it anyway'.

If we follow that logic, the government went to the market, asked for advice and ignored it anyway. Pardon me and the rest of Victoria if we think this was a sham consultation. It was a process for the sake of process and it was not about outcomes. Government members stand there and labour the fact that they stand up for the people of Victoria, they take advice and they listen to the people of Victoria. Why did they not listen on this occasion? I think it is best summed up in Mr Dalidakis's response to a question without notice on 5 August 2015 when he said:

The simple answer is we are committed to going through the RIS process because that is the way in which we move forward with the gazettal of the holidays. It is a process issue, but members should be in no doubt that, irrespective of what the submissions say, we will continue to implement our election commitments ...

Let me get that right: irrespective of what the submissions say; irrespective of what the people of Victoria want; irrespective of what casual employees say about being hurt, what businesses say about being hurt and what the wider community says about how unproductive this is; and irrespective of the fact that the independent regulatory impact statement said this is a bad idea, the government went ahead anyway. It conned Victorians. It misled Victorians. It went to the market saying 'Tell us what you think' when really it meant 'We don't care what you think, because we're

doing it anyway'. This government that purports to govern for the people of Victoria clearly governs just for its own mates.

But we will give Mr Dalidakis a chance to make a contribution today and throw himself on the mercy of this Parliament and say, 'I was wrong'. He gets the opportunity today to tell the people of Victoria he misled them. He gets the opportunity today to tell Victorian businesses he misled them. He gets the opportunity today to tell the people of Victoria, 'It was one bloke's idea, and the only way I got a ministry was to sign up to this idea'.

This is a chance to come clean, because we know and he knows deep in his heart that this was a bad idea. He knows it, but tragically he may well be forced to just run with the party line. I hope he does not, because his inaugural speech was impressive. He talked about himself from his heart, and he talked about his care for small business and how he understands the plight of the small business. I would expect him to be true to his word today and for government members who are making a contribution today to be true to their words, because the evidence is overwhelming that this was a bad idea. It is proving to be a bad idea. The evidence is overwhelming that people do not want this holiday, except for those who have a vested interest and control the Australian Labor Party.

I will come to that in just a moment, because point 5 of my motion talks about the previous Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade's view about this public holiday. We congratulate him on speaking the truth to the Victorian people when he said that advocating for an additional public holiday was not consistent with his small business portfolio, and we agree. If any minister of the Crown who represents the portfolio of small business is true to their heart, they will agree that advocating for an additional impost on small business is not consistent with their portfolio.

But Mr Somyurek might well have given us the answer; he might well have given us the clue in his final press conference after he was stood down as a minister when he talked about the boss of what he called the powerful SDA, Michael Donovan, whom he says has 'undue influence' over the running of the government. He said:

The secretary of the SDA until now has exercised power without scrutiny. Given his undue influence over the Andrews government, that has to change, that must change.

Who is running the show? It might have been one man's idea, but clearly it was driven by another man. Whilst there has been a change of Prime Minister officially declared in Canberra, maybe unofficially

there has been a change of Premier in this state as well. Maybe Michael Donovan of the SDA is running this state. Because Mr Somyurek said — —

Mr Dalidakis — Who writes your lines?

Mr ONDARCHIE — Mr Dalidakis interjects with, 'Who writes your lines?'. Mr Somyurek said it at his press conference. Maybe Mr Dalidakis is telling us today that Mr Somyurek was speaking untruths, but Mr Somyurek, the former Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, said after he was stood down as a minister that the SDA has undue influence on the running of this government.

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Mr Dalidakis laughs about that. Maybe he is laughing at what Mr Somyurek said. Maybe he is ridiculing what one of his own colleagues said. I did not say it; Mr Somyurek said it. Mr Dalidakis will have the opportunity today to stand up in this place and say Mr Somyurek was wrong. We will see.

The reality is that this mob came to government saying it was going to create 100 000 new jobs in two years. We are almost 12 months in, and in a football sense the government is out the back door. Just in the last month 18 600 full-time jobs were lost in Victoria. You do the math: 100 000 new jobs in two years. It is already way out the back door. I know many members will need a calculator for this, but I can pretty well do it in my head. The government will need to create about 300 full-time jobs every day if it is going to catch up.

Where is the government's starting point? Its starting point is to create a grand final parade — a public holiday that hurts jobs and hurts employees. The party that claims it stands up for workers in fact just stands up for its own mates. Why are government members not standing up for all Victorians? Why are they not ensuring that casual workers can get shifts that day? I will tell you why. Because this grand final public holiday was an absolute mess-up from the start. It is not supported by business. The government's own independent regulatory impact statement told the government that it was a bad idea. Jobs are being lost in this place.

The minister told us in this house that it is about process. It is clearly not about outcome; it is about process. He wants to be seen to be doing the right thing, but the government had already made up its mind. Why did it ask them? Why did it commit the time and energy of Victorian businesses, employers and employees to contribute to its regulatory impact statement when it had already made up its mind? Why did it waste their

time and their energy? Why did it waste taxpayers money to engage PricewaterhouseCoopers to undertake an independent regulatory impact statement when it had already made up its mind? I will tell you why: because this was a sham from the start. It was a con job on Victorians.

The government went through the process, as the minister described it, for process's sake. That is bad government. Government should be about outcomes, but the current government is more focused on the process to achieve its own ends than it is on outcomes. The outcomes are simple: Victorian businesses will hurt that day, Victorian employers will hurt that day and Victorian employees will hurt that day. Loss of productivity is bad for Victoria. Why have a public holiday? So those opposite can march down Wellington Parade with the West Coast Eagles and the Fremantle Dockers and say, 'Isn't this a great thing for Victoria?'. The Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade should be ashamed of himself.

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Mr Dalidakis is going to say, 'This is a good time for families to be together and enjoy each other's company'. Mr Dalidakis does not get it. Let me tell him what is going to happen to family-run businesses. The casual employees are not going to get any shifts that day, and the families are all going to have to work — from grandma to toddlers — in those shops to keep them open because they cannot afford the additional employees. Is that what Mr Dalidakis sees as quality time for a family? 'Let's all work the counter on this day, because otherwise we're going to lose too much money'. From little ones to grandmas, they are all going to work in the shop because the government decided to penalise Victorian businesses and employees. Mr Dalidakis says that it will be a lovely time for families to get together. From dawn to dusk they are going to work together because Mr Dalidakis says that is quality family time.

I have a different view of quality family time. To me, quality family time is my family and I getting together and spending good time together. It is not the impost by the government of our having to work because the government forced us into it. Quality time is going to worship on a Sunday morning with my family. Quality time is enjoying each other's company. But Mr Dalidakis thinks they should all be forced into business on that day because the government has imposed a public holiday on Victorians that penalises employees and families.

Mr Dalidakis does not get it. He does not understand what he is doing to Victorian businesses. But, to be fair — I am signalling all of this to Mr Dalidakis — I think he does get it. The trouble is he is constrained by the emperor with no clothes; he is constrained by the box that says he has to say this because that is how one gets to become a minister. I say to Mr Dalidakis that in his response to my motion that says this holiday is bad we are going to ask him to put his hand on his heart today and tell Victorians the truth. We are going to give him the opportunity to say, 'We don't get it'. Is it not interesting that when I ask Mr Dalidakis to tell Victorians the truth he laughs? Maybe he sees telling the truth as funny.

Mr Dalidakis — Sit down and I will speak.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Maybe he sees it as something he does not need to do, but he does and he will be given the opportunity to do so.

Mr Dalidakis — Give me the call.

Mr ONDARCHIE — I think Mr Dalidakis is saying that as soon as I sit down he will speak. Acting President, he can give me the nod if it is the case that he wants to speak next. I encourage him — in fact as a person representing the people of Victoria, I demand that he tell us the truth.

Mr Dalidakis — I will tell you the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But you can't handle the truth.

Mr ONDARCHIE — That would be interesting. I see that Mr Dalidakis has already started his contribution, but if it is okay with him, I will complete mine.

I say to Mr Dalidakis that he has five simple points to answer: that Victorian business has not supported this grand final eve public holiday; that the government's impact statement has confirmed that the costs outweigh the benefits; that he confirm that the regulatory impact statement was a sham consultation, because he has said that in this house and if he speaks against that today, then he misled the house earlier; that in the last month 18 600 Victorians lost full-time jobs; and by way of response he can also say whether he agrees or disagrees with the former minister in his portfolio who said that advocating for these additional public holidays was not consistent with his portfolio.

Mr Dalidakis stood up in this place in his very first contribution to this house and said he supports small business. If that is true, then today he will support this motion. I commend my motion to the house.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I will be fairly brief in my response, and then I will allow Mr Dalidakis and Mr Ondarchie to continue yelling at each other. For the students who are watching, this is not the way we always behave. Sometimes it is much worse.

The Greens will not be supporting the opposition's motion. We believe that public holidays are an important part of this community. There are 13 public holidays in Victoria each year. I think that is a reasonable number. I have to say that I do not think the government thought very clearly about having this holiday for the grand final. There is a whole range of other things we could have had a public holiday for.

My short list would have been a public holiday to celebrate the 1968 referendum that ensured that Indigenous people were part of the census and that they achieved the vote, or the start of NAIDOC Week or Remembrance Day. We could come up with a list of 20 other significant historical dates that would have been more appropriate for a public holiday than the day before the grand final. However, as I said, the Greens will not be supporting this motion.

We think that public holidays are a good thing; they are good for people, and I am really interested in this whole argument about how it is going to be bad for business. For tourism it is going to be exceptionally good, and people are going to be able to go away for the weekend. They are going to be spending money in regional areas, and I would have thought that spending money in regional areas is quite a good thing.

With that small contribution the Greens will not be supporting this motion.

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — It is my absolute pleasure to rise to speak against what is truly a most ridiculous motion. I will start by noting that Mr Ondarchie has not brought forward a motion about the workers who have been abused at 7-Eleven. He has not brought forward a motion about workers' entitlements or the ability of families to spend more time together. All he has done is try to whip up a frenzy using misnomers and misleading the house. For those who are in the gallery listening, this is about a commitment that we made in 2011 while in opposition.

In 2011 the then Leader of the Opposition, the now Premier, Daniel Andrews, committed this state to the introduction of two public holidays should we be elected in the election of November 2014. The first holiday was to be on Easter Sunday and the second

holiday was to be on the grand final eve Friday, and by the way this is a holiday to celebrate our indigenous football game — the greatest game in the world, second of course to the global game that Mr Ondarchie and I both share a love for, which is the other form of football. Just to prove that Mr Ondarchie and I have a spirit of unity on some things, we both share a love of Melbourne City Football Club and trust that it will continue to be superior to Melbourne Victory whenever it gets the chance.

Maybe Mr Ondarchie would have been more favourable to the public holiday if it had been for the Football Federation Australia grand final rather than for Australian rules football.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — We could have done it on a Monday or, better still, on the Friday before, but unfortunately Mr Ondarchie probably would have been sour about that as well. Unfortunately what we are seeing is the inability of those opposite to accept the outcome of the election last year, whereafter this government very proudly has gone about its business in implementing the agenda, election commitments and policies that it took to the election.

No-one can argue that they were unaware of this election commitment. No-one can argue that we did not tell people that we were going to implement this. No-one can argue that they were unaware that in 2011 then opposition leader, Daniel Andrews, promised that if Labor won government at the next election it would implement these two holidays.

Let us go forward and deal with this motion very specifically. I noticed that Mr Ondarchie was so full of beans when moving his own motion that he only managed to speak for half an hour. He was so passionate about his contribution that it went for about half an hour.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — We will measure Mr Ondarchie's passion meter and contribution by his ability to interject, and we will see.

The first part of the motion is:

That this house notes —

- (1) the grand final eve public holiday has not been supported by Victorian business;

That is a very firm statement, and unless Mr Ondarchie has gone out personally and spoken to every single

business in Victoria — every single business registered and operating in Victoria — then I am not sure how he can make that statement. I am not sure how Mr Ondarchie makes the statement that it has not been supported. That is the first point that I will make.

In the second paragraph of his motion Mr Ondarchie claims:

- (2) the independent regulatory impact statement relating to the two new public holidays has confirmed that the costs outweigh the benefits ...

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Let me refer to the regulatory impact statement (RIS). I would like you to note, Acting President, that the shadow minister has asked me to note the statement, and it is my intention to read large parts of the regulatory impact statement.

Mr Ondarchie — I'll tell you which parts to read.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I thank Mr Ondarchie for his advice. I will continue on according to my agenda. I will start with the executive summary's very first key point, which is:

The Victorian government made a commitment in its 2014 state election platform to declare Easter Sunday and the Friday before the AFL Grand Final as public holidays.

That is the very first statement. It is pretty clear, emphatic and unequivocal. There is nothing even remotely difficult about understanding what our intentions were.

Apparently Mr Ondarchie believes I should be pilloried for the second key point, which is:

The Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 requires that a regulatory impact statement (RIS) be prepared to consider the impacts of the government's policy.

There it is. It requires that an RIS be prepared to consider the impacts of the policy as part of the legislative requirement in gazetting the public holidays, and that is exactly what I have said time and again in this chamber. What I have repeatedly said in answer to questions in this chamber is that we undertook the RIS as part of the process as required under the Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 in order to move forward with the gazettal of those public holidays.

In so doing let me be very clear. Did we have a look at the submissions? Of course we did. Did we consider the content of the submissions? Of course we did. Did the content of those submissions effectively make us consider — —

Mr Ondarchie — Don't mislead the house.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Mr Ondarchie should not interject. It is unruly.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Mr Ondarchie should be better than me. Whilst the submissions were some 109 in number, they were weighed against the public interest of what we were attempting to do with the creation of the public holidays and against the fact that we govern for in excess of 3 million workers who will benefit from the public holiday. As a result, we then decided that it was more important to continue on in meeting our election commitment than it was to not go forward.

Everything that I have said in the past has been completely consistent with what I have just said — everything.

Mr Ondarchie — Don't mislead the house, mate. You misled the house.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Mr Ondarchie is making a very serious allegation. I am not misleading the house.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Do you want to put a point of order up?

Mr Ondarchie — If you like. I can make a point of order if you like.

Mr DALIDAKIS — It is up to Mr Ondarchie, because he is claiming that I am misleading the house and I am absolutely not misleading the house.

Mr Ondarchie — Sure?

Mr DALIDAKIS — Yes; 100 per cent sure. And I caution Mr Ondarchie not to take advice from Mr Drum.

Moving forward, yesterday I was asked one of myriad questions in relation to the public holiday. What I said was — and I again quote a key point from the executive summary of the regulatory impact statement:

Estimating the benefits and costs of the proposed new public holidays is difficult given the potential for varied behavioural responses of different individuals, businesses and groups throughout Victoria and the challenges of aggregating these potentially diverse effects.

Even though those opposite continue to try to claim that the RIS is the font of all knowledge in relation to this, the people who prepared this document recognised the

difficulty in being able to quantify all of the benefits that will be apparent as a result of the public holiday for a range of reasons, and I will come to that shortly.

Another key point of the executive summary says:

The RIS considers the net impacts of the government's commitment by comparing the cost of forgone economic activity as a result of the new public holidays against the value of individual leisure time.

While the RIS goes into more detail, which I will again quote from, at no stage is it able to quantify a dollar value — a positive net figure — to leisure time. As a result, the people who prepared the RIS were not able to ascribe a value — to you, Acting President, to me or even to Mr Ondarchie — to being able to spend quality time with our loved ones, our friends and our family on the public holiday in question.

Mr Drum interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I acknowledge that there would be some people, like Mr Drum, who would struggle to find people who would want to spend time with them, but nonetheless there are people out there in the community who appreciate the opportunity to spend time together. Even given my brief time in Parliament — some nine months or so now — I can say it takes an exacting toll on the families of all of us in this chamber. Irrespective of the political party we represent, we spend a lot of time not only in Parliament but outside of it, meeting constituents, doing work that we are employed to do as members of Parliament and covering large areas, as all of us do in the upper house — especially those who represent rural and regional areas like the regions of Western Victoria, Northern Victoria and Eastern Victoria, which are of significant geographic size.

In what we do, and what other people do, we have to balance the potential for net economic benefit against the ability to have leisure time. The RIS notes at the very beginning that PricewaterhouseCoopers, which prepared the report, was not able to quantify that in dollar terms. It is important to stress that, because when you look at this you need to be able to appreciate that sometimes the benefits of what you do are not necessarily financial. It is important to labour that point just for a moment, because the whole purpose of the introduction of the public holiday was to celebrate our great Australian indigenous game, allow families and friends to get together and provide some much-needed leisure time — leisure time that would otherwise be unavailable to people.

Further along in the executive summary it notes:

Tourism Victoria has indicated that increased travel by Melburnians to regional Victoria during a new long weekend has the potential to increase tourism expenditure in regional Victoria ...

It puts the figure at between \$17 million and \$51 million annually. Later on it indicates that it was not prepared to accept the figures that Tourism Victoria provided as part of its modelling, not because it did not want to but because it also found it difficult to quantify that in terms of the data that it wanted to put into its model. Importantly, this is not to question the validity of the work that PricewaterhouseCoopers has undertaken in its report, but to note that it means the model can at times be inexact. This is because a model is only as good as the data inputs that are provided. To be absolutely fair to PricewaterhouseCoopers, in putting this together it has noted a range of issues it had in trying to quantify the benefits, which are why it has not been able to put some things into its model. That is completely understandable.

The executive summary also talks about estimations. It talks about lost production being 'estimated'. It talks about studies that indicate a complementary sports-related event could 'potentially contribute' to the Victorian economy. Everything has been done in a relatively inexact scientific way, in terms of potential and estimates, because this is what a model does. People input the best available data into the spreadsheet, press the enter key and get their model accordingly.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Mr Ondarchie is aware of that. The second-last key point in the executive summary — —

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Unfortunately Mr Ondarchie has had his opportunity to speak and has given me the call, which means that his time is over and it is now my time. The second-last dot point says:

The benefits of coordinated leisure time have not been estimated in this RIS due to a lack of available, robust information on their potential size in this context.

There you have it — right before your eyes, Acting President, my eyes and Mr Ondarchie's eyes. The RIS understands that within the forecast model it is not able to accurately quantify the data and as a result in some areas it has not included it or been able to estimate it. That is very important.

Further along in the executive summary, while talking about the impact of public holidays, it acknowledges that for those businesses that choose to open there may be the potential for increased wage costs. I say the potential because — and no doubt Mr Ondarchie would be aware of this as he is generally a well-read and well-educated member of this chamber, but just in case he is not aware of this issue let me assist him by informing him — of the 532 000 small businesses in Victoria, almost two-thirds are non-employing businesses; they are mum-and-dad businesses or sole traders, being run by themselves. So when I talk about the potential for increased wages, that means that should those two-thirds of businesses open or undertake their work, the issue of potential wage increases is negated by the fact that it is only themselves working in that business.

Just at this point I think it is very important to again stress something I have said on repeated occasions in this chamber, and that is that the Victorian government is at no stage placing trading restrictions on any business operating in Victoria on public holidays. This is a very important point to make. Let me be clear: should a business choose to open on one of those days, it is entitled to do so. Should a business choose to close on one of those days because it is a public holiday, it is entitled to do so. At no stage will I as the minister or this government dictate to those businesses —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Eideh) —
Order!

Mr DALIDAKIS — At no stage will we be brazen enough, unlike those opposite, to dictate to businesses what they should or should not do. We are prepared to use that old liberal value and concept of free will to allow businesses to make those decisions for themselves. Some businesses will decide not to open because they will decide that it is easier not to, and some businesses will choose to open because they will have decided for themselves that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. We will work through this.

Moving on, the executive summary of the *Regulatory Impact Statement on Proposed New Public Holidays in Victoria* also states that:

Public holidays can provide opportunities to increase tourism. This provides potential opportunities to Victorian employers engaged in associated industries such as retail, hospitality and accommodation, though this is likely to be at least partially offset by reduced expenditure elsewhere.

What this is noting is that when there is a long weekend public holiday in Melbourne, history shows that people

leave Melbourne and take advantage of that extra day to spend money in and enjoy other parts of Victoria —

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I hope opposition members are not talking down the state or the beautiful parts of Victoria that people can visit. I hope opposition members are not talking it down.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I did not say you were; I said I hope you are not, because Victoria clearly has the best of everything. Whether you are down in the 'Bool in Victoria's west, whether you go up to visit our goldmining history in Ballarat, whether you go to Bendigo to tour the old trams or whether you go east to Lakes Entrance and beyond, we have an abundance of beauty. The data shows that when there is a long weekend in Melbourne people take advantage of it and go and spend their time and money in regional and rural Victoria. This public holiday has the ability to assist a range of country towns and regions that may otherwise have not benefited.

I might just digress for a moment, and then I will come back to the RIS to talk about grand final Friday as it has been in the past. I am not sure about Mr Ondarchie's experience. He asks me to be truthful. I always am, and I am sure Mr Ondarchie appreciates that. Despite the fact that at times we disagree with each other on some points, nonetheless there is a spirit of professionalism and respect between the two of us. Even though in question time I may have questioned whether or not his family wanted to spend time with Mr Ondarchie, I am sure they do and I am sure Mr Ondarchie wants to spend time with his family whenever he can as well. I just want Hansard to note that I have no doubt that Mr Ondarchie's family does want to spend time with him.

Previously I have questioned the validity of some of the modelling on this because, as Mr Ondarchie would probably appreciate, most businesspeople in the Melbourne CBD are fairly unproductive on grand final eve Friday when it has been a working day. Previously they have often gone out to lunches — probably around 11.30 to be honest, maybe midday — and many actually do not return from those lunches. Those lunches become long lunches, and people tend not to go back to work. So the hospitality industry obviously benefited greatly from that in the Melbourne CBD —

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Mr Ondarchie knows that what I say is accurate. But more importantly, whilst I appreciate that the hospitality industry in the Melbourne CBD potentially may miss out on that Friday, nonetheless Mr Ondarchie is not able to say that people were highly productive on that day in and of itself. Unfortunately Mr Ondarchie sat down, and I now have the call.

Mr Ondarchie — You are right. It is unfortunate. I could not agree with you more; it is very unfortunate.

Mr DALIDAKIS — You will not make that mistake again, Mr Ondarchie. The RIS talks about the approach taken to assessing the impacts, the alternatives considered and also the options. In assessing the options we go back to the first principles, which included the requirement that a regulatory impact statement be prepared under the Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 as part of the gazettal process.

When you look at the benefits to the community, which are outlined on page 6 of the executive summary, you see that the potential value of additional leisure time is upwards of \$312 million. That is what the executive summary claims — that the potential value of additional leisure time is upwards of \$312 million.

Under the heading ‘Benefits to business and the economy’ the very first sentence is:

The two new public holidays are expected to increase tourism and related expenditure.

Mr Finn — On a point of order, Acting President, I am aware of the standing orders which clearly state that a member should not read his speech. The minister is clearly reading a document into *Hansard*. It would be far more expedient for the house if he were to incorporate that. I ask you to direct him to incorporate the document into *Hansard*.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Eideh) — Order! There is no point of order. I think the minister is referring to notes.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Thank you, Acting President, it is an appropriate and just ruling. However, any time those opposite wish to raise a point of order and give me additional time to have a drink of water, I welcome the opportunity. I thank Mr Finn. Before the point of order I was talking about benefits to business and the economy. Members opposite have quoted from the regulatory impact statement from time to time — although they have quoted from it selectively — but they missed this line:

The two new public holidays are expected to increase tourism and related expenditure.

Why would members opposite miss that? It is because it is inconvenient to them; it is an inconvenient truth.

On page vii of the executive summary headed ‘Costs to the Victorian economy (reduced economic activity)’, it notes:

Accurately estimating these costs is difficult —

and there is a cost figure in there —

given the potential for varied behavioural responses of different individuals, businesses and groups.

It is a good point to labour.

Mr Ondarchie — You are paraphrasing your own report.

Mr DALIDAKIS — The interjection is unruly and I will not take it up.

Mr Ondarchie — It is a statement of fact.

Mr DALIDAKIS — It is not a statement of fact. Before we get to the main body of the report, in the final section of the executive summary headed ‘Impacts of the proposed policy’ — and this should be somewhat alarming to those opposite given they continue to selectively quote from this document — it notes:

The proposed policy could result in additional tourism associated with the coordination of complementary sporting or cultural events. Due to the uncertainty around the potential values associated with as yet unknown future events, this RIS does not provide an estimate of this impact.

What this demonstrates is what I started my contribution with — that is, a model is only as good as the data that goes into it. This is not to disparage the people of PricewaterhouseCoopers who put this report together, but it is to acknowledge that they also understood that there are some issues that are unquantifiable in terms of their financial impact and net benefit to Victorians.

At this point it is important to come back to the first principle, which is that this was a an election commitment made in 2011, and at no stage was it a commitment made for any reason other than to allow people to spend their time together on a public holiday. It is to allow family, friends and loved ones to have more time together. It is to allow small business owners, including that two-thirds that I talked about that are either mum-and-dad operators or sole traders, to know that they can take time off and spend it with

their loved ones without fear of losing business in competition — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DALIDAKIS — If we go back to the fact that the holiday — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Eideh) — Order! Let the minister continue.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Again, it is to enable people to spend time with their family, friends and loved ones without fearing that they could potentially lose business to their competitors, because everybody would be sharing in the public holiday together. The report goes on to say:

Further benefits could be enjoyed by Victorians in the form of coordinated leisure time. Due to the uncertainty surrounding the community's valuation of these benefits, the RIS has not sought to quantify this potential value.

I referred to that earlier, and this remains a very important point to reference. I reiterate:

Due to the uncertainty surrounding the community's valuation of these benefits, the RIS has not sought to quantify this potential value.

When they continue to quote the net economic cost or the net economic benefit, they do so without understanding that the very reason this holiday has been created, which is to allow people to spend more time with each other, not less, is not financially quantifiable as part of the RIS process. It is important to note that this public holiday was created as a holiday, not a working day, that all Victorians can share in. I point out for those members in country Victoria, like Mr Purcell, there are a range of benefits. The Kennett government ripped away the Royal Melbourne Show Day public holiday which allowed people from the country to come to Melbourne to enjoy and participate in the Royal Melbourne Show. After this year, the grand final eve public holiday will fall during the Royal Melbourne Show and school holidays.

The benefit will be that Melburnians who would like to take advantage of the long weekend will be able to travel. Data from Tourism Victoria shows that they do extensively travel to enjoy the advantages of a long weekend, spending money in rural and regional Victoria. It also shows that people who come into Victoria, and predominantly Melbourne, will have the benefit of being able to utilise that day to visit, for example, the Royal Melbourne Show. There are a range of benefits that we will be able to take advantage of.

It remains a great sadness and disappointment to me that those opposite are more interested in undertaking motions against people spending more time with their loved ones. I look forward to the great protectors of employment rights, Mr Finn and Mr Ondarchie, putting forward a motion regarding 7-Eleven stealing wages from its workers as outlined in a recent *Four Corners* report. I look forward to the motion that will no doubt come from Mr Finn and Mr Ondarchie, because many people have been greatly affected by the 7-Eleven scam that was exposed by *Four Corners*. It is quite deplorable in 2015.

Mr Drum interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Acting President, I call on Mr Drum to withdraw the vulgar and abusive remark he made.

Mr Drum interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — If you are going to say it, have the courage and conviction to withdraw it. Do not be weak; stand up and withdraw it.

Mr Drum — Acting President, I told the idiot to sit down.

Mr DALIDAKIS — No, you used a profanity. Withdraw it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Eideh) — Order! Mr Drum, that is not appropriate. I ask you to withdraw.

Mr Drum — I withdraw.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Let us now move on to the content of the report. I have finished with the executive summary. I am now on to page 2.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Eideh) — Order! I ask the minister to continue with his contribution.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I suspect my contribution may have already finished if there had not been so many interjections and points of order up until now. Under chapter 1 — and for Mr Ondarchie's benefit I will be relatively quick — —

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I am happy to have dinner with you any time, Mr Ondarchie. We will even share a Dilmah tea. Prior to the gazettal of the public holidays

Victoria sat beneath the G20 average, which was calculated at approximately 12 public holidays per year. Table 5 in the report notes the number of public holidays for some of the other G20 countries. I will get to that in just a moment. It is important to note that Victoria has moved from 11 public holidays, which is beneath the average, to 13, which is just slightly above the average of 12. It is important to note that Singapore and South Africa both have 14 public holidays.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Singapore is often used as an example of both efficient and strong economic performance, and accordingly it is important to note that table 5 notes Singapore and South Africa together. It is at table 5; if Mr Ondarchie had looked at the RIS he probably would have noted that Singapore and South Africa have 14 public holidays. I am not for one moment advocating that we move to 14 public holidays by any stretch, but the RIS notes it, so I just make use of the table that the department provided in its own document. Singapore is often cited by us as an economy that we should try to replicate in a range of different areas, and we will try to continue to look to that.

Let me come back to a couple of observations made by Mr Ondarchie in his contribution. He mentioned in particular two chambers of commerce that I have met with and people I have spoken to face to face. I have had a conversation with Mr Stone, the CEO of the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI), in which he and I had a discussion about this. He certainly put forward VECCI's position, which was that it was opposed to the creation of the public holidays, and I acknowledge that position. He and I also had a discussion about the strong economic performance of Victoria.

It is important to reflect on that because in paragraph (4) of his motion Mr Ondarchie very selectively talked about the last month of jobs data, which I find slightly amusing because when the Andrews government came to power after the November election unemployment was at nearly 7 per cent and on the most recent data provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics it is at 6.1 per cent.

Mr Ondarchie — The minister found it amusing that people have lost their jobs?

Mr DALIDAKIS — I found Mr Ondarchie's selective quotation of the last month's job data, in comparison to the fact that unemployment is now at 6.1 per cent, quite —

Ms Shing — Bemusing.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I thank my colleague — bemusing. Because it is now 6.1 per cent —

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — No, I was amused at Mr Ondarchie's selective use of one month's data. That is exactly what *Hansard* will show.

Mr Ondarchie — That is not what you said.

Mr DALIDAKIS — That is exactly what I said. Because when we came to government, unemployment was at nearly 7 per cent and it is now at 6.1 per cent. What we can see by that is that economic data proves that the economy is trending up under the Andrews Labor government, and that must be an inconvenient truth to Mr Ondarchie as he tries to prosecute the indefensible, which is the economic program of the previous Geoff Shaw-led government, which was disastrous for Victorians. It took an unemployment rate of 4.9 per cent — post the global financial crisis, I might add — and got it to nearly 7 per cent when we again took over. The last time the Victorian unemployment rate had a 7 in front of it was — believe it or not — when Jeff Kennett lost the election. There are a range of similarities we can see that history teaches us we should be cognisant of. It is important that we all be wary of history lest it repeat itself — in which case the previous government took its eyes off the road.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — If unemployment has gone from 6.9 per cent to 6.1 per cent, I say to Mr Ondarchie that clearly a lot of new jobs have been created. Okay?

That was the first conversation, with Mr Stone at VECCI. The other chamber of commerce I spoke to was the Geelong Chamber of Commerce, which I spoke to recently. We spoke at length about a range of issues, and believe it or not we spoke on the public holiday issue for a minimal amount of time. What I said to it was that this government has a strong book of programs in support of Geelong and that it looks forward to supporting the region as best it can and doing what it can, and it acknowledged that it will be the beneficiary of tourism through the region, from Geelong right through to Victoria's west. It is a beautiful area of Victoria. If people are looking to enjoy a long weekend, I encourage them to get out that way because there is a lot of beauty to admire, appreciate and experience.

What I would like to end on is that the motion before us is, sadly, not a motion fighting for the workers.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DALIDAKIS — No way. This is not a motion fighting for 7-Eleven workers who have been abused by system roting of franchisees, the head office of which is now undertaking a review, and I encourage that review to be open and full and to look at the abuses of the 7-Eleven workers accordingly. We do not have a motion before us — —

Mr Ondarchie — On a point of order, Acting President — and I am sorry to draw your attention to this, but clearly you were not listening to what the minister was saying — the minister was talking about the 7-Eleven workers, and I do not see where that actually features in the grand final public holiday motion that is before us. I ask you to bring him back to the motion.

Ms Shing — On the point of order, Acting President, I note that today's contributions have been far ranging, and I think the minister is entitled to respond to the consistent interjections which come from the other side of the house in the form of talking about how this is not considerate of workers' priorities, needs or responsibilities. In that regard he might be guided to be brought back, but there is no point of order.

Mrs Peulich — On the point of order, Acting President, the minister is clearly using this as a convenient diversion to actually facing up to the debate, and the views of the newcomer should really be rejected because they are irrelevant, as she is.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! I am on my feet! There is no point of order, and I ask the minister to bring his attention back to the motion.

Ms Shing — On a point of order, Acting President, Mrs Peulich has just said that the point raised was 'irrelevant, as she is'. I find the statement by Mrs Peulich that I am irrelevant to be offensive, and I ask that she immediately withdraw it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! There is no point of order in relation to that. I ask the minister to continue.

Mr DALIDAKIS — For the record in *Hansard*, let me make it very clear that I believe Ms Shing's contributions to be very relevant, and I believe that her being here benefits the debate in this place. Those

opposite should be a little bit more respectful and courteous rather than attempting to be abusive towards her and bullying — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! Minister! I ruled. I ask the minister to bring his attention back to the motion.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I am in the process of doing that. I am making it very clear for Hansard's benefit that if those opposite wish to bully a new member of this chamber — —

Mr Ondarchie — On a point of order, Acting President, the operation of this house is supposed to be sacrosanct. Twice now you have directed the minister to come back to the motion. He flouted your ruling on the first occasion, and he is flouting it again. I ask you to bring him back to the motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! My initial two rulings stand. The minister is to bring his attention back to the motion before the house.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Again, Acting President, I appreciate that, and I am attempting to do so, but every time I get part way through doing that opposition members seem to get glass jaws and bristle. Those opposite wish to be abusive of my colleagues, and I will rightly defend my colleagues.

Let us get back to this. I flatly reject the wording of paragraph (3) of Mr Ondarchie's motion. I do not think there is anything more inflammatory or ridiculous than to claim that the RIS process was a sham consultation. It has never been the perspective of this government that it was a sham consultation, and I find the wording used by Mr Ondarchie to be offensive.

On paragraph (4), as I said, unemployment is now at 6.1 per cent. When we took over government it was nearly 7 per cent. Mr Ondarchie can try to selectively quote previous data from yesterday, last week or last month, but the fact remains that in the nine months since we took over confidence is up and unemployment is down because employment is up. That is an inconvenient truth which proves that, in the broader picture, the economy is actually trending much better than it was. If Mr Ondarchie takes pleasure in trying to talk down the Victorian economy, I think that would be quite reprehensible for a member of this chamber, who should be supporting the Victorian economy and supporting the fact that unemployment is now at — —

Mr Finn — On a point of order, Acting President, we have been listening to the minister now for about 52½ minutes, and I can fully understand why he long

ago ran out of things to say, but an occasional reference to the motion would probably be a very good thing. You have asked him to speak to the motion on a number of occasions. He is now expanding this into a wideranging discussion on anything that enters his head, albeit briefly. I ask you to once again reaffirm your direction to him to speak to the motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn) — Order! I thank Mr Finn. There is no point of order. The minister is to continue.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I was referring to paragraph (4), and I am amused by Mr Finn's attempt to disrupt the debate. As I was stating, paragraph (4) is an attempt to talk down the Victorian economy, when in actual fact the Victorian economy is at the moment in its best shape since we took over government in November last year. When we took over, unemployment was nearly at 7 per cent. It is now at 6.1 per cent, and a large part of that has been because Premier Andrews has had a very significant jobs and works program. This is why Victoria is now ahead of the national average, and that is something everybody should be proud of because Victoria is getting back on its feet after four years of being in the barren wastelands of the abyss.

Paragraph (5) is in relation to the former Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, and I find it quite unedifying that those opposite continually try to muckrake and refer to the previous minister in a way that is somewhat disparaging. The previous minister in this place discharged his duties appropriately, and in relation to — —

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — Let me finish. In relation to this very specific question — —

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I am on my feet, and you are not. In relation to this very specific motion, time and again the previous minister took questions in this place and answered them in relation to the public holiday while the RIS process was underway. Each and every time the previous minister provided answers completely and to the best of his ability. He said that while the regulatory impact statement was underway it was difficult to provide comment at that point, not because he chose not to do so but because he did not want to prejudice the process that was already underway. That process has since been completed. This government — —

Mrs Peulich — On a point of order, Deputy President, the minister on his feet is inferring that paragraph (5) of the motion is a direct personal attack on Mr Somyurek, which clearly it is not. In actual fact the attack came from within Labor ranks, and he was stitched up on a factional basis. Predominantly this is about the answers that the minister has given in response to the Premier making an announcement unilaterally with regard to small business.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! It is my view that that is debating, not a point of order.

Mr DALIDAKIS — I think it is most unedifying of us to refer to the previous minister in a general business motion.

As the current minister — and this may delight Mr Ondarchie — I take full responsibility for the gazettal of these holidays. I take 100 per cent, full responsibility. In fact last Friday I spent the afternoon with a variety of businesses along with Commerce Ballarat, which brought in a group of both service and non-service related traders to meet with me, all of whom expressed their disappointment with the public holiday. I acknowledge that. At no stage have I ever sought or attempted to suggest or imply that there are not businesses out there that will not be happy with the creation of a public holiday. However, Labor had a commitment dating back to 2011, when we were in opposition, that should we be elected last year, which we were, we would implement the public holidays. We stand by that commitment.

We went through a regulatory impact statement process because that is what is required in order to gazette the public holidays. That required me to consider the submissions. We did consider the submissions, and there was nothing in the submissions that suggested to us that we should do anything other than continue to implement our election commitment. That is what we have always done. That is what we have committed to doing. That is what I have been committed to doing since I took over the portfolio, and that is what I continue to stand by, which is why this motion is ridiculous and why we will not support this motion.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — Mr Dalidakis has effectively said time and again that this public holiday is going to allow people to be with their loved ones. Mr Dalidakis will therefore spend this day locked in a room with himself.

Mr Finn — And he will enjoy his own company; he is the only one who does.

Mr DRUM — Absolutely. Mr Dalidakis said that if you love Australian Rules football, you have to love the fact that we are having a public holiday before the grand final. That is just absolute rubbish, because the people who genuinely love Australian Rules football did not ask for this. The people who genuinely love and work for Australian Rules football did not want this. This is something that has caused enormous embarrassment within the AFL. This is something that has caused the AFL to abandon a tradition it has had for 35 years.

Mr Dalidakis does not understand that many of the people who are out there running small businesses do not even know this holiday is coming. Many of them do not even know they are going to be hit with two and a half times their average wage bills on the day because of this thought bubble from a thoughtless Premier. Daniel Andrews no doubt snuck this announcement out, and now he has to fight through the embarrassment and ridicule of having to follow through on this ridiculous idea.

The government is therefore bound to do an RIS, a regulatory impact statement, and we have heard it from the minister himself in this chamber that ‘We’re only doing this RIS because we have to. We’re not going to pay any attention to whatever is in the submissions. We don’t care what is in the submissions. We do not care what the cost of this holiday is. We do not care about the impact it has on business. We are going to go ahead and do this because we snuck this announcement out. We are paying back somebody. Even though nobody wants it, we are going to go ahead and inflict this pain on our small businesses’.

Very soon the people of Victoria are going to learn that what we have at the moment is a Premier who when he gets behind a microphone always says the right things. Victorians are going to have to learn not to judge this Premier by what he says but by what he actually does. We have a Premier who four days out from an election said, ‘The contracts for the east–west link are not worth the paper they are written on. The side letter associated with the contract is not worth the paper it is written on. I will be tearing them up as soon as I can. I will make them public within a week of winning this election. I will make both the contract of the east–west link and the side letter associated with that contract public property within a week of winning the election’. He broke that promise for months and months. He then realised he was going to have to pay compensation.

This is a Premier who says one thing and does another. This is a Premier who is being ridiculed and who is having to fight through this embarrassment. He is

having to tell all these surprised small businesses that they are going to have to cop this excess when it comes to the wages associated with this holiday. Small businesses must feel under attack from Daniel Andrews. He must understand that the minister effectively said in his contribution, ‘No-one really works on Friday before the grand final anyway. No-one does anything that is productive, so we might as well just give them a day off. Everyone goes for a long lunch’. That was the most staggering contribution I have ever heard. It is just ridiculous.

The simple facts are that businesses that have a high quota of casual staff are going to have to ask many of those casual staff to stay home. Many casual staff will be sent home early. Many of those businesses that have flexibility within their working arrangements are going to have to ask their permanent staff to carry the bulk of the load on that Friday. In many instances it means that mums and dads will drag their family and friends into their businesses to help them keep the doors open on what is normally one of their busiest and most profitable days, the Friday before the AFL Grand Final. There will be many businesses that do the sums and decide that, unfortunately, they are simply going to have to close. Therefore the visitor experience that the Labor Party keeps talking about and says will be so eminent in regional Victoria will be a much lesser experience for all those people who decide to travel to take advantage of this unwanted day off.

I look at the government trying to defend this stupid decision — this act of stupidity from the Premier, and I note that it is trying to defend it the best way it can — but we are yet to see anybody from the government say that they will commit to this holiday for their term of government. I think they are hoping that the holiday goes through, they can get away with it and it just goes away, and maybe next year they will ask people to go back to work.

When this government first came into this house last year, it said its first job was to get Victoria back to work. It said this in Parliament time and again when it brought us back for a sitting in late December 2014, a couple of weeks after being elected. It was urgent that we come back because Premier Daniel Andrews and his government had to get Victoria back to work. The very first thing they did was give Victorians two extra days off! Where is the continuity in what this government is doing?

This is a government that says one thing and simply does the exact opposite. We have to hold it to account. It is a government that sounds good behind the microphone, but when you look at its actions you see a

government that is absolutely bereft of ideas — and bereft of the true courage and conviction to acknowledge that it has made a horrendous mistake in inflicting this on a community and a sport that do not want it and changing a tradition that has been going on for years! For 35 or 40 years the grand final parade has gone down St Kilda Road and Swanston Street into Collins Street, with the two teams presented in front of the Old Treasury building. This will ruin the whole thing. It will turn Melbourne's CBD into a ghost town the Friday before one of its most spectacular sporting events. It is ludicrous and it is crazy, yet government members are still standing over there trying to justify this. It is just nuts.

Gillon McLachlan and Mike Fitzpatrick are so embarrassed that they have had to change the route of the parade to try to salvage it, and the government still does not get it! Somewhere between \$700 million and \$1 billion in costs will be added to small business, and the minister does not understand — or does not want to understand — the regulatory impact statement. He says, 'Have you asked all of the businesses?'. We have asked as many as we can. Around 80 per cent feel so strongly about this that they are prepared to put their names forward in the hope of knocking it back.

The AFL did not want this. The business community did not want this. The workers of Victoria never asked for this. The minister is saying that 3 million people will enjoy this, but never once did those 3 million people ask publicly for a public holiday on the day before the AFL Grand Final. It is amazing that we have been put in this situation and have to pay for the cost of this ridiculous government.

I will go through a few responses from my home town of Bendigo. Jock Clark, the proprietor of the Match restaurant, said:

My grandmother told me that it's better to open and make a little bit of money than not open and make nothing — but it's just ludicrous. I'll open, but just.

Norm Quinn, the former mayor and highly respected fruiterer in the main street of Bendigo, said:

Please tell me I'm dreaming that the government just invented another long weekend. I'm still thinking about whether or not I'll open, but it'll cost me.

Let's Get Saucy, an award-winning Eaglehawk food business, has said it will not open but it is still going to cost it a lot of money. Clogs restaurant, one of our better restaurants in the main street, said it will open but 'let's hope someone starts making some good decisions about this'. An online poll by the Gold radio network covering Maryborough, Bendigo and Ballarat asked,

'Are you in favour of the grand final eve public holiday?', and 80 per cent of respondents said no. Another business commented:

It's causing havoc far and wide. If I open or don't open I have to work in with those harvesting produce and delivering it from as far away as Queensland.

Another restaurant, which is unnamed, has said:

I reckon a lot of places which choose to open and then don't do much business will simply cut back on staff ...

The Bendigo Traders Association president has said any additional costs will make it harder. The manager of Barzurk, Matthew Bird, said:

A lot of people are very angry. I think we'll open, but it'll be at a cost.

Mark Coffey, from Wine Bank on View, said:

We thought it was an April Fools' Day joke and if it'd been on any other day of the week, we'd just shut, but it is Friday night — our busiest night — so we can't take the risk. But it is just a big pain in the ...

A.

We have asked people for comment and it seems that in Bendigo only two people have come out in favour. One was a visiting Premier, Daniel Andrews, and the other one was the Minister for Public Transport, Jacinta Allan.

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I am pleased to make a contribution to this debate. I congratulate Mr Ondarchie for bringing this very important issue before the Parliament. The reality is that the businesses and the employers of Victoria have not really had the opportunity to have a say on this particular issue. The government said it was going to have two new public holidays, with no consultation whatsoever. It then ran a sham consultation process with the regulatory impact statement (RIS) after which the minister against small business stood up and said, 'We're not going to take any notice of the RIS. It doesn't matter what it says — we're going ahead with these public holidays anyway'.

When the minister was appointed, small business was hoping it would get a Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. It very soon found out that it was given a minister who was against small business, who will not operate in their best interests. I spent 27 years working in small business with my family prior to coming into Parliament. I grew up in small business. I was eight when my parents went into a small business. I was old enough to be able to remember what life was like before, when Dad worked hard in the corporate world but had weekends at home with the family, and I

remember how life changed for us when we went into small business. We probably saw more of Dad, but we did so by working together in the business. I know the impact that public holidays have on small business people and their families and I know what the additional workload is.

Not only small businesses but all Victorians will suffer because of this public holiday. I would like to put a bit of a different spin on this debate and consider what the public holiday will mean for health services in my electorate. For instance, we know that public hospitals do not schedule elective surgery on public holidays. We know also that at Goulburn Valley Health 511 patients are waiting for surgery. With no surgery on that Friday before the grand final, probably 15 to 20 people on the elective surgery list will have to wait longer, but all 511 people will wait longer because they will all be pushed down the list while they wait for their surgery to be scheduled. The Tongala and District Memorial Aged Care Service has said that the two new public holidays will cost it \$25 500. In aged care it is very difficult to find that sort of additional money.

I have been contacted by disability services in my electorate. They say that the additional public holiday will mean that exhausted families dealing with young people with disabilities will have to care for their families on those days because the disability services will be closed. A number of other people, including dentists, have contacted me to say that they have had to cancel patients care on that day because it will be a public holiday. The impact of the public holiday on businesses goes far further than wages; it will impact also on people's health and their ability to get services.

I surveyed a number of businesses in my electorate, and many of them have come up with some really important points. An interstate transport business said that it will cost the business \$20 000 in lost production and that no thought has been given to the impact the public holiday will have on businesses that operate across different states. A printing business that employs 16 people said that it will cost it \$10 000 in lost productivity on that one day. A construction company of 14 people said:

The cost alone is in excess of \$10 000 — do I need to say any more.

Another construction company said that it will be a financial hit of \$4000 per day, plus lost time and inefficiencies on all contracts.

I can go on and on. A lot of disparaging remarks about the Labor government have been included in the feedback I have had. People referred to the effect of cancelling appointments, the absolute stupidity of this

holiday and the fact that Labor just do not care. One person said:

The Premier should take a good look at country Victoria and just how many small businesses there are. I hope he enjoys the parade!

We in country Victoria will not be enjoying the parade. Another response was:

Small business will pay for this stupidity. Damned if we open and damned if we don't.

One business said:

Thank you for the opportunity to have a say.

The government did not give these businesspeople the opportunity to have a say, and government members are not listening to those businesspeople now. The responses go on and on about Labor not understanding small business. They talk about the impact on casual employment and the loss of wages to the families of those employees. They talk about the impact on families in small business having to do that additional work. They say that Labor just does not want to listen.

This is a public holiday that is not necessary, and it was not wanted. Even the AFL did not want it. This public holiday will turn Melbourne into a ghost town for the many visitors from interstate. They will not be able to shop and enjoy the experience of Melbourne as it normally operates. That could affect our tourism even in the longer term.

I thank Mr Ondarchie for bringing this motion before the house today to allow us to at least put forward the thoughts of our constituents about Labor's unnecessary public holidays.

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to contribute to the debate today on this very important motion moved by Mr Ondarchie, who has very articulately, as he always does, outlined a whole range of concerns about the imposition by the Labor government of the grand final parade public holiday. I will raise a couple of areas from the perspective of health in the context of the motion. The first is the cost to health services and the community and the second is the impact of services not being open on that day, both of which are addressed in the regulatory impact statement (RIS), but not in detail.

It is quite astounding to me the extent to which the Minister for Health has gone to avoid articulating what the cost is to public health services of these new public holidays, and in particular the grand final parade public holiday. I have here a file that is half an inch thick. The minister has been asked a question in Public Accounts

and Estimates Committee hearings and in the debate on the appropriation bill. She has been asked during questions without notice and has been asked to give a written response. She has been asked in questions on notice. In fact the President has now twice reinstated the question because there was not an answer. The very simple question asked has been: what is the cost to Victorian health services of the new grand final parade public holiday and also the Easter Sunday public holiday?

This was something that the Labor Party in opposition was prepared to articulate in *Labor's Financial Statement 2014*, saying that the cost of the grand final holiday would be about \$22 million this financial year and it would be \$11 million for Easter Sunday. We have not had one answer. There has been ducking, weaving and avoiding. What is Labor trying to hide by not answering a very simple and straightforward question, with Labor members pretending that they do not know the answer to this very simple question? They are not matching up their commitments with what they will actually cost.

We know that it will be substantially more than Labor committed. Even the RIS aggregates public sector agencies and non-profit agencies to a total cost and it also aggregates local, state and federal governments, so that there is no transparency and the cost of these public holidays is absolutely hidden. This is a choice that the Labor government is making to invest in an additional public holiday rather than investing in our health services and delivering more services to more of the Victorian community. This is a clear sign of the government's lack of transparency and its commitment to fulfilling union payback. These are policies that Labor committed to before the election and that it is now implementing, and these policies are diverting money that would otherwise go towards delivering more services for more Victorians.

The Victorian Healthcare Association has published its concerns in relation to the new Victorian public holiday. Metropolitan health services expect to incur an additional \$600 000 in operating costs; small rural health services expect about \$82 000 in additional operating costs; rural health services that are even smaller than that expect to incur an additional \$42 000; and community health expects to incur an additional \$70 000 to pay wages on a weekday public holiday. These are dramatic costs across the board, and it is not clear that they have all been funded. Once again the minister is ducking, weaving and hiding from answering the simple question: what are the costs of these public holidays to the Victorian public? We see it again and again. It is not good enough, and it is not

acceptable. The minister should answer this very straightforward question. We know the work is done, and we know the analysis has been done. What she refuses to do is answer the very simple question and provide transparency about the decisions and priorities of this Labor government to invest in additional public holidays rather than the expansion of public health services.

The second issue I want to raise in relation to this motion is what it practically means for health services. Elective surgeries would normally be scheduled for the Friday before the grand final and it would just be a normal work day. If we make a rough estimate, about 700 elective surgeries are performed on any normal working day across the state. These surgeries will now be closed on this public holiday. Emergency services and emergency surgery will of course continue to be available, but elective surgeries will not be scheduled. That is 700 people who will not get their surgery on that day because of this new public holiday. This surgery will be delayed and deferred, and this is at a time when elective surgery waiting lists are increasing under this government. What the government is seeking to do through this policy is exacerbate this problem even more.

A straightforward service such as public dental health is very important for the community. On any given day there are roughly 3500 visits to dental services, which are funded by the public for people across the state. The waiting times for these services are increasing. People are waiting longer for dentures and restorative dental care. If you look at Labor's own budget for 2015–16, you will see there is a drop in the number of people being treated. Again, 3500 visits to dental services will not occur because of this new public holiday. The dental association has done a good job of providing a submission to the RIS panel to articulate its concerns. The submission is from Dr Stephen Liew, president of the Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB). Dr Liew said in his submission that the ADAVB believes that the RIS:

... underestimated the economic cost to small businesses, such as dental practices, and did not consider the effect on public access to dental care.

So the new public holiday does have an effect on dental practices. Dr Liew says that the economic impact for dental services in Victoria if dental practices close on this day will be about \$4.7 million. If dental practices choose to remain open, there will still be a loss of \$2.9 million, which is a dramatic impact on dental practices. It is not just about dental practices; it is also about patients receiving treatment.

Dr Liew goes on to say in his submission:

Our experience demonstrates that creating more public holidays would decrease public access to emergency dental care on those days.

This policy of the Labor Party is having a dramatic impact on small businesses such as dental services. It is having a dramatic impact on the ability of health services to manage and address their elective surgery waiting lists. Most importantly it is having a dramatic impact on patients who would be accessing the services on those days, who now will have to experience further delays under this Labor government. This is a policy that is not — —

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Kangaroo control

Mr YOUNG (Northern Victoria) — My question is for the Leader of the Government as the representative in this house of the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water. I ask: how many permits to destroy native wildlife were issued in the last 12 months for kangaroos and what was the total number of kangaroos on those permits?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I thank Mr Young for his question. I had a sneaking suspicion that this question might be coming, so I may be able to furnish the house with some advice. I certainly know, on the basis of my advice, that in 2014 there were about 1600 authorities to control wildlife permits issued in Victoria and they authorised the control of about 84 000 kangaroos in Victoria during that period of time. In the last 12 months, from last September to this September, there has been an increase in the number of permits that have been issued. That number has been 2462 for 12 months, which has authorised the killing of 131 720 kangaroos across the Victorian landscape.

I am sure there are many members of the community who may find that a distressing issue when they consider the protected nature of wildlife in Victoria. It is incumbent on the government to remind the community that within that large kangaroo population there is a demonstrable negative impact not only on agricultural production but also in some cases in relation to biodiversity and threatening the habitat and viability of endangered species across the Victorian landscape. There are both ecological and agricultural reasons for control of the kangaroo population in Victoria, that has a benefit not only for the viability of

agriculture and the safety of some communities, in particular on some areas of our road network that may have a greater proliferation of kangaroos traversing them, but also in some cases for the protection of endangered species and other wildlife.

It is a population that needs to have some degree of control to it, and the issuing of authorities for control of wildlife permits provides for a regulated space in which that can occur. From the maths, when I drilled down and had a look at the number of kangaroos that are authorised to be killed through those permits, it is on average in the order of about 50 head of the kangaroo population per permit application. It is the government's intention to continue to provide for the humane removal of the kangaroo population in a sustained and appropriate fashion that is regulated. That is the means by which the government currently regulates that activity.

Supplementary question

Mr YOUNG (Northern Victoria) — I thank the minister for his answer, and I am not surprised at all that the number this year has had to increase by such a large amount. As a supplementary question, I ask: what data collection is conducted to determine how many kangaroos were actually destroyed under those permits?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I am going to have to take some further advice from my colleagues in relation to this in terms of the method of verification and validation and the confidence they have that what they issue and regulate is in accordance with the advice I have been provided. As Mr Young could tell from my substantive answer, there is a high degree of confidence in the department that it knows the situation because it asserts what that population control outcome is. I will speak with the department and provide supplementary information about the manner by which it undertakes that work.

Colac Area Health

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Families and Children, Ms Mikakos. As the minister would be aware, Colac Area Health has had the funding for its youth worker cut. However, the person in that position continues due to local efforts to continue some measure of funding for the position. Is the minister able to confirm that the funding for this position was cut under the coalition government, and in the same vein has the minister been able to take any steps to find a way to have ongoing funding reinstated?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank Mr Barber for his question. I can confirm that the defunding of this program did occur under the previous government. The 2015–17 Engage! program funding was finalised by the former government last year, and all funding has been committed for this program for three years. I understand that Colac Area Health has been extremely disappointed about not receiving Engage! funding during this three-year process, and I understand that it and many other organisations that had previously received funding for important youth programs in their areas missed out on funding for that three-year period that the previous government announced last year.

The thing that has disappointed me the most in relation to the information I have seen relates to the process the previous minister undertook in making deliberations around which groups were going to get funded. I have heard of a number of organisations that were concerned about this process, and some significant questions need to be asked about how the previous minister and government went about engaging in this process. Organisations like Colac Area Health and many others that missed out on funding deserve an explanation. An analysis of the grant applications shows there was a significant proportion of applications that seemed to be geographically skewed in how they were allocated — for example, 62 per cent of applicants from the eastern metropolitan region of the Department of Health and Human Services were successful, while only 17 per cent of applicants were successful from Mr Barber’s and my electorate in the department’s northern metropolitan region. I am sure that is not as a result of poor submission writing on behalf of organisations in the northern parts of Melbourne.

Regional Victoria also fared very badly in the allocation of grants by the previous government. Between 33 and 49 per cent of applications were successful from the regional areas of the Department of Health and Human Services, which is significantly less than the number that were successful in many parts of metropolitan Melbourne. A lot of questions need to be asked about how decisions were made by the previous government.

As I have explained to the member, the previous government essentially locked up the funding for this program for three years, from 2015 to 2017, so that puts me in a very difficult position in terms of assisting Colac Area Health in relation to this. However, I am very sympathetic to the position it is in. I encourage it to continue to have discussions with my department, as it has had, about its particular needs going forward into the future.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order!

Supplementary question

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — By interjection the minister was suggesting just then to the coalition member that he was asking her to fix it. In fact it is the Colac area community that is asking the minister to fix it. While that was a useful statistical analysis of the first part of my question, the minister would also be very well aware of the statistics of disadvantage in the Colac area, including high levels of school absenteeism, family violence — including family violence where children are present — and of course drug use. Apart from discussions between Colac Area Health and her department, what action is the minister willing to take in order to provide some certainty to the community about the future of its position?

Ms MIKAKOS (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank Mr Barber for his supplementary question, and I certainly hope his new-found interest in the Colac community is not related to an upcoming by-election in that community. As I said, I am very sympathetic to the Colac community in relation to this issue. As I have explained, the previous government essentially locked up funding for three years — for 2015 to 2017 — in the Engage! program in the way it made those funding decisions. I encourage Colac Area Health to continue to have discussions with the Department of Health and Human Services about its needs going forward, but the Engage! program is fully committed until 2017 under a decision of the previous government.

I have been very sympathetic to Colac. I have just announced last week a new men’s shed that will be established in Colac — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! An interjection might well be tolerable, but a barrage from Mr Ramsay and Ms Lovell that keeps going is not. Ms Mikakos, to continue without assistance.

Ms MIKAKOS — It is interesting hearing from members of the coalition, who clearly did not speak to the minister at the time, last year, when he made the decision to defund Colac Area Health. It is very belated interest on their part.

RSPCA funding

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. The RSPCA is a private organisation exercising legal powers conferred on it by this Parliament. It is becoming increasingly concerning that what was established as an animal welfare organisation is now becoming an animal rights organisation that holds a privileged legal position. In 2013 the RSPCA euthanased 131 cattle in the Framlingham forest near Warrnambool. Recently, after a mammoth David and Goliath court case, the court ordered the RSPCA to pay \$1.4 million in compensation to the owners of the cattle. The court ruled that the RSPCA officers had acted illegally. I ask the Minister for Agriculture: will any of the funding that the state provides to the RSPCA through taxpayer funds be used by the RSPCA to pay the substantial costs incurred in this case?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Mr Purcell for his question and his interest in this matter. The Victorian government provides funding in the order of \$1 million a year to the RSPCA. This has been a longstanding arrangement that is to contribute to the cost of its inspectorate function, which is around a \$3.5 million-a-year operation. The Andrews Labor government is continuing that level of funding to support the inspectorate activity. There is memorandum of understanding in place that governs those arrangements.

There is also an additional \$5 million in funding being provided to the RSPCA, which was an election commitment that was part of our policy around cracking down on puppy farms. I can certainly assure Mr Purcell that none of these funds will be used by the RSPCA to assist it in meeting those legal costs associated with the matter Mr Purcell raised. I am advised that this will be met by the RSPCA through a combination of insurance and operations costs.

Supplementary question

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — I thank the minister for her reply. I ask the minister, considering her reply, whether she will review the role of the RSPCA and the extensive power the organisation has been given through this Parliament.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Mr Purcell for his supplementary question. The incident that is the subject of Mr Purcell's question is the only one of its nature over a very longstanding arrangement. I assure the house that we do maintain that memorandum of understanding with the RSPCA.

We have high expectations about the way in which it delivers on its obligations to the government as part of that arrangement. Aside from that, there are no immediate plans to review that arrangement.

China-Australia free trade agreement

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Last week the minister opened a fruit and vegetable fair in Beijing, saying her government is:

... committed to fostering closer trade and investment links between Victoria and China to capture more trade opportunities and create more jobs.

In the same week the Premier wrote to Trades Hall agreeing with the union concerns about the China-Australia free trade agreement. How can Victoria's trading partners in China believe the minister's words when the Premier is talking down the free trade agreement at home?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Mr Drum for his question and his interest in growing exports of our food and fibre products to China. This is our single biggest agricultural export market — it is larger than the next five combined — so the opportunities that exist for greater trade between Victoria and China that will come from the free trade agreement are significant. There will be tariff reductions in many commodities. Some will be quick and some will be a bit slower — they vary from product to product — but our dairy producers, our winemakers, our fruitgrowers and our producers of meat products are all exceptionally excited about the opportunities that exist.

I had the opportunity to meet many Australian businesses and Chinese businesses in China that are interested in building on existing investments or entering into new investments in Victoria. The free trade agreement presents an exceptional opportunity for Victoria to grow jobs. As Mr Drum well knows, we have identified six key sectors of the Victorian economy that are poised to underwrite the success of our economy into the future, and food and fibre, as one of our exports to China and to other trading partners, is an essential part of this.

Mr Drum suggested that the Premier does not support the free trade agreement. That is plainly false, and I would urge Mr Drum to have a look at the comments that Mr Andrews made in the Parliament in the last sitting week to that end. Indeed if Chinese investors and business are interested in asking Mr Andrews what he

thinks about this, they can ask him next week when he will be in China.

Supplementary question

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I thank the minister for her answer. When the minister met with the Chinese officials last week did she share the Victorian government's concerns that the free trade agreement might see Victorians lose their jobs to Chinese workers?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — Mr Drum can try as he might to suggest otherwise, but the Victorian government supports the ratification of the free trade agreement. This is a matter for the commonwealth Parliament to consider — the enabling legislation. That is actually what the debate is about. The Victorian government has made it very clear, the Premier has made it clear and I have made it clear on numerous occasions that we support the ratification of the free trade agreement. We think there are enormous opportunities to grow jobs for Victorians as a result of increasing exports and increasing two-way trade with China. Those opposite might want to talk it down, but it is an essential part of the Victorian economy's future, particularly for our food industries. We support the ratification of the agreement. There are great benefits to that occurring this year rather than next year.

Intensive farming

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is also to the Minister for Agriculture. I refer to the decision made by Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal deputy president Helen Gibson in *Yarra Ranges SC v. Happy Valley Free Range Pty Ltd*, and in particular the impact of what is effectively a new definition of intensive agriculture. I therefore ask: will the minister guarantee that farmers supplementing the feed of their livestock during periods of drought will not run foul of these draconian new provisions?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Mr Davis for his question — I think it is his first question to me regarding my agriculture portfolio. There are no new arrangements. What is new is a review of this issue, which is in the process of being established — something the Minister for Planning, Mr Wynne, and I announced a couple of weeks ago. It will be an independent planning panel's consideration of matters where increasingly intensive agricultural production is coming into conflict with community aspirations and community desires. We see entirely too much of this conflict. We want to grow our industries. There are some tipping points around the definition of

intensive — or extensive becoming intensive — and some of these are evidenced by a percentage change in feed brought in from another location from 49 per cent to 51 per cent.

These are not new arrangements but they are causing unnecessary and increasing conflict, and that is why we are in the process of appointing a panel to review these matters and take submissions from industry and affected communities so that we can all move forward with less conflict and greater confidence for our producers.

Supplementary question

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for her answer, but I note it did not get to the full nub of the issue with respect to periods of drought. Therefore I ask the minister: given that some areas of the state already face very dry conditions, what steps will she take to ensure that those farmers relying upon supplementary feeding arrangements will not fall victim to these provisions in October or November this year as they ramp up their feeding to manage dry conditions?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank the member for his question. I think he misunderstands the issue a little bit. This is really about the circumstances where people tip from one set of planning arrangements into another. We are verging on the area of responsibility that is very much that of the Minister for Planning, but obviously I have an interest in our producers being able to proceed with their business and go about their work with confidence. This is exactly why we are keen to have a review of the definition of extensive versus intensive — because it is so arbitrary and because feeding requirements change, not only in times of particularly dry conditions but even through a year of average rainfall. These conditions do come and go. These are not new arrangements, as Mr Davis suggested in his initial question. This is something that we are looking at.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I thank the minister.

Ms PULFORD — I also indicate to Mr Davis, if I could, President, just very quickly, that the piggery industry is keen for it to be regulated as intensive.

Ordered that answer be considered next day on motion of Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan).

Intensive farming

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — This question is also for the Minister for Agriculture. In respect of the Blackmore Wagyu beef farm, the planning minister's decision to call in this matter and her decision to convene an advisory committee to advise her on broader policy issues, I ask: are the planning processes separate from the processes involving her committee or will the advisory committee replace standard planning processes in Mr Blackmore's case?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — I preface this by saying I am not the Minister for Planning — this is getting right into his area of responsibility — so I will proceed with caution. There is a section in the Planning and Environment Act 1987 that I am only partly familiar with because I am not the planning minister — maybe Mr Davis knows it — but it is the section under which a planning advisory committee can be established to provide advice to the Minister for Planning. That is the mechanism that is being used to establish this advisory group.

On the matter of David Blackmore and his dispute with the Murrindindi Shire Council, that matter was appealed to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and the planning minister has called that in. Really these are questions the member needs to be asking the planning minister.

Supplementary question

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — Let me ask very directly about the advisory committee that has been established. I understand that there have been discussions between the minister's office and the Minister for Planning's office on this matter. On what date will the planning advisory committee be established, what will the membership of that committee be and why, 26 days later, has it not yet been established?

The PRESIDENT — Order! Before the minister answers, I make the observation that the minister has indicated that this committee has been constituted under a planning act and under the jurisdiction of the Minister for Planning and not of the minister in the house. The minister in the house has sought to be helpful to the house in indicating that that was the method by which the committee has been established, and I certainly accept that in terms of a minister venturing into a jurisdiction other than their own the minister has not done so in that substantive answer.

I indicate that the minister may well be in a position to answer this question, but it certainly occurs to me that, given the instrument used to establish the committee, it is more likely that the Minister for Planning is the appropriate minister for these matters and that any reference to the minister in our house is likely to have been by way of consultation on the matter rather than by way of decision.

Mr Dalidakis — On a point of order, President, given that I represent the Minister for Planning I am certainly happy to have the shadow minister redirect that question to me, if he would prefer to, as a substantive question.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will rule on that first, and I am not sure if this will be helpful to the point that Mr Davis wishes to make, which may be more in the context of what I have said than what Mr Dalidakis has said. Under our standing orders I say to Mr Dalidakis that that would not be possible. The substantive question has been put to Minister Pulford; therefore the supplementary question needs to be directed to the same minister. Ms Pulford is in a position to despatch that question and to perhaps suggest where else that question might be better put, in which case it would need to be a subsequent question.

Mr Davis — On a point of order, President, I am aware that the minister's office has been directly involved in the constitution of that panel, and in that sense I think the minister does have involvement.

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Mr Ramsay — Why don't you let Ms Pulford answer it?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am of that view as well. Just on Mr Davis's point of order, I accept that, and no doubt Ms Pulford will provide the house with some indication of the extent of involvement of her office in the constitution of the panel. My remarks were simply made by way of — if you like — caution to the house as to where I saw the minister's responsibilities lying at that point. But it may well be that the minister has more information that she can provide to the house, given the consultation that may well have occurred with her office.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — Thank you to everyone for their contribution to the discussion. Obviously a portfolio like agriculture has an advocacy role in a whole lot of other areas of government responsibility. I know I have taken questions on freight rail, questions on the port and questions on various other things, so I am trying to be helpful. It is a

committee that is being established under planning legislation, and the provisions in that legislation describe that mechanism as a report to the Minister for Planning. As you indicated, President, in the to and fro just now, my role in this has been one of an advocate. Obviously it is in the interests of the industry which I am charged with supporting that we move on with this as soon as possible and get this work done because of the nature of the conflict that exists in communities in some parts of Victoria from time to time and, in my view, all too frequently.

Ministerial staff

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is again for the Minister for Agriculture. What is the name or names of the staff in the minister's office who have been involved in negotiating the Blackmore Wagyu beef farm matter, and was it this staffer who gave advice to Mr Blackmore to apply to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal on the understanding that the case would then be called in by the Minister for Planning?

Ms Shing — How many questions is that?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I hear the interjection, and it is a worthwhile proposition to put to the Chair as to whether or not that constituted more than one question. The difficulty is that there was a possible plurality of staff involved in negotiations and then, as part of that question, we home in on one person. Nonetheless I will allow the question to stand.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — The decision by Murrindindi Shire Council to act contrary to the advice of its own planning staff in relation to the Blackmore case really ignited for the Victorian community a national debate around intensive farming. It is not the reason for the review, but it is not completely separate to it either. There are, as Mr Davis's first question around Happy Valley indicates, any number of examples of this — in the dairy industry; in piggeries; in poultry farming, both chicken meat and broiler farms; and in beef and lamb farming — where these conflicts are arising. The Blackmore case attracted a lot of attention. There was a petition posted by a very well known chef that attracted over 100 000 signatures; I believe it was the subject of a great deal of media interest. However, the issues around intensive farming were well known to the government and were the subject of discussions between me and Minister Wynne well beforehand.

I know that there were members of my staff who spoke to David Blackmore at the very earliest moment that

this was in the news to ask what his experience of the planning scheme had been, and I certainly make no apologies for providing advice and support to people who are trying to conduct their farming businesses in Victoria. Mr Blackmore spoke to a great many people — —

Mr Davis — On a point of order, President, it was actually a very precise question seeking the name of a member or members in the minister's office and whether in fact those members had given undertakings.

The PRESIDENT — Order! This is an interesting question because it is the view of the Chair that by and large members should not be pursuing the names of the staffers of ministers. We have had other rulings in this regard in the past; in fact I believe that I have also expressed opinions on this in the past. Obviously if there is some misbehaviour involved, then that might well be a different situation, but I am not sure that to simply find out which department staffer provided information to somebody is a fair question for the staffer involved, and I am not sure that it is necessarily in the public interest.

At the end of the day it is the minister who carries that responsibility for the actions of their staff and for the advice that might well have been given by the office rather than an individual staffer, who might then be subject to considerable and unfair scrutiny by parties outside this Parliament when that would not be appropriate given their responsibilities and the fact that they may well have simply been acting under the direction of a minister.

I think the responsibility here is the minister's responsibility, not the responsibility of the individual staffer, therefore the question does give me some difficulty. I allowed the minister to pursue an answer to the substantive question on the basis that she could make the judgement as to whether or not it was relevant to public interest and whether the knowledge was worthwhile to the house in terms of an individual within the department as distinct from her assuming that responsibility as the minister. On that basis I will allow the minister to complete her answer bearing in mind what I have said.

Ms PULFORD — I am confident that no undertakings of the nature Mr Davis is suggesting were made by any member of my staff, and the matter to call in the Blackmore decision was a decision of the planning minister. For the third time, I suggest that the member direct his question to the planning minister.

Supplementary question

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — Just prior to putting my supplementary question I make a point, President, and that is that you are quite right that ultimately ministers carry the can for what their staffers do or do not do. But nonetheless it is a legitimate line of inquiry, I believe, to understand what staff have said to certain members of the public, hence the question I am about to ask.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will comment on Mr Davis's statement first. There are occasions when that might be absolutely correct. As I said, this is an area of judgement by the Chair, and it is a judgement that must be exercised in the context of public interest in particular. To simply say that you can ask questions about members of staff — and I am not suggesting Mr Davis is doing this today — and in effect go on a fishing trip to find out who from a minister's office said what to whom is just not on. Unless there is some real concern about the behaviour that might well be a matter of public interest, then I say that the responsibility essentially resides with the minister, not the staff.

In this context I understand that Mr Davis's question and no doubt his supplementary question, though I do not know what it will be, are likely to go to this issue of any undertakings that have been made, and the minister has already advised the house that she does not believe any member of her staff has actually made any undertakings. That is a relevant line of inquiry if undertakings have been made that have suggested that the process could be manipulated or used in a certain way. Nonetheless, general advice — and it might well have been put as one of a number of possible scenarios of a matter going forward — is very different to specific advice, and there is a real chance of things being taken out of context in terms of this line of inquiry. Again, we need to bear that in mind, particularly in regard to just how responsible a member of staff is compared to the minister's responsibility in that jurisdiction.

Mr DAVIS — Specifically I am concerned that there may have been a misuse of legal process, and for that reason I am asking: in providing advice to Mr Blackmore, were the minister's staff freelancing without her knowledge and therefore not acting on her behalf or were they acting with her explicit knowledge and approval?

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will give Mr Davis one very narrow window of opportunity to rephrase his question. It is absolutely outrageous to propose to the minister that she can answer whether or not a staff

member was freelancing. She just cannot be expected to answer that sort of question. I will give Mr Davis a chance to rephrase his question.

Mr DAVIS — Then I ask a very narrow question: were the minister's staffers in their contacts on this matter acting with her explicit knowledge and approval?

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Agriculture) — Mr Davis seems to be suggesting that members of my staff made undertakings to Mr Blackmore. That is simply not the case. My staff had discussions with Mr Blackmore. Mr Blackwood spoke to a lot of people over that period of a number of weeks. I spoke to other advocates in the farming community who had also spoken to Mr Blackmore. Indeed Mr Davis may have noticed that these matters were canvassed widely in the papers. The decision to call in the planning dispute between David Blackmore and his family and the Murrindindi Shire Council was a decision of the planning minister.

Ordered that answer be considered next day on motion of Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan).

Dr Pradeep Philip

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Special Minister of State. This week it was announced that Dr Pradeep Philip will depart as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, less than nine months after the government appointed him to the role, and that he has now been appointed to lead the new yet tiny Start-Up Victoria. I ask: does the secretary's early and sudden departure have anything to do with the capability review into the department, and if not, what was the reason?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — The member is quite right to note that in fact Dr Philip has been appointed to commence a very important project on behalf of the Victorian government and in fact the Victorian economy by leading the organisation that will give life to our commitment to Victorian start-ups to drive innovation and to drive better economic performance. Indeed Dr Philip has an outstanding track record in terms of his economic credentials, his understanding of the economy and his understanding of innovation. He has been associated with that field of public policy development, and his experience is second to none in terms of being across the Victorian public sector and providing leadership in this area.

In fact the work he has done in recent times in terms of the medical research capacity within the Victorian

government in the last iteration of the government has been in the business portfolio. It was transferred to health in part because the level of appreciation, understanding and regard within the health portfolio for the biotech sector, the medical research institutes and others would allow them to have their work fully appreciated and given life.

The important aspect of this government's approach to innovation is that it understands that there needs to be appropriate industry support provided to the biotech industry, medical research institutes and other start-ups and that it be a feature of our economic wellbeing into the future. We see this as a first order issue that straddles portfolio responsibilities. While the member may refer to the immediate resource allocation out of a significant investment of \$60 million augmented by access to other future industry funds and the priorities of the Premier's Jobs and Investment Panel and other activity, there is a lot of work that will be undertaken by this government in collaboration with the business community and the start-up community to drive the innovation agenda.

Dr Philip is well qualified, experienced and determined to acquit his responsibilities as part of the government's forward economic agenda. He is certainly an excellent candidate who is well able to acquit this responsibility, and the government has great confidence in his work and his ability to do that.

Ms Wooldridge — On a point of order, President, I would ask you to draw the minister back to the question. The question was about the reason why he left the department, not why he was qualified for his new job.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am not in a position to direct the minister how to answer a question. I point out that in many ways this is a question for Dr Philip rather than for the minister as to why he might have gone somewhere else. I understand that if it were a government decision to move him because of the findings of the review, that would be a valid question and it would be within the minister's jurisdiction to answer that question. The minister has to this point indicated that the particular individual was suited to this new role, and in his opening the minister said he regarded it as an important one for the government.

As I said, I am not in a position to direct the minister on how to answer. Whether or not the minister might be prepared to venture a view on whether the review had anything to do with the departure or whether there is any government position that led to the change of

position is for the minister to determine in the following 1 minute of his answer.

Mr JENNINGS — I do not think my description of Dr Philip's capabilities, the confidence government has in him and the important task that he is undertaking needed to be interrupted in terms of outlining an answer that is fulsome in terms of the government's enthusiasm for Dr Philip's work and its enthusiasm for his undertaking that work on the government's behalf. Ultimately that is the reason the announcement has been made and the shift is in place. It is to enable the resources of the government in terms of the leadership across the Victorian public service to acquit the various responsibilities and expectations that we have. The government is of the view, and certainly Dr Philip shares that view, that this is an appropriate appointment, a timely appointment and one in which he will deliver great results to the people of Victoria. That is the spirit in which the appointment has been made.

Supplementary question

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer. Can the minister detail whether Dr Philip as head of Start-up Victoria will remain on a similar total remuneration package to the one he currently receives as secretary of the \$20 billion government Department of Health and Human Services?

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — President, you would appreciate that in terms of what has been a feature of the line of questioning by the opposition today and on previous occasions, those opposite are wanting to get into the terms and conditions of employment of a number of individuals across the Victorian public service or people who work within ministerial offices, for not necessarily valid reasons.

Ms Wooldridge — On a point of order, President, every year the government publishes through annual reports secretaries' total remuneration packages, as I expect it will continue to do. There is not a comparison to staff wages, which are not published. I know the minister has only had a few minutes, but there is only a minute for the response, so I ask you to draw him back to the supplementary question, which is very valid and relates to something which has been and will continue to be on the public record.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Can I just observe that that was a point of debate, not a point of order. There has been no breakdown in the process of the house.

There were simply some additional debating points that were injected into the proceedings.

Mr JENNINGS — Through the point of debate, as distinct from the point of order, the member has correctly identified that the remuneration in the sense of its broad reporting in terms of the bands of employment details is indicated and published by the government, and that was the case during the previous government. The terms and conditions are similar. I am not sure whether I am able to confirm the absolute quantum, but it is very similar to the arrangements that were in place for the head of a public agency, and that continues to be the case.

Ms Wooldridge interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — You are inviting me to use a bit of the Parliament's time to say that the remuneration of CEOs of public service sector agencies is not determined by the size of the budget they are responsible for; otherwise there would be quite a variation across the remuneration packages in the public service, that does not exist because they are within a consistent band.

South West Institute of TAFE

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Training and Skills. There are now just six directors on the board of South West Institute of TAFE, despite the organisation's own constitution stating that the board consists of 11 directors. Is the minister aware of any impacts that this has had on the board's decision-making?

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — No, I am not actually. However, I will have a look at that, and we will try to fill those appointments.

Supplementary question

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I thank the minister for his frank answer. My supplementary question is simply: why has the minister delayed for months the appointment of five people to fill the vacancies on the South West Institute of TAFE board?

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I assume, firstly, that Mr Drum is talking about Governor in Council appointments as opposed to TAFE appointments — five out of how many, did he say?

Mr Drum — Eleven all up.

Mr HERBERT — Eleven. I will have a look at that, but I do not believe there has been any great delay. Of course we have had the legislation coming through and we have parameters we are looking at. I will say, though, that I have been conscious of the fact that when we fill these positions we need to have a look at how those TAFEs are going and whether there are issues with their performance. I do not believe that is the case with South West. Of course they have a financial issue because of the funding cuts that were imposed on them by the former government — substantial funding cuts, as members would know. We have had large numbers of staff losses there, and there is a viability — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HERBERT — I think South West Institute of TAFE is doing a fabulous job in engaging with local industries in terms of making sure the training it offers meets the skill needs of those industries in the area. I think it is planning 40 separate industry engagement sessions in this 12 months. I have attended one of them. I will have a look, however, at the board appointments and just do it as quickly as I can.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr JENNINGS (Special Minister of State) — I have written answers to questions 457, 652, 653 and 1234.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Written responses

The PRESIDENT — Order! With regard to today's questions, I indicate that in relation to Mr Young's question to Mr Jennings on what I have written down as monitoring systems, Mr Jennings indicated that he would seek some further advice on the monitoring of the numbers of kangaroos involved in the cull in the current circumstances. That involves a minister in another place, so he has two days.

With regard to Mr Drum's final supplementary question to Mr Herbert on the delay in appointments, I think the minister gave a fairly satisfactory answer and to all intents and purposes did answer the question, but given the response that he gave I invite the minister to advise the house further if there are any particular reasons for why the additional appointments have yet to be made at that particular TAFE. That is expected on the next day of meeting.

Mr O'Donohue — I raise a point of order, President, in relation to some outstanding information from the Leader of the Government. During the committee stage of the Appropriation (2015–2016) Bill 2015 the Leader of the Government took on notice a range of questions I put to him. To date I have yet to receive a response. I wrote to the minister on 2 September seeking his response, and I would appreciate some advice from him as to whether a response to those questions from back in June will be forthcoming.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Just before the minister answers, Mr Davis has written to me in the same vein with respect to responses made in the committee stage of a bill with which he was dealing. He might remind me what it was, because I do not have the paperwork in front of me.

Mr Davis — President, it concerned the debate in the committee stage of the appropriation bill and matters around a particular department and reprioritisation of money. The Leader of the House took my question on notice. Obviously I did not expect him to have the precise details there and then.

The PRESIDENT — Order! That is fine. The point is that it was the same debate. I indicate to the house that in terms of the standing orders and procedures of the house, we do not have a process by which I can request those answers to be provided back to the house. The minister, with regard to some of those questions from the committee stage, may well have been prepared to advise the member privately. I could not determine from looking at *Hansard* whether or not those matters were to be reported back to the house or, given that the committee stage has long gone, just how they would be reported back.

I will invite the minister to make any comment in this respect, and perhaps he will need to rely on his recollection of that debate. If there are specific matters to pursue in that regard that members retain an interest in, they will need to submit those as new questions without notice or questions on notice — one way or the other — so that there is a mechanism for the house and the Chair to deal with them.

I will be adjudicating later in the day or tomorrow on some queries from Ms Crozier. Is hers still outstanding?

Ms Crozier — No.

The PRESIDENT — Order! No, she is fine. But certainly with respect to questions from Ms Wooldridge that she feels have not been adequately answered, I will be determining my position on those later this day.

Mr Jennings — On the point of order, President, I was expecting Mr O'Donohue to refer to a piece of correspondence that I have signed and sent to him in the last few days about this matter, indicating to him that I have written again recently to the Treasurer to remind him of the expectation that he will provide answers to Mr O'Donohue. I wrote to Mr O'Donohue, so obviously he has not received that correspondence. However, I have signed a piece of correspondence to him to that effect — to reiterate my recollection of the issues, my expectation of the Treasurer to comply with them and the fact that I have referred them to the Treasurer.

In relation to Mr Davis's matters, I have not had the paper trail, but he may have generated a paper trail to me that I have not seen.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Davis has written to me.

Mr Davis — President, I have raised the matter in the house previously as a point of order. I will perhaps say by way of assistance to the house that when the process of budget committees was reinstated in 2005, the practice has since been that the leader or Treasurer or Treasurer's representative would write to members. Although that is not a standing order, it has in fact been practised.

Mr O'Donohue — Further to the response from the Leader of the Government, President, I appreciate that advice. I suppose the point I make by way of a further point of order is that my recollection is that the Leader of the Government took it on notice to get back to me, and he is now saying that he has referred the matter to the Treasurer for the Treasurer's response at some future time. I appreciate that response, but I was anticipating a direct response from the Leader of the Government.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Remembering essentially that the budget is the legislation of the Treasurer and therefore the minister does need to rely on the minister with jurisdiction for that piece of legislation and therefore for the detailed answers to the matters raised in committee, then yes, this minister might well have given the undertaking, but one would obviously expect him to refer to the originating minister for that legislation, which is the Treasurer.

Is Mr Davis happy for me to forward a copy of his correspondence to me to Mr Jennings so that he is aware of that matter?

Mr Davis — Thank you.

The PRESIDENT — Order! As I said, there is no process that we have to deal with these matters raised in committee, and it is a courtesy extended by the ministers, as Mr Davis has referred to, to provide further advice to members on occasions. However, if that advice does not meet the member's expectations, then it needs to go back through our other processes.

Sitting suspended 1.01 p.m. until 2.04 p.m.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Eastern Victoria Region

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — My question is directed to the Minister for Regional Development, the Honourable Jaala Pulford, and it is in regard to the loss of jobs in the Latrobe Valley. According to media reports in my electorate, one of the Latrobe Valley's celebrated employment success stories, the Lion yoghurt processing factory in Morwell, is planning on reducing its workforce by more than one-quarter. This has created concern throughout the community and in particular at the Lion factory in Morwell, where people are fearful of losing their jobs.

The Lion factory in Morwell has been well supported by the coalition in the past, including as a recipient of \$490 000 through the Latrobe Valley Industry and Infrastructure Fund to increase electricity capacity — a fund, mind you, that this Labor government has cut. My question is: what will this Labor government do to ensure that major employers in the Latrobe Valley, such as Lion, retain and grow local jobs?

Western Victoria Region

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources and it is in relation to the potential expansion of the Stawell goldmine. As the minister would be aware, there has been much community angst regarding the operation and potential expansion of the goldmine at Stawell, and it has been an ongoing issue in Stawell for a number of years now. I request that the minister inform me of the steps the government is taking to address community concerns in Stawell regarding this issue and ensure that discussions between the mine, residents and government agencies are calm, reasonable and constructive.

South Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ms SPRINGLE (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning. I understand that Kingston City Council has

written recently to the minister to seek his advice regarding proposed changes to the urban growth boundary. Specifically, the council is seeking his advice with regard to rezoning land within the green wedge for residential development. Bearing in mind that a recent consultant's report highlighted the adverse impact of landfill in the green wedge, what is the minister's attitude toward rezoning land within the Kingston green wedge for residential development?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade in his capacity as the minister responsible for public holidays. It relates to a company in my electorate called Worboys Plumbing that does a lot of work in the plumbing industry, particularly around emergency management. It is around public holidays. They tell me they already have 10 public holidays, 20 annual leave days, 13 rostered days off and an average of 4 to 8 sick and personal days a year.

They tell me they will lose at least \$2800 in direct wages and potentially \$8000 in productivity charges for the day. And they have not had a chance to budget for these holidays because it was not in the planning scheme. So they are asking the minister if he could advise me what I should tell them about the cost impost on them, because many of their maintenance contracts were locked in years ago with fixed rates which did not account for these holidays and they are going to be financially disadvantaged. Could the minister tell me what to tell them?

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — My question is addressed to the Minister for Education, the Honourable James Merlino. I note the exceptional work he is doing in making Victoria the education state, which was one of the key election commitments of the Andrews Labor government. This includes a commitment to increase the number of breakfast clubs, make school excursions more accessible for more kids and the refurbishment of numerous schools in my electorate of Western Metropolitan Region.

I refer the minister to the \$10 million allocation to upgrade Tarneit P-9 college and the \$7 million committed in the 2014-15 budget allocation to upgrade Werribee Secondary College, which will replace old classrooms and modernise learning facilities. In order to update my constituents and for my own information, my question to the minister is: when are the upgrade

works due to commence and when will they be completed?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Education. Last week the minister briefly attended a community meeting with members of local schools called by the member for Albert Park in the Assembly. There was nothing new offered at this meeting and unfortunately there were no visits to actual schools in the electorate. At the end of the meeting parents approached the departmental representative there, after the minister had disappeared, seeking clarity about the extra land that is sought for Albert Park Primary School. They came away with the understanding that there was no money for this to be done. I am told that the school has had two meetings set with the minister and both have been changed. A meeting is now set for 8 October. I am also told that the school has invited the minister to come to see the school and the land for himself, but that invitation has not been responded to. The clock is ticking and I believe the minister needs to see this land for himself while there is still time for a decision to be made. I ask the minister: will he visit the school with me and let me show him the obvious need for this land to be acquired by the school?

Western Metropolitan Region

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is directed to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to the daily saga of the many thousands of motorists crawling to work each morning along the Westgate, Tullamarine and Calder freeways and the Western Ring Road, which again this morning was blocked. The daily gridlock has worsened, with even the slightest of vehicle accidents displaying the capacity to cripple the entire road network servicing Melbourne's west. Will the Treasurer tell us the cost to the Victorian economy of the thousands of hours lost in traffic mayhem on the aforementioned freeways and roads in the Western suburbs every day?

Northern Victoria Region

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Regional Development and has to do with the Macedon Ranges Shire Council and a project it has on the books — the Macedon Ranges equine centre. Under the previous government the council was able to conduct a feasibility study costing \$155 000, of which \$60 000 was contributed by the previous state government. That feasibility study has been done and the option preferred and adopted by

the shire councils is for a 5000-seat indoor stadium and a 500-seat warm-up area. As the project needs to move to the next stage, it requires a full business case. The Macedon Ranges Shire Council is trying to acquire somewhere between \$100 000 and \$150 000 for this purpose. My question to the minister is: what opportunities are available to the Macedon Ranges Shire Council to receive that type of money to take this project to the next stage?

Western Victoria Region

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, who is also the Minister for Ports. It is in relation to the state of Timboon-Colac Road. It is a very important arterial road in the Polwarth electorate. Under the previous government there was a VicRoads budget attached to a full upgrade and maintenance of that road, but unfortunately since the election the Labor government has let the road deteriorate to a point now where there are speed restriction signs on this road rather than actual maintenance. What was a road with a 100 kilometre-per-hour speed limit went to 80 kilometres per hour and has now gone to 60 kilometres per hour because of the extent of the deterioration, the potholes and the side pavement falling to bits. This is a very important arterial road used by industry, the dairy industry, tourism and school buses. My question to the minister is: when can we expect the works to be done on the Timboon-Colac Road to make it a safe carriageway for users within the Polwarth electorate?

Western Victoria Region

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Police. I have been contacted by residents in my electorate concerned with the impact that ice is having on their communities. Of late, I have been contacted by residents in the city of Portland, who are especially concerned about the prevalence of ice and the negative impact it is having on families living in the great city of Portland. Noting that Labor's budget provided for not one new police officer in the state of Victoria, can the minister please tell me what he is going to do to address the scourge of ice affecting the regional city of Portland?

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Debate resumed.

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I had a few more words to say when we were interrupted by question time. I conclude by saying that Mr Ondarchie's motion is a very important one and I support it. As I outlined earlier, this grand final parade holiday will have a dramatic impact on business and the health sector. It will have a very dramatic impact on the public health system in terms of its cost. We have had no transparency from the government or the minister in relation to what those costs will be and it will have a dramatic impact on patients who are trying to access public health, dental and other health services. I certainly commend the motion to the house.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — It gives me pleasure to speak to Mr Ondarchie's motion in relation to the grand final parade public holiday. I say right at the start that I am absolutely disgusted that the Andrews government has seen fit to gazette a new public holiday despite all the evidence to suggest that it will come at a significant economic cost to all Victorian small businesses and larger businesses right across the state and particularly to my electorate of Western Victoria Region and the lower house electorates of Polwarth and South-West Coast, where many small businesses do not have capacity to provide staff at increased penalty rates to stay open during the gazetted Friday grand final eve holiday.

I also mention that many of these small businesses are open on Saturday as well, so it is not as if there is a three-day holiday for these businesses. They have to close their business or bring in family members to help staff their business on the gazetted holiday on the Friday and reopen on Saturday with normal staffing arrangements for the weekend. Unlike the brethren of the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, who see this as an opportunity to go away for three days, many of these small business operators in my region of Western Victoria and in the lower house electorates of Polwarth and South-West Coast do not have the opportunity to go on holidays or spend time with loved ones, which apparently is the new reason for having this holiday rather than the election commitment. It is about having time to spend with family, Mr Dalidakis said in his contribution, but I know he does not believe that. In fact he speaks with a forked tongue, knowing very well that he does not support this ridiculous election commitment thought bubble to have a gazetted public holiday on grand final eve.

The lack of consultation in relation to this proposed holiday clearly demonstrates that it was a captain's pick election commitment by the Premier himself, without consultation with the AFL. The AFL certainly does not want a gazetted public holiday on the day of the most important pre-grand final activity of the whole year, knowing full well that if there are two interstate teams playing, the Melbourne CBD will be totally vacant on the day. Those people who normally go onto the streets of the CBD to watch the parade will not be doing that this year.

In my quick contribution I want to refer to small businesses and the impact that the gazetted public holiday will have on them. I am happy to cite the Geelong Chamber of Commerce, which has been very proactive and vocal in relation to the cost to its membership of this holiday. It has identified over \$30 million of economic loss due to the penalty rates that will apply for this gazetted public holiday and also the fact that many might not open due to the cost of providing labour at those penalty rates. In fact the owner of a bakery rang me up in some distress, saying it was going to cost over \$10 000 at those rates to put on the staff required to stay open on this new public holiday. He might well make the decision not to open at all.

Foster's Mensland owner Graeme Foster has said the holiday would hurt local business and was quoted as saying the holiday is 'pointless and unfeasible', particularly in rural and regional areas. Grampians Pharmacy and Amcal Pharmacy operator Brian Hancock agreed the holiday was unnecessary and said the holiday 'will cripple local businesses' and have 'no benefits for Stawell'. The *Wimmera Mail-Times* reports that businesses in the Wimmera have slammed the holiday too. At Rupanyup, Adrian Tyler of Tylers Hardware said the impact is a choice of paying staff time-and-a-half on Friday or closing his business.

Despite regional Victoria clearly demonstrating the proposed public holiday for the grand final parade will come at a major financial cost to its businesses and despite a majority of submissions to the regulatory impact statement process showing a significant cost to the community if the holiday was gazetted, the small business minister has gazetted it. The Australian Industry Group is forecasting a \$700 million cost to the Victorian economy in relation to this holiday. But the icing on the cake was actually Premier Dan Andrews coming down to Geelong and announcing that this holiday would be good for tourism. Despite the fact that the Geelong Chamber of Commerce raised the issue of the cost to small business, Dan Andrews just flicked his hand at the membership of the chamber and said it was

an election commitment, and that was it. 'It was an election commitment. Don't worry about the \$30 million loss in Geelong or in the Polwarth electorate or in the South-West Coast electorate. It was an election commitment, and that's the basis on which we're going to gazette this holiday'. To me that is just crazy politics, and I firmly believe the small business minister does not have his heart in providing any sort of justification for this holiday when all the evidence suggests that it is going to come at a significant cost to small business.

As part of my role as a member of Parliament representing the Western Victoria Region, we did a survey to see what the impact would be on local businesses in my region, in addition to the surveys done by the respective chambers of commerce right across the state. Many businesses — —

Mr Dalidakis — How many? How many responded?

Mr RAMSAY — You have asked, Mr — I was nearly going to say Mr Ondarchie! — Dalidakis. I will not confuse the two, because there are very different ideologies from one side of the fence to the other. I know Mr Dalidakis wants to be on this side of the bench because he knows we make sense over here. We would not under any circumstances have a thought bubble idea like another gazetted holiday for the state of Victoria. We have more holidays in this state than any other state in the whole of Australia.

Mr Dalidakis — Only now.

Mr RAMSAY — No, we have two more holidays now, more than any other state in the whole of Australia. That is something for Mr Dalidakis to be proud of! As he keeps telling us, in his first nine months in this chamber he has provided Victorians with more holidays than any other state in Australia. Congratulations. He should be proud of that. He will be able to strut out and say, 'Look what I accomplished as the small business minister. I have created more holidays and more loss of economic value and opportunity than any other small business minister in the country'.

I am winding up, but I want to quickly tell Mr Dalidakis where these businesses are: Grovedale; Barrabool Road, Highton; Torquay; Waurm Ponds; Murray Street, Colac; and Camperdown. I could go on, but I think my point is taken. There are 17 pages of respondents from small businesses who do not support this public holiday in my electorate of Western Victoria Region.

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to say a few words on this motion. I understand I have 5 minutes, in which time it will be very difficult to cover the range of seats in the south-east — 10 lower house electorates — that will be most affected by antibusiness and antijobs policy, of which this is obviously one example.

I have been in small business with my family for over 45 years. There used to be a joke: how do you start a small business under a Labor government? The answer: you buy a big one and you sit and wait. Unfortunately successive Labor governments have always adopted antibusiness, antijobs policies. That is why it was a farce that this government started off with getting Victoria back to work at the same time as it was doing deals with a range of unions, both before and after the election, in relation to enterprise bargaining agreements in return for political favours and doing a deal with Mr Donovan — obviously a very effective lobbyist for the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA) — in relation to the additional public holidays.

The casualty of this was the first Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, who had to sell a policy that was a thought bubble and a deal done for political interests, not for the interests of Victoria. He had to sell a policy that I assume he did not have much to do with. I know that his electorate of South Eastern Metropolitan Region and its many business organisations were strongly opposed to this particular policy, as well as to many others that hurt business and impact economic activity. He had to sell a policy that nobody wanted apart from the union movement and Labor, and he has paid a very heavy price. His successor, instead of addressing the issues that have been raised, is full of bluster and bravado. He certainly did not put a case for this particular policy, with the exception of more 'family-friendly' initiatives. However, we can think of many other initiatives that would be more family friendly.

The government has ignored the advice of its own regulatory impact statement. Yes, it was a sham consultation. The minister is on the record as saying he was going to ignore the RIS and that it was not going to change a policy that had been an election commitment. Clearly this was an election commitment to the SDA, and I would imagine that many other enterprise bargaining agreements with lots of other unions will also impact negatively on this state. The estimated cost of the new public holidays far outweighs any quantified benefits, and they will result in at least \$800 million to \$1 billion worth of lost production in the state.

Premier Daniel Andrews is the only Premier I know of — and I have been in Parliament for 19 years, albeit with one involuntary break — who actually pays for things not to get done. He paid for the east–west link not to proceed, and now businesses will not be able to afford to open on the grand final eve public holiday. Mr Dalidakis has said that that is their choice, despite the fact that this is an impost by his government. But it is not their choice, because these business will still be paying — —

Mr Ramsay — The Minister for No Business.

Mrs PEULICH — Absolutely. They will still be paying the imposts on their businesses.

Of the 109 submissions to the regulatory impact statement process, over 100 were against it, many of them from the south-east. The public holiday will also impact on councils. There will be a \$300 000 impact on the bottom line of the City of Casey. Health services will be similarly impacted, as will disability services. Everyone will be sharing in the costs as well as the losses in production.

The submissions that have been received from the south-east have been substantial, and one of the most critical of the policy is that of the South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance. According to an article on the website of the ABC TV program *The Drum*:

Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief Mark Stone has said that on grand final Friday alone, Victorian businesses could face a bill of \$543 million to pay full-time workers not to work.

Businesses that choose to open could face 150 per cent increase in wages ...

Some of those most impacted are businesses such as hairdressers. You cannot rope in your mother, father, grandmother or aunt to come and help out at a hairdressing business, because those businesses need skills and grand final eve is one of their biggest trading days. They will have to pay exorbitant prices, which they will not be able to recoup.

Businesses in places such as shopping centres will have no choice but to open, because they are fined if they do not open, so they will be making losses. This government does not give one hoot about the impact of this new public holiday on businesses or employees or about the voices that have expressed concern about it through the RIS process. The AFL itself did not ask for the holiday, and it is on the record as saying that.

Bendigo Traders Association president Steven Blundell was reported in the Bendigo *Advertiser* as being critical

of the new public holiday. As I mentioned before, the Casey council has also written to the minister expressing its concern.

The Greater Dandenong Chamber of Commerce made a submission to the RIS process. According to the *BusinessTimes* website:

Chamber president Robert Downing said it was ‘unanimous view’ of chamber members that two extra public holidays ‘are not a good idea for businesses in Dandenong’.

Frankston Business Network president Peter Patterson said:

The public holiday for the Friday before the grand final is not necessary and will impact all businesses.

While the grand final is a great event, it does not warrant a public holiday. Again, small and medium businesses will bear the heaviest burdens and these are the majority of members.

The opposition has advocated very strongly for the business and jobs sector. The Labor government does not care. This is all a product of the deals it struck with the union movement, and we end up paying the price. How to buy a small business in Victoria: buy a big one and wait, or buy a small one and be shut down.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to rise and speak on Mr Ondarchie’s motion this afternoon. I am pleased that the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, the minister who is responsible for this very important area, is in the chamber to hear the comments from the opposition. This is an important motion that we are debating today. The minister and I are both members for Southern Metropolitan Region. If he walked with me down Centre Road, Bentleigh, he would understand clearly how those traders feel about this ridiculous decision made by the government.

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Ms CROZIER — Mr Dalidakis’s office is there, so he is obviously not listening, because not one business there wants this holiday.

I refer to the submissions received during the regulatory impact statement (RIS) process. The Bentleigh Traders Association, which I referred to in the house yesterday, represents 330 small businesses in the Bentleigh shopping precinct. I read from its submission regarding the regulatory impact statement yesterday, and I will read it again:

I write to you on behalf the Bentleigh association to express our utter disbelief at the state government’s recent declaration of two new designated public holidays in our state ...

... the flow-on effect of this is massive — stock wise, sale wise and customer wise.

Bentleigh Bayside Community Health is another organisation that will be impacted by this disastrous and ridiculous decision. I will read from its submission:

Bentleigh Bayside Community Health is a not-for-profit registered community health service. We provide primary health services with priority access for the marginalised and at-risk members of the community; group activity and ill-health prevention education to the residents in the City of Bayside and the southern part of the City of Glen Eira.

... the introduction of two additional public holidays has created a financial impost to our organisation as follows:

...

Under the various enterprise bargaining agreements we are obliged to pay staff for the grand final eve public holiday and in some cases a penalty loading will also be payable. The estimated cost of wages is \$41 500.

These additional wage costs are unfunded by government.

We have estimated a loss of client co-payment fees for the grand final eve public holiday of approximately \$6000.

Mr Dalidakis should be listening to this if he has any consideration for these organisations in the electorate that he and I share.

The submission ends by saying:

In summary Bentleigh Bayside Community Health estimates an increased unfunded liability of \$50 000 per annum ...

This is an absolute demonstration of how a disastrous decision by government can have far-reaching consequences.

Mr Dalidakis — It was an election promise.

Ms CROZIER — Mr Dalidakis, being an election promise does not mean it is right. This is a disastrous election commitment, and as I said yesterday it is one that the Premier wishes he had never made.

Mr Dalidakis — Why, because spending time with families is a bad thing?

Ms CROZIER — Mr Dalidakis can say that all he likes, but when I walk down and talk to these businesses in Centre Road, Bentleigh, they say they are going to have to open and have an impost, and they cannot spend time with their families because they are too busy working. They are not out there enjoying picnics like the union members who I spoke to in Bentleigh, who said either they were going to work to get the extra penalties because they wanted the money

or they were going interstate. They are not even going to spend time in this state, so the money will be flooding out. This is a ridiculous, disastrous decision by Mr Dalidakis's government, and he knows it. Mr Dalidakis knows that this is a very costly, disastrous decision by his government.

I want to make one other point in relation to another business that is involved in the building and construction industry. It points out that of all the days proposed the Friday before the AFL Grand Final impacts further on its ability to meet construction deadlines, and it has said:

There are already shut down dates in the September–December period for the Melbourne Cup, builders picnic et cetera, as well as extended RDO shutdowns around these dates that impact across the business both financially and in relation to productivity.

Fridays are a traditionally busy day for sales and the Friday public holiday would mean that their business would have to close on that day and impact on loss of revenue.

Mr Dalidakis interjected.

Ms CROZIER — This is a serious issue, Mr Dalidakis! It is not one to be laughed at. The letter continues:

There are also the logistical impacts with scheduled deliveries from other suppliers. In their opinion the one day will turn to a four to five day break with industry RDOs et cetera. The feedback from their customers has been similar.

Mr Dalidakis — When are you going to stand up for 7-Eleven workers?

Ms CROZIER — When is Mr Dalidakis going to stand up for small businesses in this state?

To conclude I make a final point on the excellent motion Mr Ondarchie has brought into the house today on which we are having this debate. I call on the Premier of Victoria, Mr Daniel Andrews, to cancel the grand final parade holiday and focus on creating jobs, not cutting them.

Debate adjourned on motion of Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Reference

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — I move:

That this house, pursuant to section 33 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, requires the Family and Community Development Committee to inquire into, consider and report no later than 30 June 2016 on the current situation relating to the health, care and wellbeing of mothers and babies in Victoria during the perinatal period, including —

- (1) the availability, quality and safety of health services delivering services to women and their babies during the perinatal period;
- (2) the impact that the loss of commonwealth funding (in particular, the National Perinatal Depression Initiative) will have on Victorian hospitals and medical facilities as well as on the health and wellbeing of Victorian families;
- (3) the adequacy of the number, location, distribution, quality and safety of health services capable of dealing with high-risk and premature births in Victoria;
- (4) the quality, safety and effectiveness of current methods to reduce the incidence of maternal and infant mortality and premature births;
- (5) access to and provision of an appropriately qualified workforce, including midwives, paediatricians, obstetricians, general practitioners, anaesthetists, maternal and child health nurses, mental health practitioners and lactation consultants across Victoria;
- (6) disparity in outcomes between rural and regional and metropolitan locations; and
- (7) identification of best practice.

This motion is close to my heart personally. I am a mother who almost lost my first child in childbirth. In fact I almost lost my own life in the delivery of my son almost 18 years ago. Within the last 10 years I have lost two more babies, both to miscarriage. Having experienced the healthcare system from the perspective of a patient has given me insight into the needs of mothers and their babies during this delicate perinatal period. This is a period of time that for some mothers involves grief and for others joy, for some mothers great pain and for others great health. All of our experiences are equally valid and equally merit consideration.

This motion is also close to my professional area of expertise. I understand the importance of thorough investigation. I understand exploratory research and am seeking to understand and weigh up individual needs within block-funded packages, particularly when the

topic is so crucial. This motion calls on the house to give a reference to the Family and Community Development Committee to inquire into, consider and report on the current situation relating to the health, care and wellbeing of mothers and babies in Victoria during the perinatal period.

The perinatal period can be defined in many ways. Generally it is simply referred to as the period immediately before and after birth. Depending on the source of the definition it starts anywhere from the 20th to the 28th week of gestation and ends up to 4 weeks after birth. The quantitative facts stand for themselves in this area. More needs to be done in relation to the health, care and wellbeing of mothers and their babies during this period of their lives.

In Australia the number of babies who die at birth or in the first 28 days of life is greater than our national road toll. In 2012 over 2500 babies died during the perinatal period, while approximately 1300 people were killed on our roads. Both are tragedies. There are still more stillbirths than there are cases of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), such has been the success through lives saved since SIDS risk reduction campaigns began a number of years ago. This was a topic of *9 News* last Thursday night, which reported that there are 30 times more stillbirths in Australia than deaths from SIDS.

In 2012 there were almost 3000 perinatal deaths in Australia and there were 9.6 per 1000 live births. Of this 2.4 per 1000 births were neonatal deaths and 7.2 per 1000 births were stillborn. On these statistics alone, this is a serious issue that warrants our attention. If we combine these statistics with the baby boom that is currently occurring here in Victoria, we find quite a substantial picture. On 22 July this year *Star Weekly* reporter Charlene Macaulay published an article headed 'Baby boom at Werribee Mercy', which reported that 15 babies were born at Werribee Mercy Hospital within 24 hours during that week. This was extraordinary, but on average five babies are born at this hospital alone every single day. In the 2014–15 financial year this hospital delivered over 3000 babies. This financial year it will be close to 4000. This is a substantial increase.

The area of Wyndham, which includes Werribee, which is in my electorate, is not the only growth area with a baby boom. Five other growth areas have been identified across the state. They are Cardinia, Melton, Whittlesea, Hume and Casey. The city of Casey, in Melbourne's south-east, recently recorded a boom of 86 newborns per week.

The *Age* has coined the term 'baby belt' to describe these suburbs. On 11 August the *Age* published an

article headed ‘Growing pains in Melbourne’s “baby belt” suburbs’. The article states:

Every 11 hours, in Melbourne’s suburban growth areas, enough babies to fill an entire prep class come wailing into the world.

This is why I suspect the Minister for Families and Children is so passionate about building capacity in our kindergartens. I am sure that this issue will come up in the community consultations into early childhood which Minister Mikakos mentioned in her ministers statement earlier today.

There is also a lot of qualitative evidence to promote the need for an inquiry into this area. I met recently with Pete Lockyer from the Lilyroo Fund. The fund was established by Pete and Kristie Lockyer, who celebrated the ‘short but perfect life’ of their daughter Lily, born at 23 weeks and 6 days. They now raise funds for the newborn and intensive special care unit at the Royal Women’s Hospital. I have also met with Dr Carl Kuschel and his staff at this unit at the hospital. He talked about innovation around technology and electronic monitoring systems, and building capacity in regional hospitals. All of this needs to be looked into. I have also met with a number of doctors in my electorate, who are excited about the possibilities for the new 237-bed western women’s and children’s hospital at Sunshine and, as a result, about the possibility of providing better care to mothers and their babies during this perinatal period.

The motion calls on the Family and Community Development Committee to look at a number of issues in its investigations. Paragraph (1) of my motion asks the committee to consider:

... the availability, quality and safety of health services delivering services to women and their babies during the perinatal period ...

This fits with the government’s strategic direction as published earlier this month in the newly released *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015–2019*, one aim of which is to promote and support safe and healthy pregnancy and childbirth. With the rapid growth in the birthrate, which I described at the beginning of my contribution, there is an obvious issue around systemic capacity.

Dr Mukesh Haikerwal, representing AMA Victoria, is mentioned in a recent *Age* article, which states:

Dr Haikerwal said the ‘well-trained and professional’ staff at the hospital —

in this instance he was referring to the Sunshine Hospital and the Werribee Mercy —

could be forced to work without the right facilities around them, while the high demand on the ward created the potential for mishaps, such as bleeds after delivery not being picked up in time.

‘We need to ensure there are enough rooms and staff at maternity wards to maintain Australia’s excellent record in maternal health’, he said.

The committee will be charged with assessing the availability, quality and safety of health services which will answer the AMA’s stated concerns.

Paragraph (2) of my motion asks that the committee consider:

... the impact that the loss of commonwealth funding (in particular, the National Perinatal Depression Initiative) will have on Victorian hospitals and medical facilities as well as on the health and wellbeing of Victorian families ...

Perinatal depression has been described as a silent killer. It is the greatest single cause of maternal death, yet even now, with our increased awareness of depression, many families find it difficult to talk about it and to accept it. As many as one in seven new mothers in Victoria develop perinatal depression, which has been linked to suicides of young mothers — a devastating outcome for all.

Established in 2008, the National Perinatal Depression Initiative aims to improve prevention and the early detection of antenatal and postnatal depression, and to provide better support and treatment for expectant and new mothers. The Centre of Perinatal Excellence commissioned an analysis from PricewaterhouseCoopers on the economic costs of not identifying and treating maternal mental illness. The report estimated that if all treatment for perinatal depression and anxiety stopped, it would cost Australia \$535 million each year. Of course this cost is very hard to quantify in dollar terms, but it takes into account the health costs of parents, the health costs of babies and the loss of productivity.

In recent discussions I held with people from the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation’s Victorian branch, they expressed their grave concerns about the impact of the loss of this funding on the Victorian health system. If my motion is passed, the committee will be charged with exploring the impact of the loss of commonwealth funding, particularly in relation to the National Perinatal Depression Initiative, and ways in which the Victorian government may need to compensate for its loss.

Paragraph (3) of my motion calls on the committee to consider:

... the adequacy of the number, location, distribution, quality and safety of health services capable of dealing with high-risk and premature births in Victoria ...

High-risk and premature births are an ongoing concern in this state, as I reflected in the statistics I quoted earlier. At present four hospitals in Victoria are able to provide statewide tertiary neonatal services for the most complex neonatal care needs. These are the Mercy Hospital for Women in Heidelberg, the Monash Medical Centre in Clayton, the Royal Children's Hospital in Parkville and the Royal Women's Hospital in Parkville. Each of these hospitals does an excellent job and has a commitment to training those in regional hospitals and to research.

Many hospitals provide support to babies who are born prematurely, but are not able to do it to this tertiary standard. In my electorate the Sunshine Hospital has Victoria's largest level 2 special care nursery, which is able to look after babies over 32 weeks gestation. Further afield, at Bendigo Health, I discovered that at one stage up to 30 per cent of babies born went through the special care baby unit in one year.

I propose that the committee will be charged with looking into the adequacy of the number, location, distribution, quality and safety of health services capable of dealing with high-risk and premature births in Victoria — for example, to ensure that all electorates have adequate facilities comparable to their birth rates and their needs.

Paragraph (4) of my motion asks the committee to consider:

... the quality, safety and effectiveness of current methods to reduce the incidence of maternal and infant mortality and premature births ...

The best place for an academic — which is what I was and, to a large extent, still am — to begin to explore this is through quality peer-reviewed journals. There was not a lot of published research in this area, but there were some very revealing pieces of research which we should take note of. Published earlier this year, one such article is entitled 'Why birthplace still matters for infants born before 32 weeks: infant mortality associated with birth at 22–31 weeks gestation in non-tertiary hospitals in Victoria over two decades'. This article draws some disturbing conclusions for Victoria in regard to infant mortality and premature babies, in particular regarding the quality, safety and effectiveness of current practice.

The researchers set out to look at 'very preterm infants born in non-tertiary hospitals', acknowledging that they were known to have higher mortality rates compared with infants born in the tertiary centres. Their method was based on a population cohort study of consecutive live births between 1990 and 2009, so it was a 20-year study, which is quite substantial. The article states:

The fundamental aim of regionalised perinatal care is to identify women with high-risk pregnancies and to deliver these women in hospitals with appropriate obstetric and neonatal care facilities. Despite a highly organised system of regionalised perinatal care in Victoria, preterm infants ... continue to be born in non-tertiary hospitals.

It also states:

The major findings of this study are that incidence of outborn livebirths at 22–31 weeks gestation in Victoria is not declining; indeed, the problem is getting worse, not better.

This study discovered that mortality rate for premature babies born in non-tertiary hospitals was 2.8 times greater than for those born in tertiary hospitals. It further states:

Victoria has a well-organised structure of regionalised perinatal care, including systems to facilitate in utero transfer of at-risk pregnancies to a tertiary centre. It is therefore unclear why the —

rate of babies born outside these centres has risen —

... given there were no major changes in the structure of perinatal referral services in Victoria between 1999 and 2005.

More mature infants, of course, had lower rates of mortality, so the differences between their mortality rates based on where they were born were much narrower. The authors of the study urged that:

Further research is required to investigate rates of serious short-term and long-term morbidity in —

babies born prematurely outside of a tertiary centre —

... and the likelihood that these infants will require transfer to a tertiary centre after birth.

Furthermore, the authors called for a review of perinatal care guidelines for the management of extremely preterm births and pointed to the one-year survival rates for premature babies, which is directly linked to which type of hospital they are born in. The committee will be charged with such an exploration.

Another significant piece of research I came across was in relation to models of care. The article was published in October 2013 and is headed 'The range and accessibility of maternity models of care and allied health service delivery across public hospitals within Victoria, Australia'. The article identifies discrepancies

in information provided to consumers, a scarcity of models involving continuity of care and continuity of carers and an overall reduction in equity and access throughout rural maternity health service provision. The authors reported:

Effective health service planning involves adequately meeting the needs of the local community ... While obstetric and clinical outcomes are of great importance, maternal morbidities are on the rise, and include, conditions such as depression and poor physical health following the birth. Such situations often call for higher rates of allied health services ...

Of great concern to me is the lack of continuity experienced both in care and in carers. Being handed from one organisation to another, from one primary carer to another, from one medical practitioner to another or from one program to another is disruptive at best during this delicate and sensitive time in the lives of mothers and their babies. The committee will be charged with investigating the matters around current methods and models of care in some depth.

Paragraph 5 of my motion requires the committee to inquire into:

... access to and provision of an appropriately qualified workforce, including midwives, paediatricians, obstetricians, general practitioners, anaesthetists, maternal and child health nurses, mental health practitioners and lactation consultants across Victoria.

This is not an exhaustive list. I have already noticed that I missed neonatologists — a term I learnt in one of my recent visits — who are doctors who are specialists in newborn and neonatal care.

When looking at models of care and support we must not lose sight of the practitioners delivering these vital services. In 2012 the report titled *Health Workforce 2025 — Doctors, Nurses and Midwives* was released. It provided Australia's first major long-term national projections for these professions. It identified that health workforce planning requires the most up-to-date information being collated and used to inform policy and planning decisions. Victoria's health workforce is absolutely critical to the overall success in delivering the best possible care to women and their babies during the perinatal period.

This was considered under the previous government, and the work of creating and maintaining a sustainable skilled workforce is being continued under the present government. We need to consider the whole spectrum of skilled workers, from medical practitioners to allied health professionals, for example. The committee will be charged with focusing the Parliament on the issues of access to and provision of an appropriately qualified

workforce, which relates directly to the care and support of mothers and their babies during the perinatal period.

The next item for the committee to look into is the disparity in outcomes between rural and regional and metropolitan locations. This has been covered in part in my comments in reference to paragraph 3 of my motion, regarding the adequacy and location of health services. As the research article that I referred to then identified, there is clearly inequality in the provision of and access to services across and between rural and regional and metropolitan locations. It says:

As the existing research suggests, and this study confirmed, particularly in rural regions, women are required to travel longer distances for care. Further, allied health services are not always provided through the maternity setting in which women give birth, but rather sourced via referral to external community settings.

The tyranny of distance and the obstacles to obtaining continuity of care all indicate the geographic discrimination faced by many mothers during the perinatal period. The committee will be charged with examining in-depth this disparity in outcomes.

Finally, the committee will be asked to identify best practice. As a practitioner-researcher, I was always grappling with best practice issues. In health care near enough is never good enough. We must turn to international best practice and nationwide best practice. We need to look at systemic reviews, evidence-based health care and governance structures. We need to take a holistic view, looking at all aspects of care, including ICT. Providing perinatal care is so much more than allocating neonatal cribs. It involves infrastructure, sustainable systems and continual cycles of review, which can address both reactive and proactive elements of health care. And of course it refers to workforce readiness and ongoing training.

It is time for Victoria to take a comprehensive and detailed look at this issue. Mothers and their babies deserve nothing less than world's best practice here in Victoria during the perinatal period. The committee will be charged with identifying best practice and making recommendations that will provide significant improvements to policy and practice here in Victoria. In conclusion, I look forward to the contributions on this motion in the house today. This is such an important issue, which I urge all members of the house to support. I commend this motion to the house.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) — It is a pleasure to follow Dr Carling-Jenkins in speaking on her motion in relation to perinatal health this afternoon. Anyone who has experienced firsthand that exquisite joy

alongside the intense and at times overwhelming vulnerability that accompanies the birth of a child will see merit in the investigations proposed here today.

Victoria is an extremely safe place to give birth. According to *Victoria's Mothers and Babies — Victoria's Maternal, Perinatal, Child and Adolescent Mortality 2010/2011* report the mortality rate here was 8.3 per 100 000 births for the 2009–10 period and 8.3 per 100 000 births for the period 2010–11.

Throughout the state there are an array of options available to expectant parents related to the type of care they wish to receive both before and after birth and the type of birth they desire to experience, although many of us soon find that despite our best laid plans, Master or Miss might just have ideas of their own. Regardless of this we are fortunate to have choices available to us.

A heightened awareness in recent years has brought the once-taboo subject of postnatal depression out into the light and enabled a more honest conversation to be had across the community and within homes about what it is, how it feels and who might need help.

I sought help post the birth of my second child. I attended the Northern Hospital to access its program which is commonly referred to as 'Sleep School'. My second child was waking 20 or 30 times a night on my impending return to work, which helped spur me into action to seek help. It also opened my eyes to the fact that not only were there other mothers who had children with issues like mine, but there were also mothers seeking help predominately for their own struggles. It was a lovely group of women to have discussions and share my experience with. I spent a week there. I would not say it fixed my son, but it certainly helped me.

We are fortunate that we live in a society that is committed to ending the stigma of mental illness by talking about it more and putting in place necessary support services and facilities to ensure that when people raise their concerns, they have somewhere to go, someone who can help them and someone who will work through the challenge and heartache they may be experiencing. The recent federal funding cuts to this and countless other vital and much-needed services are of grave concern to me and they are of grave concern to the Labor government in Victoria. We simply cannot stand by and let the gains of recent years be lost. Who knows the reason the federal government chose to cut services such as this? The cuts came into effect at the start of this financial year and they were to the Perinatal Mental Health National Partnership.

For those members who are not familiar with this, the cuts totalled \$1.9 million and impacted on the Perinatal Emotional Health Program, the Perinatal Psychotropic Medication Information Services, Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia (PANDA) telephone counselling services, early parenting centres and perinatal infant health training registrar positions. These cuts are not only devastating and harmful but they may also deny someone access to important early intervention in mental health. Surely there could be no earlier intervention than in perinatal mental health, yet that is the service that the federal government has chosen to dump.

There has been no reduction in the funds that the Victorian Labor government puts into perinatal mental health. I know the Minister for Mental Health, Mr Foley, has written to the federal Minister for Health, asking her to reverse these cuts. I am sure he will continue to stand up for mums and babies by writing to the new Prime Minister to prosecute this case. Potentially we may also have a new federal Minister for Health by the end of the week, who I am sure Mr Foley will also contact on behalf of Victorian organisations, mums and babies.

In May this year I had the pleasure of attending the PANDA annual lunch in memory of Louise Litis. This is PANDA's biggest fundraiser, raising \$20 000 this year. More importantly it aims to raise awareness among businesses and the broader community of perinatal depression and anxiety. The event is used as an opportunity to reinforce the vital message that it is okay to talk about perinatal depression and anxiety and that early intervention leads to a fast recovery. The guest speaker, comedian George McEncroe, entertained guests with her recollections of birthing and early parenthood. She and I shared the same obstetrician so I could relate to some of her stories. She also went on to recall her struggle with postnatal depression using dark humour, which was quite hilarious but also powerful. I am sure many parents in the room were able to relate to this.

PANDA community education volunteer Genevieve Heraghty also spoke of her long, undiagnosed struggle with postnatal depression and recovery. She implored guests to be mindful around new parents, saying:

Be kind and tread carefully around the neighbour, friend, family member or colleague who is expecting or who has a new baby as they may be walking in the same shoes I was.

I would again like to thank CEO Terri Smith and board member Matthew Stewart for involving me in this important event. It was certainly disappointing to hear, just one month after I attended that lunch, about the

impact on PANDA's services as a result of the federal government cuts. We as a government know the important role early intervention plays and how it can improve the lives of both mothers and their babies. Without doubt the federal government knows this too, which makes it all the more reprehensible that it could choose to rip out nearly \$2 million from this area.

Other Victorian services that provide remarkable support and assistance to parents include the Queen Elizabeth Centre and Tweddle Child and Family Health Service. One of my electorate staff sought the latter's help as a new parent and went on to serve on its board, so impressed was she with the service her family received.

There are also 24 child and family information, referral and support teams, or Child FIRSTs, across the state. Each Child FIRST provides a central referral point to a range of community-based family services and other supports within each of the Child FIRST catchment areas, ensuring that vulnerable children and their families are linked effectively with relevant services. This may be the best way of connecting children, young people and their families to the services they so desperately need.

Whilst I have outlined a lot of the good things we are doing here in Victoria, and the services that are already within our community, there is more that can be done. If we can do better than we currently are, then this motion is absolutely worthy of further exploration. The establishment of a joint party committee to investigate this has merit and therefore has my support.

Each year over 75 000 women give birth in Victorian hospitals. Three-quarters of these births are in the public system. Around 10 000 babies each year need extra support and care in a special care nursery or neonatal intensive care in their first few months of life. Maternity and newborn services are offered in health services across Victoria, providing women with choice and access to quality care. Three hospitals provide tertiary services — the Royal Women's Hospital, Monash Children's hospital and Mercy Hospital for Women. These hospitals deal with the most complex pregnancies as well as newborn babies. The Royal Children's Hospital provides neonatal services.

The Andrews Labor government is also very pleased — as are many women — to be building an additional service, which is to be named in honour of Joan Kirner. It will be called the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital and will provide services for complex pregnancy and neonatal services.

Forty-eight public health services currently provide antenatal, intrapartum and postnatal care. Some smaller, mostly rural, maternity services provide mothers with antenatal and postnatal care but do not provide birthing services. I think most of us can attest to the high-quality maternity services we already have, but we can always improve in this area. This committee will provide an important forum in which to scrutinise our services and ensure that we are providing the best possible service to Victorian women.

The Department of Health and Human Services monitors the quality of perinatal services and produces an annual report, the latest of which is entitled *Victorian Perinatal Services Performance Indicators 2012–13*. The report provides important data to health services about their performance. It publishes data on perinatal mortality rates and quality indicators, such as smoking during pregnancy, breastfeeding and the percentage of women who receive a first antenatal visit. This information is provided to health services so they can benchmark their success and monitor their progress against peer group hospitals. This report shows that some of our health services perform better than others on key indicators. The department is working closely with health services to support their improvement and to help them learn from similar hospitals.

It is the government's view that the committee's inquiry will provide a valuable forum in which to further scrutinise the data that the department compiles. In particular we would welcome the committee's consideration of issues such as the adequacy, the number and the location of services and whether there is a disparity of outcomes between rural and regional hospitals and metropolitan hospitals. As a regional MP I am certainly interested in that component of the motion because I am very concerned with ensuring that women in all parts of Victoria are able to access quality services locally. In addition I note the term of reference that relates to the access and provision of an appropriately qualified workforce. We know how important a quality workforce is to the provision of quality services.

I note the Andrews Labor government's recent announcement that it will be legislating midwife-to-patient ratios. This is an important way in which the government is ensuring quality prenatal care services. Midwife-to-patient ratios will guarantee that midwives providing birthing services and care in neonatal intensive care settings can provide quality care to each of their patients.

I conclude by thanking Dr Carling-Jenkins for moving this motion. Members on this side of the house believe the committee will provide valuable information about what is needed to support our workforce in the wonderful work it does to support Victorian women and babies.

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to speak to Dr Carling-Jenkins's motion this afternoon about establishing a committee reference to the Family and Community Development Committee in relation to the health care and wellbeing of mothers and babies in Victoria during the perinatal period. It is a very important issue. Making sure that mothers and babies have the support, care and health services they need to be healthy and well at such a critical time in their lives is something for which there is clearly a lot of support in this house. The coalition will be supporting the motion, and members on this side of the house think that the Family and Community Development Committee is well placed to do this work and make a very valuable contribution to the knowledge we have about what we have done so far and what else we need to do in the future.

There are a few elements I want to comment on. Firstly, in terms of the committee undertaking the work, there has already been some good work done in this area and the committee will be well informed by some of the work that has been undertaken to date. The Auditor-General published a report in 2011 on the capacity of maternity services, and in preparing to contribute to this debate I checked whether the Auditor-General had scheduled a follow-up in relation to that review. The government responded at the time by supporting all of the recommendations, and a number of them have progressed significantly since that time, as members would expect. It is important for the committee to be informed by the Auditor-General's work — particularly any follow-up work the Auditor-General is doing and in what time frame he is doing it — so that information can be shared as opposed to committee members potentially reinventing the wheel by repeating some of the work that might already be underway.

The government recently released the 2012–13 annual report entitled *Victorian Perinatal Services Performance Indicators*. One of the big challenges with data is always the lag time, and clearly we are a couple of years behind with the data for these services. However, this is a very comprehensive report. It goes into the details by region across the state for a range of issues that affect the health of mothers and babies. It is a very valuable resource that the committee can draw upon, and hopefully over time there will be some

up-to-date information available. The Consultative Council on Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity does excellent work in relation to outcomes — I have some documents about clinical recommendations from the stillbirth subcommittee, for example — so there is work that has already been completed that can feed into this process. There are also academics, clinicians and others who are writing in this area.

One of the challenges for the committee will be making sure it draws on what is already out there, acknowledging work that is being done and making sure it brings together all of those things into a piece of work that does not double up on work that has already been done. It must build on and expand our knowledge and understanding of where things need to go in the future.

I will comment on a few other aspects of the motion. One of the things I want to be very clear about, and one of the things I have already mentioned, is the commitment to the recommendations of the Auditor-General's 2011 report. As a coalition government we were very committed to making sure that the health and wellbeing of pregnant women, mothers and newborns was a priority, and that happened on a lot of different levels. There was significant investment in neonatal intensive care cots, with a \$4 billion boost just last year, and also in operating costs to run five new cots. They are very expensive, and I am sure they will come in as part of the consideration of the mix of services required. A comprehensive consultative ministerial committee was established by former health minister David Davis to advise on ways to improve health care for women and newborns in Victoria. It was established following the Auditor-General's report, and I understand it has done very good work since that time.

At a personal level, during my time as Minister for Mental Health a lot of initiatives were undertaken. One of the things I am proud of in terms of investment in additional mental health services is the investment in mother and baby units in regional Victoria. Regional Victoria had never had specialist mother and baby units. I was pleased to open one at Latrobe Regional Health late last year. I understand that one is now operating in Ballarat and that one will be established as part of the new Bendigo Hospital. These will substantially expand maternal mental health services and make a dramatic difference. With five beds at each of those places, access will be improved and provided as close as possible to mothers in their own communities. That was a significant and important investment around the issue of perinatal mental health.

I am also very pleased that we made a significant investment in the perinatal and infant inpatient unit at Monash Health. We invested over \$1 million to refurbish what was a very run-down facility to bring it up to modern fabric. We restructured it quite significantly so that it is a unit tailored to the needs of mothers and their babies and also to the clinical and nursing staff to make sure that they are able to be most effective in their roles.

I want to come to the issue mentioned specifically in the motion in relation to the national partnership agreement (NPA) on the National Perinatal Depression Initiative. As minister I spent a significant amount of time with responsibility for this initiative. While there was agreement with the then federal Labor government on the financing, the responsibility for crafting the programs, determining who would deliver them, allocating the funding and then renegotiating an extension to the program fell to me in my role as Minister for Mental Health.

Under the National Perinatal Depression Initiative there are a number of programs, which include a perinatal emotional health program at all nine rural clinical mental health services, a perinatal psychotropic medication information service at the Royal Women's Hospital, registrar training administered via Mindful from the University of Melbourne and telephone counselling by PANDA, and can I just say what amazing work PANDA does as a community-based service for women with depression, especially around the perinatal period. There was also increased capacity at the early parenting centres, which I know have been mentioned separately and include Tweddle, the Queen Elizabeth Centre and the Mercy Health O'Connell Family Centre.

One of the things that took a significant amount of time was negotiating with the commonwealth to extend the National Perinatal Depression Initiative. It was to conclude in June 2014, and we went through some rigorous negotiations to extend that NPA for another 12 months. About half the funding was from the state and half was from the commonwealth. For the first six months, because we did not have the agreement, we negotiated that the state funding would be expended in that period, and then the commonwealth funding kicked in to fund the second six months rather than doing half and half over the full 12-month period. I was very pleased to be able to negotiate and advocate very strongly for the extension of the National Perinatal Depression Initiative. It is disappointing that this NPA has not continued. Obviously there has been a loss of commonwealth funding, but I have to say that advocacy from the state was important in continuing the initiative

in the first instance. I think it is unfortunate that the combination of state advocacy and commonwealth decision-making has meant that this initiative has not continued.

There is clearly a gap in those very important services that have been provided. It is important that a way to maintain as many of those services as possible with state funding be established. I suggest that potentially the state should step up and make sure that those services can continue. There have been a number of instances in the past, including under our government, where changes at the federal level, be they under a Labor or a coalition government, have meant that there has been a shortfall in state funding, and the coalition state government has stepped in to fund those gaps. This amount, while significant at about \$1.8 million, is not going to break the budget in terms of the state Department of Health and Human Services. I think it would be worthwhile for those vital services for mothers and babies to continue. I would certainly encourage the state Labor government to continue those services.

It is important that these issues be discussed and debated so that we understand where we are at and so that this house gets some advice about where to go. On that basis the coalition supports the motion and commends it to the house.

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to speak on the motion moved by Dr Carling-Jenkins. As Dr Carling-Jenkins mentioned, it is reported that in the city of Whittlesea there are 60 new babies being born and 60 new houses being built every week, so there is an enormous boom. I understand that is expected to increase over the next 10 years to over 100 babies a week in the Whittlesea region. Therefore it is very important to have a better understanding of perinatal services in that area. Also in the city of Hume there are 56 babies being born every week, and that is looking at doubling over 10 years to up to 98 babies a week. So the Northern Metropolitan Region is probably one of the baby boomers booming. If I can say booming one more time —

Dr Carling-Jenkins — Baby belt?

Ms PATTEN — The boomiest baby belt, yes! Northern Metropolitan Region also has a number of hospitals that provide a lot of the perinatal services in Melbourne, being the Royal Children's Hospital, the Royal Women's Hospital and the Northern Hospital in Epping. These provide specialist treatments for the wellbeing of women and children, especially newborns.

Analysing what is available out there, considering the growth we will see over the next 10 years, is crucial.

I am particularly interested in mental health issues around perinatal depression. We know the numbers are large and that up to nearly 10 per cent of women suffer from some form of antenatal depression. That number can be even higher in some areas, where up to one in five mothers of children under 24 months of age have been diagnosed with depression. Unfortunately depression is more likely to affect those households with low income or other issues. Young motherhood and low income can be some of the factors in depression hitting those homes. One of the other things about antenatal depression is that it can lead to ongoing mental health issues. If we can prevent or deal with antenatal depression at the beginning and work out how we can best prevent it, detect it early and combat it and provide strong support at that time, that could see a reduction in ongoing mental health issues in the wider community as those mothers age.

It was interesting — and it will be interesting to see what comes out in this inquiry — to hear from Ms Wooldridge about the disparity between the regional and urban areas. From a quick look at where the tertiary hospitals exist, the concentration of services does seem to be very urban-centric, so looking at providing these services to regional areas will be an important part of the inquiry.

It is interesting that more people are choosing home births, and some home birth pilot projects have started. I think that is great. I am on the parliamentary committee inquiring into end-of-life choices, and we are looking at enabling people to die at home. It is great to see us taking back and de-medicalising not only birth but also death choices. The neonatal inquiry should go a long way in supporting mothers who choose to have a home birth.

I commend the government for introducing legislation to ensure that patient-nurse and patient-midwife ratios are kept out of any enterprise bargaining. That is a great move. The other week I had the honour to meet two neonatal nurses. They brought in a killer lobbying tool, which is one of the best I have ever seen in my life — two six-month-old baby girls. They could have asked us for anything. The whole office was completely in support of whatever they were saying. I am not even sure what they were saying; we were just playing with the babies. The neonatal nurses do some really tremendous work and I commend them. I also commend the government for ensuring that ratios are kept out of pay bargaining.

I have spoken to Dr Carling-Jenkins about this motion. My only concern is the time frame. I appreciate that you have to put a time in a motion, but I suspect the process will take a little bit longer if the committee wants to inquire as extensively as we all think it should. I am pleased that the motion has come before the house, and I am very pleased to commend it.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — This is incredibly important work that needs to be done. My only concern is, as Ms Patten has just indicated, the timing and the resources for the committee. We have clearly seen the upper house committees not being properly resourced, and I hope this joint committee will be properly endorsed to do what is an important piece of work.

Over the last eight years or so the Greens and I have done a great deal of work around a number of the issues that Dr Carling-Jenkins wants the committee to inquire into. I will go through a few of those. The perinatal emotional health program that runs at Sunshine Hospital, which Dr Carling-Jenkins mentioned, has been defunded. This program enabled routine mental health screening of pregnant women to increase early detection and provide support and treatment for those experiencing feelings such as sadness and anxiety during pregnancy and early parenthood. This was an extremely successful program which identified 403 women who required support and help to cope. The fact that 18 per cent of all pregnant women who used the maternity services at Sunshine Hospital were identified as requiring support during the trial period means that over 400 women who might otherwise have suffered for far too long before receiving support, or who may have received no support otherwise, have been helped, and those women and their children have not been put at such great risk.

The program has enabled women to get the support they need before their depression and anxiety spirals and becomes a much bigger problem. Unfortunately the funding for this trial program is now coming to an end. The federal government will not re-fund it, and unfortunately at this stage the state government has not taken up the urgent need for the funding of the program. We all know that for far too long the prevalence of perinatal depression has not been properly recognised. As a result, there has been far too little investment in early detection and treatment of perinatal depression and anxiety.

Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia, known as PANDA, provides a national hotline, but it runs on an absolute shoestring budget. There are few other services or programs that specifically address this area.

The particular thing about PANDA and other similar organisations is that their volunteers are women who have been through this condition, so they actually know what it feels like. I am told by women who have used the service that that has made a massive difference. The perinatal emotional health program provided women with health care for their minds as well as their bodies during a huge life change, but unfortunately it is now gone. I welcome more investigation into this area especially.

We know that there have been chronic shortages in neonatal intensive care in Victoria for many years. Every now and again there is a story in the paper about a baby that has had to be flown to Adelaide or Sydney because there are simply not enough beds in Victoria. We also know that these beds are extremely expensive to run, but the separation between parents and a baby during this critical time cannot be overemphasised, and we absolutely must deal with the issue of neonatal cots. If babies have to be moved from hospital to hospital, and often interstate, we must put ourselves in the place of the parents of those babies. They may not be able to see their baby because they have other children or work commitments or because of the costs of travelling interstate, not just of the airfares but of the hotels et cetera, which are often well beyond what a family can manage. The Andrews government committed to investing in more cots and neonatal intensive care, but I am not totally convinced we have enough of these cots to deal with this problem, so, again, further investigations in this area are most welcome.

Access to maternity services for antenatal labour, birth and postnatal care are not equitable. There are disparities in access to maternity care, particularly in rural and regional areas and especially in the outer suburbs of my electorate, as Dr Carling-Jenkins has already indicated. When you look at the number of births in Werribee — 60 to 80 a week — it is hard to fathom how any hospital can keep up. There is also a problem for high-risk pregnancies. How are these being dealt with? Are women able to go to a hospital near home rather than having to be transferred to the Royal Women's Hospital? Further attention needs to be given to this area, especially to how rural women are supported. We definitely need to look at the need for greater travel allowances or whether some regional cities are becoming large enough to offer more specialised care.

All these issues mean that there are out-of-pocket expenses for a family. It is about someone having to be in hospital for several months, whether there are children at home and how all of that is managed. It can

be quite difficult. The issues around access for regional and outer suburban women are absolutely critical.

For many years the Greens have campaigned on providing more choices to women in the model of care they receive during pregnancy, especially in relation to access to midwife-led care. There are still a number of hospitals that do not provide midwife-led care options, and where they do the places are quite limited. There is also limited access to public homebirth services and to birth centres. I have to say that, from everything I know about the program that runs out of Sunshine, people think it is just fantastic, but it needs a lot more expansion.

Of course there is always forward planning that has been identified in Auditor-General's reports and government reports about the kinds of services that are needed, because we really have been running behind in relation to maternity services in Victoria over the past decade. An example of this is the situation we had for quite some time at Sunshine Hospital, where women were delivering quite regularly in the emergency room. The hospital and the government did a number of things to alleviate this, and I give credit to the government for building the new wing at Sunshine Hospital. It is extremely appropriate that it has been named after Joan Kirner. This will do a lot to assist, but unfortunately it is probably only just going to do catch-up, and we need to be planning for what is going to be happening in the future, especially as these areas are expanding so dramatically.

All these issues are currently known to the government, and I believe the Minister for Health has a real understanding of it and has shown a real commitment to it, but I think the work of the committee can bring all the players together and show exactly what is needed and how it is needed. Having read a number of reports from a number of committees in the past, I know they can shed real light on innovative ways to manage all these issues. For all those reasons the Greens will be supporting this referral.

Dr CARLING-JENKINS (Western Metropolitan) — I would just like to make a couple of very brief concluding comments on motion 164 standing in my name. I am very pleased with the broad support for this motion. I am pleased the Minister for Health, Jill Hennessy, has given her support for this inquiry. I think it is a brave move for the government to support such a broad-ranging inquiry, which is sure to have an impact on government policy and the government pocketbook. I thank Ms Symes for sharing her personal experience of accessing and appreciating support services after the birth of her child; sharing

such experiences is a very brave thing to do in this place. I also thank her for presenting the government's support for this inquiry.

I thank Ms Wooldridge for presenting the coalition's support for this reference and for her detailing of the reports and initiatives the committee needs to take note of. I would like to acknowledge the work contributed by Ms Wooldridge and the previous government, particularly in Ms Wooldridge's capacity as former Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Women and Minister for Community Services. The investments she made in office at this time, some of which Ms Wooldridge outlined but obviously not all of them, in areas that are now experiencing this baby boom are very valuable and are reaping benefits. I would also like to thank all the minor parties for their support of this motion, and I commend the motion to the house.

Motion agreed to.

REGIONAL RAIL LINK

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — I move:

That this house —

- (1) condemns the Andrews Labor government and Minister for Public Transport, Ms Jacinta Allan, MP, for neglecting regional Victorians after having botched the introduction of the new regional rail link timetable;
- (2) notes that punctuality on the Ballarat line has dropped from 95 per cent in May 2015 to 82.8 per cent in July 2015; and
- (3) calls upon the Minister for Public Transport to reinstate the pre-regional rail link timetable on the Ballarat train line.

In speaking to this motion I would like to be able to say that I rise with great pleasure; however, it is not with great pleasure at all that I rise to speak on this particular motion, because I take absolutely no pleasure in seeing the impact that Labor — the Premier, Daniel Andrews; the Minister for Public Transport, Jacinta Allan; and the local MPs in the Assembly, the member for Buninyong, Geoff Howard, and the member for Wendouree, Sharon Knight — has had on the once reliable and punctual Ballarat train service.

It appears that even fellow Labor MPs have been forced to voice their disgust at the way Labor has been treating Ballarat commuters. Catherine King, the federal member for Ballarat, in her recent newsletter stated:

Recently I have been contacted by many of you across the electorate regarding the reduced and delayed rail services along the Ballarat line. I am frustrated by what has happened and have written to the Victorian transport minister, Jacinta

Allan, raising my concerns and the negative experiences of commuters across the region.

I certainly do not try to make a habit of agreeing with Ms King on many issues at all; however, I must agree with Ms King in her acknowledgement that this state government has let the people of Ballarat down, as did the Labor federal government. Our lacklustre state and federal Labor MPs treat the people of Ballarat with absolute contempt and just expect them to put up with it. Well, not anymore! The people of Ballarat are sick and tired of being ignored and treated with disregard. What is of particular note in Ms King's newsletter is her reference to the 'reduced and delayed rail services along the Ballarat line'. It is immediately obvious to all those who have used the Ballarat service that they are certainly delayed, with the recent punctuality results for August 2015 being a disastrous 85.4 per cent compared to August 2014, when punctuality on the Ballarat line was 93.5 per cent. But let us look at punctuality later.

What I really want to address is the point that Ms King made in her recent newsletter about reduced services on the Ballarat line. I raise this point because in a media release from the Minister for Public Transport, Jacinta Allan, dated 14 September 2015, there is a quote attributable to Minister Allan that reads:

Patronage is booming and the performance of Ballarat services isn't up to scratch. That's why we have added services, added carriages and reviewed the timetable to make services more reliable.

We have a minister who says she has overseen the adding of services to the Ballarat line, whereas we have a local federal Labor member — not a Liberal member — who is saying that services have been reduced. I must say that once again I agree with Ms King because she knows what Geoff Howard, the member for Buninyong in the Assembly, and Sharon Knight, the member for Wendouree in the Assembly, know and what every commuter who has had the misfortune to use a Ballarat train service knows — that is, that Labor has reduced services on the Ballarat line and it has thumbed its nose at Ballarat commuters all the while overseeing the plummeting of punctuality results by almost 10 per cent. Labor has wrecked the Ballarat train service, and Daniel Andrews, Jacinta Allan, Geoff Howard and Sharon Knight could not care less.

A short history of the regional rail link might be helpful for those members who are unaware of the significance of this particular project. I encourage everybody to listen intently. The regional rail link was first announced in 2008 by the Brumby government. In simple terms the idea of the project was to have a

dedicated line for regional trains travelling from Ballarat, Geelong and Bendigo so they did not get stuck behind metropolitan trains in Melbourne. It was in May 2009 when the project reached full funding with the assistance of the federal government — or so we thought.

As we have come to expect from Labor, the regional rail link project under then Premier Brumby and then Minister for Public Transport, Martin Pakula, was poorly planned and horribly underfunded. Just by way of example of how Labor tried to roll out this project, there were residents whose homes were to be acquired as part of the regional rail link project who found out about the compulsory acquisition when a journalist knocked on their door to ask about the acquisition of their homes. Such was the callous disregard with which Labor treated the affected home owners.

The coalition was elected, thank heavens, in November 2010 and began a wholesale review of the regional rail link. Under the Minister for Public Transport at that time, the Honourable Terry Mulder, the coalition identified that the project had been underfunded by Labor to the tune of over \$1 billion.

Ms Pulford — What utter rubbish!

Mr MORRIS — Ms Pulford should listen. I am going to quote a Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) report that she might find quite interesting. In the VAGO report entitled *Portfolio Departments and Associated Entities — Results of the 2013–14 Audits*, the Auditor-General stated:

The original project budget of \$4317 million was revised in March 2011 to \$5568 million to include additional contingency provisions, signalling equipment, land acquisition and the removal of the level crossings at Anderson Road, Sunshine.

What we see here is that the original project, as costed by Labor, was some \$1 billion short of what was required. The VAGO report also states:

The 2014–15 state budget announced another amendment to the project budget, further reducing it to \$4102 million based on the current project delivery progress, while also including \$202 million of level crossing works at Main Road, St Albans, within the project.

Thanks to the efficient Liberal minister, Terry Mulder, the regional rail link was completed on time and under budget, in stark contrast to what had occurred under the watch of Mr Brumby and Mr Pakula. The regional rail link had been completed by the coalition. Unfortunately we did not win the 2014 election, but Labor members had a project that had been well managed and delivered

under budget. All they had to do was implement the new timetable. The rest had been done for them.

However, on 21 June this year Labor launched the regional rail link timetable. That date is now widely regarded as a very black day for Ballarat commuters, who since this date have suffered through the debacle of a Labor government charged with running our regional trains. It was from the very first week of Labor's failed timetable rollout that commuters began contacting my office by phone, email, letter, Facebook and Twitter, as well as by stopping me in the street, to share their concerns about the absolute disaster that was Labor's new train timetable.

Commuters who contacted my office told me of having to give up their lunchbreaks because they were late to work and had to make up time. Others told me they were no longer getting to see their children during the working week as they had to leave home before the children woke and were consistently late home in the evening, arriving after their children had gone to bed.

Commuters kindly provided me with spreadsheets of the punctuality performance of the train services that they caught. Mr Gerold Martens kept track of the lack of punctuality on the Ballarat train line between 3 August and 3 September of this year. Mr Martens caught 39 V/Line services between Ballarat and Southern Cross stations, and 37 of those were late — a remarkable on-time performance of 5.1 per cent! — and the minister wonders why commuters are as furious as they are. I can tell her, because I am just as furious: when 1 in 20 services is running on time, commuters have every right to be furious with the Minister for Public Transport, Jacinta Allan.

At last count another commuter, Mr Joseph van Dyk, has copied me in on 23 emails he has sent the minister. I congratulate Mr van Dyk because his email correspondence with the minister is always exceptionally polite despite the horror that the minister has brought to bear on the incredibly important Ballarat train line. Here are a couple of examples of the correspondence Mr van Dyk has sent me. An email sent on Friday, 21 August says:

Good evening, I hope this finds you well.

This evening myself and several hundred other Ballarat commuters boarded the 5.53 p.m. service from SC. We were unfortunately told the train wouldn't be operating.

It is now 8.34 p.m. and I have just boarded a train to Ballarat and hope to be home by 10.00 p.m. This is the 8.25 p.m. by the way — running 9 minutes late for departure already.

Well done on another great day of V/Line services! When do you anticipate we can expect a service to run on time?

I would like to meet with you next week at some time. Please provide a time when you are available to discuss further.

Thanks.

From another email:

Just a quick email to let you know people who were catching the 5.53 p.m. train to Ballarat have now arrived.

Unfortunately I had to cancel my dinner catch-up with friends and family; if only these trains could run on time.

The second email was sent at 9.53 p.m. It took from 5.53 p.m. until 9.53 p.m. for Mr van Dyk and hundreds of other commuters to get home on Friday, 21 August — a 4-hour trip to get home to begin the weekend after a working day.

Another commuter, Mr Jonathan Nolan, has taken the initiative to set up a Facebook page called Ballarat to Melbourne Express that advocates for what I, Leader of the Opposition Matthew Guy and shadow Minister for Public Transport David Hodgett have all advocated for — that is, the reintroduction of the extremely well patronised, efficient and popular express service from Southern Cross railway station on the Ballarat line. We have all advocated for the same outcome. However, Minister Allan has chosen not to listen but to actively ignore the wishes of those whose lives are adversely affected on a daily basis.

These three commuters — Mr Martens, Mr van Dyk and Mr Nolan — are but three examples of thousands upon thousands of people who have been terribly inconvenienced over the past 87 days since Labor's failed timetable has been imposed on the Ballarat train line. Not only has the shadow Minister for Public Transport met with commuters at the Ballarat train station but he has also met commuters at Southern Cross railway station — and I might say the passengers on the Ballarat line have been very keen to share the abominable experiences they have endured over the last 87 days. People whose daily lives have been adversely affected by this Labor government have shared their utter disbelief at just how quickly the Ballarat train line has deteriorated from a reliable, punctual service to what is best described as an absolute dog's breakfast.

What more can I say? This is Labor. But it is not enough for Labor to have an unreliable and overcrowded service — it also has to overcharge commuters. An analysis of the prices paid per kilometre of trip on various V/Line services shows that trips to Bendigo cost about 13 cents per kilometre and to Geelong about 16 cents, but coming out on top is the cost of the tickets to Ballarat, at 19 cents per kilometre. So not only do Ballarat commuters have the least

reliable and most unpunctual service in living memory, they also have to pay significantly more for that privilege. In fact the cost per kilometre to travel to Bacchus March, which is on the Ballarat line, is a little less than 6 cents per kilometre. Ballarat commuters have to pay triple what Bacchus Marsh residents have to pay. In fact some commuters have been disembarking from the train at Bacchus Marsh and touching off their mykis before touching back on again and re-embarking the same train, saving almost \$10 per trip — such is the absurdity of Labor's ticket pricing regime.

Let us delve into the punctuality of the Ballarat service. It might be interesting to note that the last punctuality data, for the month of August, did not appear on the V/Line website until 9 September — much later than was the case in the previous months. It appeared only after I tweeted a question to the minister asking where the punctuality data was. Amazingly, 10 minutes after I asked that question, there the data was, having magically appeared on the V/Line website.

I will look at some of the punctuality data for the Ballarat service. In March 2015, when Labor was in government, punctuality was at 94.6 per cent — that is a fairly good punctuality rate. In April 2015 it was 93.1 per cent, which is still not too bad. In May 2015 it was 95 per cent. In June 2015 — the fabled June 2015 — it dropped to 85.3 per cent, nearly a 10 per cent drop in punctuality from May to June. You must also remember that Labor's failed timetable was only introduced on 21 June. To get down to 85.3 per cent having only run for 10 days shows just how disastrous the introduction of the new timetable was for commuters. Unfortunately it went from bad to worse in July. This has not been a steady decline in punctuality; this has been performance falling off a cliff.

But why does all this matter? It matters because these numbers represent families who are not sharing meals together. They represent children who are not seeing their mother or father before they go to bed. They represent dinner plans that have to be cancelled. They represent work lunchbreaks that are not happening because workers have to work through their lunchbreaks to catch up on the time they have lost as a result of getting to work late. I have even heard from commuters who have lost their jobs as a result of being consistently late to work, but it certainly appears that the Minister for Public Transport does not care.

One particular incident that occurred on the Ballarat train line on 18 August can only be described as farcical: when the 7.39 a.m. Wendouree–Southern Cross train took the absurd route of Wendouree to

Ballarat, Ballarat to Wendouree, Wendouree to Ballarat and then on to Melbourne. On 18 August the Ballarat *Courier* had the headline 'Backtrack', and the *Courier* went on to exclaim:

The laughable regional rail link Ballarat services became even more ridiculous on Tuesday morning.

The latest setback saw Ballarat station commuters sent in the polar opposite direction to their destination — Melbourne.

Commuters aboard this service thought the announcement was a joke — the train surely could not be going back to the station from which it had just come — but unfortunately the only joke here is the Labor government and the current Minister for Public Transport.

I now turn to wi-fi on the Ballarat train line. The Napthine government funded, out of the budget, the rollout of point-to-point connectivity on many regional train services, including the Ballarat line. I am sorry that the minister responsible for the rollout, the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, Mr Dalidakis, is not in the chamber, as I would like to ask him what exactly he is doing with it. We funded it — all the money is there — and all he has to do is get on and do it. But, alas, it is all too hard. Perhaps the minister is too busy trying to convince himself that new public holidays are a good idea for Victorian small businesses, because he knows what we all know and what Mr Somyurek, who was the minister before him, knows: new public holidays are bad for Victorian businesses and bad for Victoria.

So what have the Premier and the Minister for Public Transport done? To give him credit, the Premier came back from his holidays early to apologise to the people of Ballarat for his incompetent minister. He was quoted in the Ballarat *Courier* of 14 July as having said:

I want to personally apologise to the people of Ballarat for the totally unacceptable performance of V/Line services.

On that we can agree: the performance is totally unacceptable.

The Premier went on to say:

It is not good enough; everyone from the Premier down is on notice and knows this isn't good enough.

He said also:

I am disappointed I have had to intervene to achieve that outcome, but I have.

The Premier had to intervene because of his do-nothing minister, and he put everyone on notice. I ask: for how long can the Premier put someone on notice? For how

long can he apologise and say this is not good enough and then do nothing — nothing at all? It has been 87 days, and nothing has changed. If anything, it has just got worse.

Mr Ondarchie — It has gone backwards.

Mr MORRIS — That is right; it has gone backwards — just like that service from Wendouree to Ballarat.

After a concerted campaign by Ballarat commuters and the local media, Jacinta Allan was shamed into attending at the Ballarat station on 27 July, more than a month after the launch of her failed timetable and almost a fortnight after the Premier came to Ballarat to apologise for her incompetence. The minister, the person who is supposed to be responsible for the public transport portfolio, was missing for more than a month. Despite the disastrous impact of her timetable, she was missing in action for more than a month, and it was her boss who came to apologise for her. It is hard to believe she still has a portfolio at all, let alone such an important portfolio as public transport. But the minister did come to Ballarat on 27 July. What did she say she was going to do? Surely there must have been some imminent action. The minister was quoted in the *Courier* as having said:

I'd prefer to wait until we see what comes through the regional public transport development plan.

There was no action — none — just talk, bluff and bluster. I am not sure if Jacinta Allan was fiddling at the time, but she may well have been. What changed after the minister's visit? Nothing. The trains were still late, and they were still overcrowded.

It was a long time between drinks, but the minister came back to Ballarat on Monday of this week. Commuters were hopeful. Surely there would be some swift, positive action to fix the woes Labor had imposed on Ballarat commuters — but alas, there was not. It appears that the only thing the minister has done since 21 June, when she launched her failed timetable, is read press releases of the previous coalition government from a time way back when the Ballarat trains were running on time.

On Monday in Ballarat the minister announced additional car parks at the Wendouree station, a coalition commitment that Labor members had been dragged to kicking and screaming, as they generally are with good public policy. On Monday the minister also reannounced the coalition's Rowsley passing loop, but it will not be completed until the middle of next year, which is of no immediate help at all.

There was a third announcement, and it was the one everyone had been waiting for: there will be changes to the timetable. Alleluia! The minister had finally seen the light. Everyone expected the immediate reintroduction of express services, services that would get people to work on time and home at a reasonable time in the evening. But then came the kicker. When will these changes actually come in? In January, maybe. So six months after the introduction of her failed timetable some changes may be made to improve it. The response by commuters to this pathetic excuse for an announcement was swift and unanimous. How could the minister possibly think that imposing four more months of pain on Ballarat train travellers was a positive? This shows just how out of touch the minister really is.

In summing up, the detail of what I have presented to the house today clearly indicates that Labor has forgotten about Ballarat commuters. Its members have shown their complete disregard for those commuters. I commend the motion to the house.

Ms PULFORD (Minister for Regional Development) — That was a lovely selective bit of storytelling from Mr Morris. I would like to respond just briefly to some of his comments. I am not a daily commuter on or user of the V/Line Ballarat train service, but for a long time I have been a frequent user of the service. Along with all users of the V/Line Ballarat service, I want it to be good and better than it currently is.

The Premier, the Minister for Public Transport and local members, including myself, have acknowledged that the performance of the service and the timetabling changes implemented in June have been disappointing, and we want to do better. Since the end of June, the government has added seven extra carriages to the Ballarat service, which provide space for an additional 400 passengers. Punctuality is improving slowly, but there is more work to do. There is an additional morning service and an additional p.m. service in peak periods. There are five additional peak trains for the Bacchus Marsh station, where many people join the service.

Mr Morris failed in his contribution to mention some things that I must pull him up on, including his comments on the express service. I have been a big fan of the express service, and it is probably worth pointing out that the former government did not provide that express service.

Mr Morris interjected.

Ms PULFORD — Mr Morris implied that he was talking about the old express service — the express service that ran under an hour — which I would welcome back with open arms. When he said we should just go back to the old timetable, Mr Morris missed the point. That really is a bandaid approach. We do not need an old timetable. We need new carriages, more capacity and better services — things the former government did not deliver.

I note that Mr Morris and Mr Guy have called for additional carriages, which would, of course, be easier to achieve had the former government ordered enough rolling stock during its four-year term. The coalition government failed to order a single train carriage for two years. There was not only a failure to procure train carriages and rolling stock for our train services, which had a negative impact on employment in the industry, but there was also underinvestment and neglect for four years. In the first two years of the previous government not one single V/Line carriage was ordered, and the downstream consequence of that has been crowded and congested lines. That is why there was an eight-week delay in the opening of the regional rail link.

By contrast, the Andrews Labor government immediately placed an order for 21 new regional rail carriages and for infrastructure to significantly boost capacity across the network. This will create nearly 200 jobs. The carriages are expected to be able to carry an extra 1500 V/Line passengers a day. Unfortunately these things do not happen overnight, although we all certainly wish that could be the case.

Former Liberal-Nationals governments do not have great form on regional rail. Back in the day their members were opposed to the regional fast rail project. The lines they closed make a list longer than my arm. In its most recent term the coalition government cut \$60 million over three years from V/Line's budget, which impacted on things like cleaning and maintenance and basic services and resulted in 100 jobs being lost.

I recognise that we have a lot to do to get the Ballarat service up to the standard that Ballarat commuters want and expect. On Monday my colleague Jacinta Allan was in Ballarat to announce a number of initiatives to continue our work to boost performance on the Ballarat line. Mr Morris did not mention any of those initiatives, such as his selective storytelling. For the record, those initiatives include the construction of a new passing loop at Rowsley, which will start within weeks and will provide another point at which trains can pass each other. This will help services to recover more quickly from unexpected delays. Any regular traveller on the

Ballarat line knows that during many of the peak times in particular the trains just stop and wait for another train to pass. A new passing loop will help. Minister Allan also announced a nearly doubling of the Wendouree station car park.

As members know, the timetable review is currently underway. The review has identified a range of options to improve performance, including changes to where trains stop, the spacing of services and the way carriages are used across the network. I thank those users of the service who have contributed to the consultations on the regional public transport network development plan and those who have provided feedback to me and to my colleagues. These options will be developed over the coming months and implemented as part of a new timetable in January next year.

Mr Morris talked about punctuality targets, and we all agree they need to be improved. Punctuality ran at 85.4 per cent in August, which is up slightly. But we want all trains to run on time, and we are doing everything we can to make that happen. There has been a bit of selective retelling by Mr Morris of the history of regional rail investment.

The government is committed to improving our regional rail services to ensure that Ballarat residents, Ballarat commuters and infrequent users of the service alike can enjoy a service that is reliable, that is punctual, that has a good timetable, that fits in with other services, that fits in with commuters' needs and that people can have great confidence in again. We are working very hard to that end. We know it has been a trying time for Ballarat commuters in the last few months, and we are working hard to improve the service in a number of different ways.

Ms DUNN (Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to express support for long-suffering commuters from the communities of Geelong, Bendigo, Altona, Werribee and many other places that have suffered during the commencement of the regional rail link project, but in particular the people of Ballarat. I want to express support and ask a single question, a question for which the Greens want a proper answer: why are successive governments in Victoria so bad at implementing major public transport infrastructure projects?

First I will provide a bit of context. Regional rail link was a \$3.65 billion joint federal-state project comprising 90 kilometres of new track constructed to separate the metropolitan railway lines from regional lines to Geelong, Bendigo and Ballarat. This was an iconic project intended to accommodate an extra

54 000 commuters per day and liberate the metropolitan train system from the rail bottleneck in the inner west of Melbourne, which would increase reliability and capacity. The project seemed to progress well. It seemed to deliver. In fact it received several awards, including the 2015 Gold Quill Award for Excellence in Community Relations and the 2015 Australian Construction Achievement Award. I am sure these were wonderful, champagne-popping moments. The Labor government was dancing with the stars. It kicked the project off in 2008. The project then went over to the coalition government in 2010, and now a new Labor government has brought regional rail over the finish line on time and within budget. Wonderful stuff — but wait, there is more. What about the commencement of the new services?

In early 2015 the new Labor government revealed that the commencement of services would be delayed as there was not enough rolling stock. Concerns were raised about commuter chaos due to a lack of trains to at least maintain service levels. That is right: a \$3.65 billion investment intended to provide a massive boost to capacity and reliability, and concerns were being raised about maintenance of previous service levels. If it was not so serious, it would be a very bad joke.

On 26 February this year in the other place the Minister for Public Transport confirmed that there would be an eight-week delay in commencement because the government could not guarantee there would not be problems. Within days of the commencement in June outraged commuters in Ballarat were dealing with overcrowding from shortened trains. In fact the overcrowding is so bad and commuters are standing for so long that people have taken to sitting on the floor of trains as a way of trying to get some sort of rest from having to stand for so long on their journeys. Reports of delays and unreliability across the system abound. Commuters wonder if these are just teething problems or there is something else going on.

Earlier this week the Premier said:

... a series of small but important changes has stabilised the performance of Ballarat services. Punctuality ran at 85.4 per cent in August, up slightly from the previous month.

That is simply not good enough in terms of a target you should be aiming for. Imagine if I said to my staffers, 'Just get to work on time 85.4 per cent of the time'. Imagine if I set a benchmark for myself that I will arrive in this chamber on behalf of my constituents 85.4 per cent of the time. Imagine if I said to my son, of his efforts in school, 'Just put in 85.4 per cent of effort'. It is simply not good enough, and it is a stark reminder

of how this regional rail link is failing commuters, given that one year ago the punctuality rate was 93.5 per cent.

Following this, more responses started coming in. An explanation was given for the bottleneck created by the convergence of the Geelong line with the Bendigo and Ballarat lines at Footscray. There has been a \$3.65 billion investment to prevent bottlenecks, yet we have timetabling chaos because of a lack of rolling stock and the creation of a new bottleneck. Now the people of Ballarat are asking for a return to the previous timetable, which was a timetable that worked. People who rely on public transport to commute from Ballarat to Melbourne every day are desperate for a reliable system.

Many people are forced to drive from Geelong to Werribee or catch a bus and wait for another train, due to the severing of the connection between Geelong and Werribee, and between Geelong and all the railway stations on the pre-existing line east of Werribee before Footscray. People have been stranded in Altona due to other timetabling problems. People have been stranded along the Werribee line because of a massive reduction in metropolitan services due to the previous Geelong to Melbourne trains no longer servicing metropolitan stations. There has been timetabling chaos, which is due to two problems: a shortage of rolling stock, and a failure to properly plan.

Who forgot to order the rolling stock to run on the new system? It was both major parties. Labor forgot to include the additional rolling stock in the original planning for the project, and the Liberals, who hate spending money on public transport, did not do anything about it. We highlighted this some time ago. In January 2013 Mr Barber, the Victorian Greens leader, said:

People are crying out for much more frequent V/Line services. But we can see in black and white that it can't happen without a bigger government investment ...

We will see in the May budget if the Baillieu government will listen to V/Line's advice or fail Victorians.

Since Ted Baillieu took charge, there's been no expansion of public transport for regional Victoria. Passenger numbers keep growing, but service levels don't.

Mr Barber was referring to the V/Line initial strategic operations plan from 10 November 2011, which indicated that the Baillieu government had not ordered enough trains to meet demand. There we have it. I do not want to say, 'We told you so', but we told you so back in January 2013.

Mr Ramsay — Don't say it.

Ms DUNN — I said it.

Back to my question: why are successive governments in Victoria so bad at implementing public transport infrastructure projects? There is too much secrecy and no clear plan. It is a lack of public scrutiny that causes the problems. If the original business case and budget for the regional rail link had been subject to expert independent scrutiny, it would have been revealed that a lack of rolling stock and the forward planning needed to order the rolling stock was a critical issue.

It is a scenario that is played out repeatedly. I invite members to think again about myki. The Auditor-General reported earlier this year that too much secrecy over the original business case and the project scoping documents was the root of the problem. Secrecy and silos cause gaps and blind spots in public infrastructure project management. You do not need a highly paid consultant to understand this; you just need to think clearly.

A lack of public scrutiny of core project planning and management documentation stops the accountability of government. It stops the community from commenting on difficulties, gaps and project shortfalls. It interrupts the democratic process and leaves communities angry about not being consulted or considered. It stops independent experts from having input and improving projects for everyone's benefit to get absolutely the best value for public expenditure. It happens time and again, and it is happening right now.

It is happening on the high-capacity signalling trial. It is happening on level crossing removals, it is happening on the Melbourne Metro rail project, the western distributor proposal and the port rail shuttle project, just to name a few. The story is the same — the foundation documents on all these projects are kept out of the public eye and competence in the management and delivery of the projects is compromised.

The Greens will continue to stand up for the standard of public transport that the people of Victoria expect in order to ensure that public transport is reliable and to push for a standard of public transport that should see it become a real and convenient alternative to private car travel. We will not give up. We will hold all governments to account on public transport and we will not give up on service delivery in relation to those poor commuters on the regional rail link.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the motion put on the notice paper by Josh Morris in relation to

V/Line services and timetabling that have gone backwards since this government got its hands on the regional rail link network that now exists. The regional rail network project was announced by Labor during the Brumby Labor government. No work was started under the former Labor government. It was not until we came to government in 2014 that the project was kicked along and put into action.

It was amazing when we got into it to realise what had and had not been scoped. The biggest omission was that the two level crossings at Anderson Road, Sunshine, were not included in the original scope. These two level crossings are only about 400 metres apart. One is for trains that take off towards Bendigo and the other is for trains that take off towards Ballarat and/or Geelong. Effectively in peak times, if these two level crossings had been replaced with underpasses and overpasses, the boom gates collectively would have been down for 45 minutes in every hour during peak travel times, both in the mornings and evenings. It was the most ludicrous omission and showed how shambolic the Labor Party was in simply announcing this project, underresourcing it and having no skills to implement the building of it.

Upon coming to government and getting this project started, I made a couple of tours of the regional rail link project with Corey Hannett, who was the CEO of the Regional Rail Link Authority. Corey was able to explain, as we went right out to the new Wyndham Vale site, everything in between, including the nearly total rebuild involved in the upgrade of the Sunshine and West Footscray stations. Out it goes, wherever the rail line goes, under the surface of the ground to minimise noise and so forth. It was an absolutely amazing project.

Corey Hannett and his team divided the project into six separate projects, and different contractors were brought in to complete each of the respective parcels of rail line. New lines were put in, bridges were built over the Maribyrnong River, and at the back of Festival Hall flyovers were built to bring trains from one side of Spencer Street station, which is now Southern Cross station, to various platforms. It is an amazing project. Amazingly this is something that had not happened under Labor for the 11 years that I had been around, but under the coalition this project was brought in at around \$600 million to \$800 million under budget. Yet the scope of the project was increased when we assumed government to make sure that the two crossings were included in the project.

It is staggering then that after this project was brought in under budget and over scope that the Labor Party, some 10 months in the job, is trying to bring the

timetable in — just the timetable — and it cannot even get that right. Effectively the Ballarat service is now in a total mess and, for the first time in 12 months, Bendigo, which had one of the most punctual services, has slipped below the standard benchmark, which is 92 per cent punctuality. That is a joke. It is not that difficult to raise those punctuality marks up to standard, yet for some reason the Minister for Public Transport, Jacinta Allan, and her team simply have been unable to bring together a timetabling process — a regime — that will enable these services to become more punctual and not considerably less punctual. That Minister Allan was missing in Ballarat for months is just deplorable. She then turned up and said that she was going to do very little to improve the situation.

I also want to mention some of the areas put forward by the Minister for Agriculture, Jaala Pulford, in her contribution. She said that the coalition has got form in relation to doing away with services. When I was first elected to Parliament there was a project called the regional fast rail project. At that time the Labor government ripped up the second railway line between Kyneton and Bendigo. There used to be two lines between Kyneton and Bendigo, but now there is only one, with three small passing loops. That single decision has caused more concerns on the Bendigo line than any other act of vandalism; it has just been deplorable. It was only when members of the coalition came to government that we were able to hear the public servants tell us of the extent of the damage caused by the Labor government, which ripped up the second line as part of the regional fast rail project.

When in government members of the Labor Party control the public servants and make sure that they are only ever allowed to say what the government wants them to say. However, when coalition members came to government we had the opportunity to meet with the public servants and ask them to speak their minds. They told us that ripping up that second railway line between Bendigo and Kyneton, which the former Labor government did as part of the regional fast rail project, was one of the greatest acts of regional rail vandalism that has ever been perpetrated upon the people of Victoria. Bendigo is still paying for that decision. Every time there is a delay or a breakdown on that line, whether it be at Malmsbury, Castlemaine or anywhere north of Kyneton, the Bendigo line is simply stuck.

Prior to the last election the former coalition government had on the table fully costed funding of \$178 million for regional rail improvements to create new services in Shepparton and on each of the major regional lines. Immediately upon coming to government, members of the Labor Party scrapped that

total commitment. That \$178 million has disappeared into the ether, and now we have a public transport minister who has simply gone missing when it comes to regional rail services. The City of Greater Shepparton deserves a lot better than having a minister who goes missing and having \$178 million of funding simply vanishing into thin air. This is an absolute puzzlement for anybody who knows anything about these projects.

As I said, I have twice completed a tour of the regional rail link. Each time it has taken me about 4 or 5 hours to make sure I had the best understanding of the project that I could have. I saw the project go from being under budget and under scope to coming in over scope and still being able to be delivered efficiently and effectively by the coalition government and then handed over to the Labor Party to implement. Labor bungled the entire timetabling program so that trains do not connect and only operate within their own line's timetable. Timetabling has been an absolute disaster so far. Members of the opposition hope that Labor gets it right. Thank goodness I do not live on the Ballarat line, as Mr Morris does. Whilst Bendigo has dropped below the acceptable punctuality rate for the first time in 12 months, its rail service still operates above the 90 per cent punctuality benchmark, which is not too bad. We can live with that.

I have with me some press releases from Minister Pulford which tell us how the 91 per cent or 92 per cent punctuality rates in 2013 were simply not good enough, but now she is in government punctuality rates are around the 80 per cent mark. It is hypocrisy, yet it is what we have come to expect. This was a great project. The coalition government embraced it and took it on with fantastic fervour and enthusiasm. Members of the former coalition government brought this project through, and it is an outstanding and stunning success. All we need now is a government with the capacity to fix up timetabling and make sure that at the very least we return to the punctuality rates we had before members of the Labor government were able to mix everything up in the way that they have done.

It is quite staggering that we are having these problems. I wish we had a minister who could stand up in front of the camera, tell the truth and come clean with Victorians on why Labor's timetabling has created so many problems on the Geelong line, the Ballarat line and the Bendigo line.

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — It gives me great pleasure to speak on Mr Morris's motion on public transport. My only disappointment is that his motion does not include the Geelong line, because the problems associated with the Ballarat line are similar in

nature to those which occur on the Geelong line, about which I will talk briefly.

I travelled on the Ballarat line on many occasions when my parliamentary office was based in Ballarat. I appreciate the efforts made by the former Minister for Public Transport, Terry Mulder, in relation to the work he did on the regional rail link. He also worked to support local companies, such as Alstom in Ballarat, which made many of the carriages not only for the V/Line services but also for the metropolitan services in Melbourne. Alstom provided over 130 jobs for Ballarat, so it was an important cog in the manufacture and putting together of the axles and electronics and indeed everything in those carriages.

The coalition government was off to a flying start in continuing the work on the regional rail link project, but, as Mr Morris has said, the former Labor government left a lot of the mechanics out of its implementation of the regional rail link project. There was no budget for signals, no budget for locomotives and no budget for quite a lot of the electronic requirements to launch the regional rail link, so the coalition government, through Minister Mulder, picked it all up, sorted it all out with Public Transport Victoria (PTV) and successfully brought the regional rail link in under budget and under time.

Bringing forward a big project like that, which is worth nearly \$5 billion, creates some problems in relation to resources, whether they be rolling stock or other things. I was surprised that members of the current government were so ready to pat themselves on the back on how successfully they were in bringing forward the regional rail link with the very short consultation phase they had through PTV in relation to timetables. Government members believed the project was going to provide a superior service for train travellers, particularly on the Ballarat line. Because there is a dedicated track into Southern Cross, members of the government thought that the time of that service would be significantly reduced, as did former Premier Steve Bracks when he introduced the fast rail to both Ballarat and Geelong.

Of course there was no fast rail; it was just a little bit faster than the slow rail. All it did was upgrade the sleepers and the track. There were no greater efficiencies in faster rail; it was more of an upgrade. Steve Bracks's slogan was, 'I'm creating this fast rail from Ballarat to Southern Cross and from Geelong to Southern Cross'. It was actually snail rail, not fast rail. That government tried to con the public that it was introducing all this new track and new capacity, when all it was doing was upgrading some of the sleepers.

We now know what Labor is like in relation to its promises.

While Mr Morris articulately went through some of the problems associated with Ballarat rail and also the new timetables, half the problem is that with Labor there is no consultation. There is sham consultation, but no real consultation or engagement with the public. That is why we have these problems associated with not only Ballarat but also Geelong. The Geelong and Ballarat timetables do not suit commuters. We are seeing overcrowded carriages on both lines. We are seeing carriages being pinched from the Geelong and Ballarat services and used on the Dandenong line and other lines. Where there were five carriages there are now only three. Consequently the peak-hour services are overcrowded — people have to stand — and run late. There are no connections with Metro rail services in Melbourne. The Geelong track converges on the Ballarat track at Deer Park, so there are significant delays there.

We are having trouble in Warrnambool on the south coast because Labor refuses to provide an additional fourth daily service, so all those rail services are overcrowded for those poor people who have no connections to Warrnambool when they get to Geelong to meet their work or sporting commitments. Recently we have seen complaint after complaint in the PTV forums about the new timetables not only for trains but also for Geelong bus services.

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr RAMSAY — You will hear more about that, Ms Shing, in my adjournment speech tonight.

I commend Mr Morris for moving this motion, which acknowledges that there are significant problems with the Ballarat line. I have travelled on that line recently. I have called for the Minister for Public Transport to accompany me on that line, as Mr Morris did. At least V/Line regional manager Peter Gibson had the guts to catch the train and see for himself the chaos surrounding the current timetables and the inefficiencies that Labor created with the launch of the regional rail link. I hope this chamber supports Mr Morris's motion, which would show clearly that the Legislative Council says this is not good enough and Labor needs to change the timetables, create a review process and actually have some consultation and engagement with commuters.

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I congratulate Mr Morris on moving this motion, which is important to his local community. Whilst I have empathy for the

Ballarat community, with the poor train service they are receiving under the Labor government, I would like to talk about a train service that is even worse than the one the people of Ballarat receive.

Mr Morris — Not possible.

Ms LOVELL — It is possible. It is called the Shepparton line, and it is atrocious. While Ballarat has 18 services per day, Shepparton has 4 services per day that travel from Shepparton to Melbourne but only 3 that go from Melbourne to Shepparton Monday to Friday. On Saturdays and Sundays it is even worse; there are only 2 return train services between Shepparton and Melbourne on the weekend. This has been a long-term problem in Shepparton. It was created under 11 years of Labor, when there was absolutely no investment or interest in Shepparton.

In the four years of the former Liberal government, it put a focus on the Shepparton line. It improved the timetable and provided an additional morning service to Melbourne. At the last election the coalition promised to add an additional service from Melbourne to Shepparton from Monday to Friday and also an additional return service on Saturdays and Sundays. We also undertook a complete review of the Shepparton line that identified short-term, medium-term and long-term goals for the improvement of services to Shepparton. One of the medium-term goals was to provide four shuttle services that could connect with Seymour trains to create more opportunities for people to travel from Shepparton to Melbourne by train.

But Labor has now completely scrapped that review. It has just lumped Shepparton in with a statewide review, when the review of the Shepparton line has already been completed. I have always been concerned that this statewide review will mean that Shepparton once again will be pushed down the order for improvements to our rail services while there is a focus on Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong and other Labor-held seats, ahead of the Shepparton line. That is exactly what we saw this week. Even though we know what the needs of Shepparton are, we cannot have any announcements because we have to wait for the outcome of the review.

The Minister for Public Transport, Jacinta Allan, has made announcements about the Ballarat line ahead of this statewide review. It was unfortunate for Ballarat that the announcements were ones that we had already made in government. The government is only rolling out the work that the Liberal Party had already done. No doubt when we get the review of the Shepparton line again, it will identify the same services that we announced prior to the election that were not already

started. Of course that is if we get any investment in the Shepparton line at all!

Under this government there is no focus on the Assembly electorate of Shepparton. Having an Independent member means that we have even less voice, because the Independent is not strong enough to stand up to this government. She is seen standing beside government ministers and being very cosy with the government, not standing up for the people of Shepparton. What we need is investment in our rail services. We need investment in our hospitals, our bypass and our CBD.

We need the Labor Party to focus on Shepparton, but Labor has no interest in doing so. It has deserted the seat of Shepparton. At least former member for Northern Victoria Region Kaye Darveniza had an office there. She might never have visited that office; in fact she probably did not even know what it looked like inside, but at least there was an office there. Now we have no focus on Shepparton from the Labor Party. It has no interest in having an office in Shepparton. In fact the two Labor members for Northern Victoria Region have put their offices as close to Melbourne as they could possibly get them — in Wallan and in Woodend. They are not at all interested in the people of Shepparton.

The people of Shepparton are particularly concerned about their rail services. We want better investment in rail services, and we are not prepared to sit back and wait any longer while Labor panders to its own seats in the big regional centres and continues to ignore Shepparton.

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — A number of speakers in this debate have already covered some of the material I was going to cover, so I will not go through it all again. Clearly, though, this project has had a poor history under the Labor Party, and it therefore needed a fair bit of assistance under the Napthine government.

There has been a lot of discussion about how things are on the line, so I thought I would give a voice to some of the commuters. I was very interested to see Minister Allan's Facebook page, which says, in ringing terms:

Regional rail link delivers more frequent, reliable train services to Melbourne's booming west and Victoria's major regional centres, and is a testament to Labor's strong history of investment in better public transport. Visit www.ptv.vic.gov.au for updated timetables and more info.

Those reading that Facebook page would beg to differ. I will just give voice to some of the feedback given by

these commuters because I think it says it all. Phil Kimber said:

Clearly you haven't used the 'new and improved' Ballarat train service yet?

More frequent? Perhaps? Reliable ... wrong!

Marie Gosnold said:

I invite you to experience the nightmare that is the new Ballarat line timetable.

Whilst I acknowledge a few additional services — the capacity of all the trains on the line has been halved. It was tough getting a seat on the old timetable — now it is nearly impossible.

Consultations are scheduled in Ballarat later this month for a week. The problem is that most of the passengers originate in Melton or Bacchus Marsh and never go near Ballarat. I am guessing that Ballarat will demand its first-class services and these will come at the cost of the majority of the passengers down the line — including those west of Melbourne who have no metro services. Any plans to address the needs of this rapidly growing community, that do not include sacrificing the already abysmal service to provide a first-class express service that flashes through our communities?

Tarni May said:

Standing room only from Wyndham Vale! Make sure your shoes are comfy.

Paul Ryan said:

Hi Jacinta, until recently I have been paying \$105 per week to get from Ballarat to Melbourne and back each day. The trains were on time and I always got a seat. Since the introduction of the new timetable I now pay \$105 per week to be late for work and stand on a crowded train on the way home. How would you feel? Today the 6.38 a.m. train is over 20 minutes late for the sixth time in 7 days, please check this fact. My employer can't believe a train service could be that unreliable, until now I would not have believed it either. You have lost a lot of credibility.

Travis McLean said:

Hi Jacinta. Wondering if you'd mind catching any of the 3.00 p.m. Melbourne to Ballarat services so you could demonstrate how elderly passengers standing in aisles for 40 minutes is an improvement? Can't move down the aisles at all. Stopping this train at Melton is absolute stupidity.

I could go on and on, but I will not because I am conscious that others want to contribute to the debate. What I will say is this: the minister has been in charge of this timetable for nearly one year, and the government chose to push back the time to introduce the new timetable so that it could make changes, which I assume it owns. They are not the changes or the timetable of the previous government; it is the timetable of this government, and the government needs to stand up and take responsibility for it.

The initiatives that the minister has flagged to fix this problem are too little, too late. I see that to some extent the Premier agrees with this. He said in July, which is going back a couple of months now:

I want to personally apologise to the people of Ballarat for the totally unacceptable performance of V/Line services ...

...

Everyone in Ballarat can rest assured I have put a rocket up V/Line and PTV about this ...

I would just add that I think he should also put a rocket up the minister. I strongly support this motion, and I congratulate my colleague Mr Morris on moving it.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I was going to say it gives me a great deal of pleasure to speak on this motion, but it does not. I wish I did not have to speak on this motion and support it, but I do compliment Mr Morris on bringing this matter before the house today.

I think it is worth considering just for a moment what the previous government did in putting the regional rail link project together. The regional rail link runs right through the centre of my electorate, and I watched with some considerable excitement as it was put together. I saw the construction of the new Sunshine station, which is something to behold. I am sure Mr Melhem will know that the colour scheme of yellow and black is a particularly impressive feature of the new Sunshine station. We put the project together on time — in fact under time — and under budget as well, and in fact we were able to use some of the savings to pay for the removal of the level crossing at Main Road, St Albans. Labor is now claiming credit for that one, but you would expect that. We know that where truth is to be found, Labor is not. That is almost a truism in itself these days.

We got the regional rail link project built before we lost the election last year. It was on time, it was under budget and all Labor had to do after it was elected — all Jacinta Allan had to do — was to print the timetable. What did she do? Jacinta Allan, in the finest tradition of the Labor Party, stuffed it up. She stuffed up good and proper —

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr Melhem interjected.

Mr FINN — I tell you what: there is a lot of reason to be angry. Next week I invite Ms Shing and Mr Melhem to come with me to the Sunbury railway station so they can tell the punters at Sunbury, who are

facing fines of up to \$500 for using a V/Line service, that they are not taking their plight seriously. Here we have a situation in which this great new rail system that was going to be such a boon for this state and such a plus for so many commuters, particularly those across the western suburbs and the outer west, the Labor Party has stuffed up to the point where people are now actually facing the prospect of losing services — —

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr FINN — Ms Shing tried that yesterday. It did not work then, and it is not going to work now. It is a disgrace that we have a situation in which we had this great project, put together by the former Liberal government under former Minister for Public Transport Terry Mulder, but then members will remember that the first thing ‘Juliar’ did — former Prime Minister Julia Gillard — when she first became Prime Minister was to pull the money from it. She pulled a quarter of a billion dollars from this project when we were elected in 2010. That is what she did. She was a vindictive sort of individual, and she still is. There is a lot of vindictiveness going on over there, but we will leave that one alone. Former Prime Minister Gillard pulled a quarter of a billion dollars from it.

We had to find that money, or the project would not have happened. The regional rail link would not have happened at all if it had not been for the previous Liberal government, and that is an indisputable fact. We got the thing up and running, we built it and we were ready to go. We then lost government, and all that was left for the Labor Party to do was to get the timetable right. It could not even do that. This mob of incompetents just staggers me. If there is a way for the Labor Party to stuff something up, it will find it. Even if there is not, there is a fair chance it will manage to find it anyway. So I say to Mr Morris: congratulations on bringing this motion before the house. I warmly and enthusiastically support this motion, and I am very hopeful that the house will support it too, because this is an important matter that needs attention.

Motion agreed to.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan):

That this house notes:

- (1) the grand final eve public holiday has not been supported by Victorian business;

- (2) the independent regulatory impact statement relating to the two new public holidays has confirmed that the costs outweigh the benefits;
- (3) the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade has confirmed that the government's calls for submissions relating to the regulatory impact statement is a sham consultation;
- (4) that in the last month under the current Labor government full-time jobs of 18 600 Victorians have been lost;
- (5) the stance of the former Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade that advocating for additional public holidays was not consistent with his small businesses portfolio;

and calls on the Premier of Victoria, Mr Daniel Andrews, MP, to cancel the grand final parade holiday and focus on creating jobs, not cutting them.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I was speaking just a moment ago about massive Labor stuff-ups, and I have jumped from one straight into another. This public holiday we are having before the grand final is something that people in other states are finding extremely amusing, particularly people in New South Wales, in Sydney. They are our competitors. What we lose here in Victoria, they will take, and they will take gladly. Over the last four years, up until the end of last year, they were struggling to compete with Victoria, but no longer. We now have a situation — —

Mr Ondarchie — They have overtaken us on the Hume Highway.

Mr FINN — They have overtaken us on the Hume Highway; Mr Ondarchie speaks the truth. It was said earlier today — I think it was said by Mr Dalidakis, which should not surprise me, because Mr Dalidakis says a lot of things that make no sense at all — 'If you love the footy, you should love this holiday'. What an absolute load of old nonsense that is.

I have to say that I was one of the 90 186 who were at the MCG, as indeed were Ms Fitzherbert and Ms Lovell, on Sunday to see Richmond robbed of a chance to play for the premiership. We all saw the free kick that was not paid that would have resulted in a Richmond goal. We saw North Melbourne get that ball after the free kick was not paid, and they rushed down to the other end and kicked a goal, which cost us the match. We all saw that. The only people who did not see it were the umpires, which is extraordinary given that there were over 90 000 people there who did. The only people who did not see it were the ones with 'OPSM' written on their shirts — I can only suggest to members that they should have gone to Specsavers. What a great pity that they did not.

There is someone else who should have gone to Specsavers: the Premier. The Premier of this state should have gone to Specsavers, because this is a dog of an idea if ever I saw one. I can see it — I have glasses from Specsavers — and he should be able to see it as well, so maybe he should go down and get his eyes checked. Where on God's earth did this idea come from? I envisage, I imagine — —

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr FINN — Mr Ondarchie thinks it might have been from a bit of Foster's. The Premier would be the only one in Victoria who still drinks Foster's. I would imagine that Dodgy Dan got up one morning and was singing a little ditty under the shower when all of a sudden it struck him — not for the first time, I have to say. He said, 'Hey! Here's an idea. This will work well with the boys from the CFMEU. We'll have a holiday on grand final eve'. He said that we would have a holiday for the parade. What he did not take into consideration is the fact that if Friday were a holiday, there would be nobody in the city, and if there would be nobody in the city, there would be nobody to watch the parade, so why the hell would he do this anyway?

Even the AFL, when it heard about it, asked, 'What is he doing?'. I think the AFL may have been the first body in this state to actually ask the question, 'Is this man mad?'. It may well have been the very first, because it had not been consulted.

Ms Crozier — It was just ahead of the queue.

Mr FINN — It may have been ahead of the queue; it can claim that. The AFL was not consulted about this — one would have thought it would have been if this were such a great idea that would boost tourism in Melbourne, as we have been told. The government tells us that the public holiday is going to boost tourism in Melbourne and also boost tourism in the country, so people are going to be in Melbourne and in the country at the same time. I am looking forward to seeing that; I have been looking into how to be in more places at once. I have been looking at how to be in more places than just the one for quite some time, so I will be very interested to see how this works.

I will tell members what is going to happen on 2 October this year. The city of Melbourne on Collins Street is usually a hive of activity on grand final eve. There are usually people there, quite often hundreds of thousands of people gathered after coming out of their offices and shops to see the grand final sides parade up and be presented to the crowd on the steps of the Old Treasury building. That is now a thing of the past. In

fact the AFL knew that Collins Street would be nothing but an empty canyon.

Ms Crozier — Fun busters.

Mr FINN — Labor members are fun busters, as Ms Crozier suggests. The AFL knew what it would be like, so it has changed the plans for the grand final parade — the grand final parade as we have known it for the past 30 years or so is no more. This holiday, this brilliant idea from Dodgy Dan under the shower, has killed the grand final parade. Now we are having some sort of carnival or something down in the park. For the life of me I cannot see the benefit to anybody except a few of the boys from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, who would have taken Friday off anyway.

Mr Ondarchie — And the SDA.

Mr FINN — The Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA) will be getting triple time. Its members will be happy. Do not mention the SDA in case Mr Somyurek comes in. He will have a meltdown. He will just go right off, as Mr Melhem well knows; he will back me up on that one. It is just astonishing that we have a government that is going to cost small business in this state millions of dollars. We have a government in this state that is going to cost workers millions of dollars in lost pay. We have a party, the Australian Labor Party, that says it is the workers party. This holiday is sticking it up the workers. That is exactly what it is doing. There are so many workers who are going to miss a day's pay because of this holiday because their employers cannot afford to pay them.

I have been listening to this debate for months now, and I am yet to hear a proper argument for this holiday. I like a holiday as much as the next bloke. I particularly like a holiday associated with the footy. Footy is a huge part of my life — not so much this week, but certainly it was last week. I love it, and I do like a holiday. But this particular holiday on the eve of the grand final, which is arguably Melbourne's premium sporting event, although I am sure the Victoria Racing Club would strongly contest that, makes no sense at all — none, zilch, zero. I ask the Premier even at this late stage to reconsider and rethink the stroke of brilliance he had under the shower one morning and come out and say, 'Yep, I got that wrong. I don't wish to cause pain, and I don't wish to cause difficulties', and scrap this holiday.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015–2019

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015–2019*, which was tabled in the first week of September. I am pleased to speak on this report because it could not make the government's health priorities any clearer. The report builds on the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2011–2015*. The plan makes plain the need to address social inequality in health outcomes. People facing social disadvantage tend to suffer poorer health outcomes. It is important for my electorate that this plan homes in on social equity in health care, because my electorate suffers higher rates of social and economic disadvantage than many other regions in Victoria.

The government acknowledges and celebrates the fact that Victorians have amongst the highest life expectancy in the world. This is a great thing; however, there are still pockets of disadvantage in our society. There is still room for improvement, and we definitely cannot be complacent. You may have the highest life expectancy and the best system in the world, but you will always have pockets here and there that need improvement. There are still a lot of people waiting to get into hospital to have operations. Some people cannot even afford basic dental care and other things. There is still a bit of work to do, but it is pleasing to know we are doing better than other places in the world.

Chronic disease is a growing problem with enormous implications for people's wellbeing, personal finances, ability to work and quality of life. Yet as the report identifies, much chronic disease is known to be preventable. That is why, for reasons of efficacy and efficiency, we must invest more in preventive health strategies. It does not take a room full of health economists to realise that it is better for governments to help prevent people from getting sick in the first place than to spend billions on treating them after they get sick. Chronic conditions are experienced at higher rates and often have poorer outcomes among those who experience disadvantage.

Besides being an important social priority, preventive health care makes good sense fiscally. During 2014 and 2015 there were around 60 000 avoidable hospital admissions statewide, and it is estimated that these will grow to nearly 80 000 in a decade unless changes are made. Imagine how those resources could be better

directed if we reduced unnecessary admissions and prevented people from getting sick in the first place.

The report talks about a number of things the government is looking at planning and putting in place in the next five years, which I mentioned earlier in relation to increases in some risks to health and limited or no improvement in others. There are other challenges relating to the increasing impact of chronic diseases and persistent inequality in health statuses. Demographic trends require new approaches, and there are challenges relating to environmental sustainability in health protection. To meet these challenges the government is looking at developing a response, and it has six priorities in place. They are: healthier eating and active living — I cannot talk about that, but I am working on it — tobacco-free living, reducing harmful alcohol and drug use, improving mental health, preventing violence and injury and improving sexual and reproductive health.

They are the main elements of the report. It is a good report. It is a good plan to have in place. As I said, it was built on the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2011–2015*. It will take us to 2019 and hopefully beyond. As a state, if we are serious about the health of our population, especially with baby boomers and an ageing population in the next few years, health is going to be our biggest challenge going forward. It is good to see that the government has a plan in place. I commend the Minister for Health, Jill Hennessy, for the work she is doing in that space, and I commend the report to the house.

Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning: onshore unconventional gas in Victoria

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to speak on the interim report of the inquiry into onshore unconventional gas in Victoria. The Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning, of which I am a member, sought stakeholder and community views on a range of issues relating to unconventional gas and has had a massive response with 1700 submissions, highlighting the level of interest this issue holds in our communities. It was great to see that submissions were from a wide variety of stakeholders, including farmers, environmental groups, the gas industry, manufacturers, tourism operators, local governments and definitely the general public. The committee has also heard from a wide range of people at the public hearings in Sale in my electorate, Melbourne and Torquay, and plans to conduct additional hearings, including one next week in Hamilton.

We have listened to many different points of view on the topic, including on whether or not the unconventional gas industry can coexist with land and water users and what the potential advantages and potential risks are regarding an unconventional gas industry. We have also looked at our state's current legislative framework to regulate an unconventional gas industry and we will seek further information from other states. It is important that we gather information and learn from other jurisdictions both in Australia and overseas. We wish to thank the many people who have provided submissions and those who have spoken at the hearings for their information, evidence and thoughts. I have listened with great interest to a range of differing views on the topic, and I think it is fair to say many people have strong opinions on what is a large, complex and multifaceted issue.

I would like to thank my fellow committee members and the committee staff for their work on this inquiry. This is an interim report and there is still much work to be done. Evidence still needs to be reviewed, hearings held and a final report brought down. The inquiry has broad terms of reference with many areas to be covered. These are the government's terms of reference so it would be in the government's interest to yield to the committee's genuine request for greater resources. It is only with adequate and proper resourcing that the committee will be able to do justice to the terms of reference.

Chapter 5 of the report lists the issues to be further considered by the committee. We note the concerns of the Victorian Farmers Federation and its call for a moratorium on unconventional gas development to be extended and for landholders to be given the right to veto unconventional gas activity on their properties. We need to carefully consider the community concerns that have been expressed about potential risks. The committee will study the reviews that suggest risks posed can be effectively managed if sufficiently robust regulatory frameworks are put in place and if industry compliance is monitored and enforced.

Communication and information is vital when it comes to this issue. Reflection also needs to take place around past and current consultation between the unconventional gas industry, government and the communities in regions where unconventional gas may prospectively be located to consider how this engagement can be managed better than it has been in past practices. The committee needs to appraise current legislation that would govern a potential gas industry. Given the reliance of Victorian consumers and manufacturers on natural gas, we also need to look at the differing evidence about any effects the

unconventional gas industry could have on gas prices in Victoria. In my electorate, particularly in South Gippsland, the issue of unconventional gas has been most significant. Residents have rallied, protested and made their thoughts very clear on what many believe is an industry too risky to explore.

In January this year it was pleasing to see the Andrews government sensibly agree to extend the moratorium which was put in place by the former Liberal-Nationals coalition government until such time as this parliamentary inquiry is completed. The Nationals support maintaining the moratorium and believe there should be no coal seam gas mining or extraction in Victoria until thorough scientific assessment and community consultation has been completed. This inquiry is a good step in gathering all the information required to make sensible decisions with regard to this industry. However, as I mentioned earlier, more resources would be helpful in order to do this inquiry justice. I look forward to continuing to work with the committee in further investigating this issue which is very important to many Victorians.

Auditor-General: *Biosecurity — Livestock*

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — This afternoon I would like to make a contribution on the Auditor-General's report *Biosecurity — Livestock*. From the outset I say that this is not pleasant reading. On the audit the Auditor-General said:

This audit found Victoria's livestock biosecurity system to have been weakened by a decline in financial and staff resourcing.

That now creates a situation where we are exposing ourselves to a range of diseases in our agricultural sector. This is important because, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Victoria's food and fibre exports totalled \$11.4 billion in 2013–14, while the gross value of agricultural commodities, including meat, milk-derived products, eggs, hides, skins and animal fibre, was \$12.7 billion. These are significant contributions to the Victorian economy.

Victorian agricultural industries have significant competitive advantages, such as being relatively free of pests and diseases, which allows premium prices at market. You would think that any government worth its salt would take steps to protect and enhance such a valuable sector of our economy. But, as the Auditor-General makes abundantly clear, that has not been the case. Under the previous government there was a significant degradation of Victoria's ability to detect, prepare for and respond to emergency livestock disease outbreaks. The potential for a major disease

outbreak going undetected until it is established has increased in the last five years. It is quite staggering that this happened with The Nationals in the coalition. I think its members have failed their traditional constituency base. They have played Russian roulette in this sector and taken a range of soft options and a lazy pathway that has put Victoria's good reputation in the agricultural sector at stake. I believe that is quite staggering.

To give an indication of how catastrophic an outbreak of disease in our livestock industry could be, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences estimates that a large-scale outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease would cost the Australian economy \$52 billion over a 10-year period. I again quote from the Auditor-General's report:

Of all Australian states and territories, Victoria is considered most at risk of —

a foot-and-mouth disease —

outbreak due to its temperate climate and intensive livestock production systems.

What did the former government do about this threat to this multibillion-dollar pillar of the Victorian economy? It presided over a 39 per cent cut in surveillance activities and a 49 per cent cut to funding for core livestock biosecurity activities.

The Auditor-General said:

It represents a diminished return on investment for the state compared to preventive and preparatory activities.

But that is not all. The previous government also presided over a 42 per cent decrease in the number of veterinary and animal health officer positions. The number of animal health officers was halved during that period. That was at a time when we actually had a veterinary scientist as our Premier, so you would have thought there would have been more care and consideration in relation to this area. The department was over a year behind in preparing a draft plan for a response to foot-and-mouth disease. The final plan will not be ready until next year.

The former government ran things down so much that the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources reports that its existing veterinary and animal health staffing levels cannot cope with one medium or two small concurrent animal disease outbreaks. This is a global benchmark, and at the moment Victoria just cannot do it. This is an unacceptable situation. Thousands of families, not to

mention the Victorian economy, depend on these industries for their livelihoods.

I could go on, but time prevents me. I am happy to say that the department has accepted the Auditor-General's recommendations and that Labor is delivering for our agricultural — —

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

Department of Treasury and Finance: budget papers 2015–16

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — Today my statement on a report relates to the state budget for 2015–16. It relates mostly to failure of those budget papers to fully cost and examine the impact of the public holidays that have been declared by the new Andrews Labor government. There is one day in October that is just a single day, but it is a day that will do enormous damage to our economy — \$1 billion worth of damage in fact. The regulatory impact statement that was discussed at length in this chamber on Mr Ondarchie's motion earlier today made clear that this will have a huge impact on the Victorian economy and will destroy jobs.

What is clear is that in my own electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region there is going to be a very significant impact. As I have talked to businesses across the region it has become very clear that there will be fewer jobs and a significant impact on struggling small businesses — private concerns that are seeking to not only make their way in the world but to also employ staff and add to our economy. I am going to use some examples.

The Diamond Pool & Spa Company on Malvern Road, Malvern — I thank Helen Strangos for the information she provided — says in an email:

We are a small business in the swimming pool industry and we run a retail and service department from Malvern Road in Malvern. For our business, grand final eve and the Saturday of the grand final are busy days not because our clients are attending the parade but because they are preparing their swimming pools for the grand final BBQ that they are having at home.

This year due to the public holiday, of a staff of 15 we do not have a single employee who is willing to work on this day. Hence our retail outlet will be closed and so will our service department.

We stand to lose thousands of dollars in revenue that we cannot recoup. And the icing on the cake is we still have to pay close to \$5000 in wages that we did not budget for.

This makes the impact on small businesses across the state very clear. This one business is just an example of the terrible impact. The email continues:

Mr Andrews and his party are kidding themselves if they think this decision is going to benefit any small business in Victoria.

Kirsty and Wayne Low from Sissi & Co said to me:

As small business owners of a cafe, provisions and catering business in Malvern we would like to express our total support for —

opposition to this public holiday on 2 October.

Those sorts of comments are ones that Liberal and Nationals MPs have been met with everywhere they have gone as they have talked to communities. It is not just small groups either; it is large organisations that have submitted to the regulatory impact statement process. The Australian Hotels Association makes the point that there will be a very considerable economic impact. Bentleigh Bayside Community Health in my electorate, which is also the electorate of others in this chamber, as a not-for-profit organisation is not being compensated for the impact of the costs on its service delivery. The small traders in Bentleigh and, I know, a number of the traders in Prahran whom I have spoken to, whether it be the Chapel Street precinct or the Toorak traders, are all in outright opposition to what we have seen. The Glenferrie Road Malvern Business Association said in the RIS process that the impact on small business of these holidays is indeed catastrophic in what is an already incredibly difficult retail climate.

Looking further, you can see groups like the Property Council of Australia making very clear points about how unrealistic it is for business to absorb costs of this nature and this scale; there are also the Victorian Healthcare Association and the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry. What do the staff suffer? Many staff will lose casual payments — 270 000 at least statewide. But what does Mr Dalidakis as Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade say? He says that this is 'just sectional interest groups'. I have to tell Mr Dalidakis that people in Southern Metropolitan Region do not think that it is just sectional interests. This is his region. He has let them down on this.

Premier Andrews went on to say that this was just 'some of these business types who have a different view'. What an arrogant way to approach things! This is on the back of other hits to small business, including the Easter Sunday holiday, the broken promise on rates being capped and the increase in the fire services levy.

All of these are hitting businesses hard, and the community should — —

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

Ombudsman: conflict of interest by executive officer in Department of Education and Training

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — I would like to speak today on the Victorian Ombudsman's report of 2 September 2015 titled *Conflict of Interest by an Executive Officer in the Department of Education and Training*. The report starts by saying:

The public sector is rightly proud of the values it espouses. They are demonstrated daily by the many dedicated individuals working in departments and other agencies, motivated by the desire to help others.

However, it continues:

When evidence comes to light, such as in the recent IBAC hearings —

regarding departmental employees and school principals engaging in fraudulent behaviour —

that public officials are feathering their own nests, it shakes our confidence in honest officialdom to the core.

This investigation continues a long Ombudsman tradition of exposing conflicts of interest in the Victorian public service. In reading this report I see there are examples of public servants who take their role very seriously and act appropriately and there are those who clearly do not. This report found that between 2011 and 2013 an executive officer of the department was involved with a company called BAWM, and during this period he was also involved in a complaint against that company but was negotiating an executive role and equity in OzSoft, which was a subsidiary of BAWM. In August 2013 he received dividends of \$30 000 while still employed by the department in his notice period, and as a result of his contracts he received significant financial benefit. When he sold his shareholdings to Student Hub and then to Vocation in December 2013 he received more than \$860 000. In 2010 BAWM received \$780 000 in public subsidies; by 2014 that had risen to almost \$46.5 million.

As serious as this issue is, I would like to turn my attention to some of the other findings and revelations in the report. These can be seen in the context of \$1.2 billion of public money being spent in the vocational educational and training (VET) sector, with

the vast majority of that now going to private registered training organisations (RTOs) based on market contestability. This report finds that:

RTOs determine the fees and students pay any gap between these fees and the VTG —

Victorian training guarantee —

funding provided by the state government, which on average is 15 per cent.

...

RTOs estimate the number of student contact hours necessary to achieve competence. RTOs also assess student competency and capability in the workplace.

The complaint that was made against BAWM was an alleged 'discrepancy between the number of hours of training actually provided by BAWM and those claimed'. The executive officer who is the subject of the report met with the complainant on the same day that he was made a director of a subsidiary of that company. The complaint was meant to lead to an audit, which did not proceed, and this report implies that this was due to the influence and activities of the executive officer, who was involved with that company from which a complaint was being made but which was now not being audited. The Ombudsman has recommended that that audit now proceed.

In terms of establishing the number of hours that RTOs claim and what they are paid for, some of the comments by the team leaders that deal with this issue are very revealing. The report states that one team leader 'was concerned because the complainant had told him that if the practice complained about was acceptable, the complainant, who was associated with another RTO, intended to implement it'. The team leader told the Ombudsman's office:

... whilst it's acceptable, if it was to happen wholesale which I think to some extent it is ... it would blow the market up.

What was alleged to be happening was reported as being:

... highly possible ... but we try to stamp it out as much as we can ... we've got 500 contracted RTOs and we have to choose where we put our efforts.

The report quotes another team leader as saying:

... our evidentiary requirements in our contracts state, 'If you claim [this] ... you've got to have a piece of evidence' ... it's within the rules. The system allows it. They can do it. It's not right and we're doing crackdowns at the moment ... but the system allows it.

I have been drawing attention to these problems with RTOs for many years.

Auditor-General: *Follow Up of Management of Staff Occupational Health and Safety in Schools*

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak about the Auditor-General's report entitled *Follow Up of Management of Staff Occupational Health and Safety in Schools*. What became immediately evident to me on reading this report was that it relates to a previous audit conducted in 2013. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office previously handed down a series of recommendations that to date would seem to have been for the most part addressed and acted upon, although of course there is always room for improvement — and that maxim is relevant to any workplace in Victoria.

It is hard to imagine that a school would be a hazardous place to work, but there are pitfalls in any occupation or place of employment. One of the items I found interesting was the issue of WorkCover insurance premiums. It would seem that schools are not accountable in a punitive sense or encouraged by the Department of Education and Training (DET) to address the ratio or number of WorkCover recipients on its books. DET's method of insurance allocations is to apply a maximum levy of \$10 000 per school. This has the negative effect of not encouraging school management to focus on or address any underlying cause of insurance premiums over and above the \$10 000 subsidy. In 2012 and 2013 schools were only contributing 3.4 per cent of the true premium cost.

It is suggested in the report that schools should be levied the appropriate real cost of premiums and not a percentage of the costs. It is critical that schools undertake the responsibility of limiting or mitigating workplace claims by taking measures to reduce instances of accidents or stress. A realistic and considerate return-to-work strategy must be formulated by each school. Having said that, the department has taken steps to improve its oversight of occupational health and safety management and compliance of schools as well as improving the processes for returning injured employees to work earlier. The department appointed consultants in May 2014 to investigate and develop alternative models. In January 2015 the department received a final report providing several model options. The Auditor-General's report states:

The recommended model will encourage schools to improve their RTW and claims management performance by:

benchmarking the performance of similar schools using measures that are currently collected in WorkSafe data;

providing quarterly feedback on performance.

Notwithstanding the report, I think WorkSafe has the primary responsibility as the regulator to provide mechanisms to assist with the proper implementation of action plans to improve workplace safety and the formulation of back-to-work strategies.

Commission for Children and Young People: “... as a good parent would ...”

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise to speak about the Commission for Children and Young People's report entitled “... as a good parent would ...”, tabled in August 2015, as well as the inquiry into the adequacy of the provision of services to children and young people who have been subjected to sexual exploitation or sexual abuse whilst residing in residential care.

As members will note, I have previously spoken to this report, commending commissioner Bernie Geary in relation to the work he undertook. I note that in his foreword he acknowledges many individuals, the openness of the agencies in the organisations while conducting the inquiry, some of the very confronting and distressing occurrences in residential care and the willingness by all to improve the situation.

As I might have done in my previous contribution, I make the point that the previous minister, a member for Eastern Metropolitan Region, Mary Wooldridge, was extremely supportive of the commissioner undertaking this inquiry. It is incumbent on governments and on us as legislators to do what we can in relation to our most vulnerable, and children in residential care are certainly some of our most vulnerable Victorians.

One of the areas in the report that I would like to tease out a little more in relation to some of the findings and observations throughout the inquiry is the analysis of the sexual abuse incident reports and the violent pornography which was prominent. Yesterday I spoke in the debate on the Crimes Amendment (Child Pornography and Other Matters) Bill 2015 and discussed the issues around why we need to toughen up sentences and take into consideration the serious nature of this heinous crime. The figures the library provided were quite extraordinary: 2 million child abuse images in circulation on Victorian computers and 7000 internet protocol addresses in Victoria accessing child abuse images at the highest point. It is potentially some of our most vulnerable children who are accessing some of this pornographic material. Clearly, as the report highlights, recent national research has indicated that young people are prolific users of social media and technology, with 93 per cent using social networking

sites at least once a week. This goes to a comment in the report on page 56 that:

Violent pornography is now the most prominent sexuality educator for many young people.

I think that is a very disturbing statement and it goes to what we must do as governments and legislators to ensure that we protect our most vulnerable. The report says:

The inquiry saw evidence that pornography, social media and the internet play a significant role in the lives of vulnerable children and young people in residential care.

...

The absence of any proactive, specialised education in the area of sexual health and safe relationships for children in residential care places our most vulnerable children and young people at an even greater disadvantage and heightened risk of further sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

That is a very relevant point made by this inquiry as to how we need to deal with this. Only yesterday I was speaking to people at one of the centres against sexual assault who told me they were in great demand, partly because of the royal commission but also because of what is going on in terms of this very issue of technology-based pornographic images, the amount of child-to-child sexual abuse and the counselling that is required. They are under great stress and great demand and require assistance from government to deal with those issues. I call on the government to address the funding shortfalls, because these are very serious issues and these children need counselling. Sometimes it is siblings who see these images and think it is all right to perform dreadful sexual acts and exploitation.

I see my time has run out, but I want to return to this report at some time. I commend the commissioner again.

Auditor-General: Follow Up of Management of Staff Occupational Health and Safety in Schools

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report titled *Management of Staff Occupational Health and Safety in Schools*. I have recently spoken on another occupational safety issue regarding violence against healthcare workers, an issue that has failed to be addressed and is putting our healthcare workers at serious risk. It is something that I hope will be addressed quickly, and I hope the follow-up report will show a vast improvement, similar to the content of this report.

In May 2013, the Victorian Auditor-General brought the issue of poor management of staff occupational health and safety practices to the Parliament's attention. The report identified weaknesses in the overall system and processes of the former Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, now the Department of Education and Training. With the department being Victoria's largest employer, it is imperative that the management of the staff's occupational health and safety within schools is placed high on the priority list. The 2013 report found that the department's culture had a history of a lack of a safety, OHS leadership and accountability. It also indicated that since 2008 WorkSafe had prosecuted the department five times under the act for school-related OHS incidents and that the department did not hold schools to account for poor OHS performance, which was highly disconcerting.

As the department chose to bear almost the entire cost of a school's WorkSafe premiums on the school's behalf, public schools did not understand the full financial burden of the premiums and as a result did not have any financial incentive to reduce injuries. The report also found the non-government schools consistently outperformed government schools on most health and safety indicators each year over the past five years, with a lower rate of 35 per cent. I was pleased to read in the report that both the Department of Education and Training and WorkSafe have demonstrated action to address all of the recommendations from the initial 2013 report. The Department of Education and Training has addressed the deficiencies in its claim management and return-to-work processes and is now performing better than non-government schools. The report also indicates that the department is taking steps to improve and monitor schools' compliance with the OHS management system. A number of initiatives are being piloted to support high-priority schools and enhance current monitoring and reporting information systems.

WorkSafe has also been responsive and proactive in its demonstrated commitment to improve monitoring and evaluation at an organisational level. Both WorkSafe and the Department of Education and Training have put the necessary mechanisms in place to hold regular meetings at executive and management levels, have representation on relevant agency committees and establish a quarterly joint working group meeting.

I congratulate both WorkSafe and the Department of Education and Training, which have actively worked together to share information on OHS and on increasing the occupational health and safety within schools across the state. It is as a result of this collaborative approach

that the implementation of the Victorian Auditor-General's recommendations from the 2013 report has been so successful. I commend this report to the house.

Auditor-General: *Biosecurity — Livestock*

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — It gives me pleasure to speak on the Auditor-General's report titled *Biosecurity — Livestock*. I think I have actually found something in common with Ms Tierney as finally, after five years, we have agreed on a position that the Auditor-General has taken in a report.

Ms Tierney — Now I'm worried!

Mr RAMSAY — Be worried — it might be the start of something wonderful! We do have something in common, and it is about the protection of our livestock exports. Certainly I agree with Ms Tierney that the Auditor-General's report is important reading, because it shows some of the current deficiencies within the departments in the state in relation to financing and resourcing.

It is important to note that the Auditor-General identifies that the revenue generated from our livestock export markets for 2013–14 was over \$11.4 billion, so this is a very important market that we must protect at all costs. Interestingly enough, the Chinese free trade agreement (FTA) indicates that we could double or treble that figure once the FTA is ratified, given the opportunity. That is why it is so important that we get bipartisan support for the FTA, even if some small enabling legislation in the Senate is required to enable it to be ratified by the commonwealth.

The issue I want to bring to the attention of the house relates to comments the Auditor-General made in relation to outbreaks of livestock disease and the costs associated with them, and what the state can do constructively to negate the risk. Past outbreaks in other jurisdictions have shown that a large-scale livestock disease outbreak, and its devastating effects, could happen here in Victoria. In 2001 the foot-and-mouth outbreak in the UK resulted in economic losses totalling US\$12 billion and the slaughter of more than 6 million sheep and cattle. I mention that because I went on a trip to the UK with industry stakeholders in 2001. There is no doubt that the lack of traceability of animals and poor practices in relation to providing pig swill to livestock created an environment where the spores of foot-and-mouth spread very rapidly, mainly through sheep in local markets, and also to beef cattle across the UK. Unfortunately early detection was not possible because of a lack of diagnostic testing, but also

because of the lack of traceability of animals. The UK's cap system and the way it lodged its animals prior to a consensus count enabled the spread of the disease much quicker than would have happened if failsafe systems had been in place.

I congratulate John Wyld, who at the time was a prime motivator for the state of Victoria and the industry itself to introduce the national livestock identification scheme (NLIS) for cattle, which was prompted by the foot-and-mouth disease in the UK. I also congratulate Tony Britt, who works for the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, who was a prime mover in relation to the introduction of a national livestock identification system for cattle in Victoria. In fact Victoria was the first state to introduce such a traceability system. Tony Britt is now trying to encourage the industry to introduce an NLIS for sheep. Despite the best attempts of former Minister for Agriculture and Food Security Peter Walsh, the member for Murray Plains in the Assembly, there is still some resistance by the sheep industry to introducing a full electronic sheep traceability system, but that will come. I also want to congratulate former Prime Minister John Howard for introducing a number of biosecurity measures in response to the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in the UK, one of which we do not have here in Victoria. We must preserve our good record at all costs.

I encourage the state to respond to the Auditor-General's report and the gaps in our biosecurity system that have been identified in the report and to quickly and urgently put in place the recommendations that the Auditor-General has made regarding the state's deficiencies in relation to providing biosecurity for our livestock but also encouraging greater responses to traceability of our livestock in the future.

Auditor-General: *Regional Growth Fund — Outcomes and Learnings*

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — This is a great opportunity to speak on the Auditor-General's report *Regional Growth Fund — Outcomes and Learnings*. This is an interesting report from a Melbourne bureaucrat who probably does not understand what the growth fund was about. The way the Auditor-General has identified the value associated with some of these projects in simple dollar terms shows that he does not understand how jobs were leveraged and generated throughout this amazing fund. It is a shame that the fund has been painted in the way it has been in this report.

If it were not for the Regional Growth Fund many communities would have missed out on funding that added value to businesses and created jobs. Projects such as new kindergartens and child health centres, main street beautification, sports and showground upgrades and local road projects were also part of this. I do not think anybody in regional Victoria would be surprised that a Melbourne-based bureaucrat thinks investment in projects outside the city does not deliver real value for money. The Victorian Nationals hold the Regional Growth Fund very dear, and we will keep fighting tooth and nail to make sure that regional and rural communities get their fair share of taxpayer investment.

The Regional Growth Fund was an election commitment by the former Liberal-Nationals coalition. Eight years of funding was allocated: \$500 million for the first four years and \$500 million for the next four years, which the coalition never got to administer. The initial \$500 million was increased during the coalition's four years in government by an additional \$70 million, so the Regional Growth Fund has been judged as a \$570 million project over four years. It had a number of funding streams associated with it, including the economic infrastructure program, Energy to the Regions, Putting Locals First and the Local Government Infrastructure Fund. There were also grants to the Latrobe Valley Industry and Infrastructure Fund.

I would like to talk a bit about Energy for the Regions, because it looks as though the Auditor-General has missed the mark with his assessment of this program. He has looked at it on a cost-per-connection basis without a true understanding of how difficult it is to get gas to communities that, firstly, do not have it, and secondly, are isolated by sheer geography, kilometres away from existing natural gas reticulated pipelines.

Upon coming to government we made commitments to a range of towns around Victoria that we would get natural gas to their communities. Some of them were smaller towns, and some of them were larger communities. Upon entering government we found that promise was very difficult to keep. We could easily have walked away and simply said it was too hard. However, that is when then Deputy Premier Peter Ryan, the former member for Gippsland South in the Assembly, stood up and was counted because he insisted that those promises be honoured. We insisted that the department find a way to deliver natural gas to those communities.

It was a \$100 million project that turned out to be a \$123 million project when additional towns were added

to the fund, because complementary program money being invested by the federal government at the time enabled us to expand that program and include 11 towns that were going to have natural gas delivered by the virtual pipeline. That in effect takes the gas to the community via road and stores it on the outskirts of town. What the Auditor-General fails to understand is that all the easy towns were connected by Labor. It was always going to be more difficult to connect those further away and more isolated towns. It is just like the next batch. Whichever government comes in and tries to do the next batch will find it more and more difficult.

But there were projects like the Donald early learning centre, which was a fantastic example of a small community project that was achieved with a range of investments from all levels of government and the community. That was an amazing program. A whole range of industry programs were able to be invested in through both the capital — —

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

ADJOURNMENT

Mr HERBERT (Minister for Training and Skills) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Hepatitis

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Health, the Honourable Jill Hennessy. I refer to Hepatitis Victoria's 2014–15 data that estimates that more than 4000 people in the Brimbank local government area in the Western Metropolitan Region are living with chronic hepatitis B, which is the second greatest prevalence of the disease in any local government area in Victoria. After Brimbank, the City of Melton is ranked seventh in the state for hepatitis B numbers and has the third highest rate of hepatitis C in the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network. Melton's figures account for 3.5 per cent of Victoria's total hepatitis C numbers.

I wish to note the excellent work the minister has been doing since her appointment to the health portfolio in December, including announcing a new women's and children's hospital for Melbourne's western suburbs. The action I seek is that the minister build on her recent commitment at the Western Action Forum on 28 August and work with Hepatitis Victoria and the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network as well as local healthcare providers to implement a

strategy that will work to reduce the cases of hepatitis B and C in Melbourne's western suburbs and improve health outcomes for Victorians already suffering from these chronic conditions.

Geelong region public transport

Mr RAMSAY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport and relates to considerable community concern about recent changes to public transport in the Geelong region. New bus routes and timetables for the Geelong region have recently been introduced, after only a short submission and consultation process, that have caused chaos and confusion with bus users. The recently launched regional rail link and its new train timetables have also caused similar frustration and confusion for commuters. We now have overcrowded carriages, delays, missed connections and timetables that are not meeting demand cycles for daily commuters or those attending sporting events in Melbourne.

There have been calls from many travellers in the south-west for additional train services on the Warrnambool to Geelong line, which are desperately needed to meet the growing demand from commuters, students and in particular those who use public transport to meet commitments in Melbourne. The public transport debacle is not confined to the Geelong line, and as we have heard today, the Ballarat train service also has its fair share of problems, with its single track and overcrowded peak services.

Problems with public transport services in the Geelong region have resulted in a flood of complaints to my office and to the office of the member for South Barwon in the Assembly, Andrew Katos — so much so that we held two community public transport forums that attracted over 200 concerned bus and train users. These groups detailed a range of problems with the new bus routes and timetables as well as with the unrealistic expectations placed on drivers who struggle to meet scheduled pick-ups and drop-offs. Nine pages of complaints were documented and referred to the Public Transport Victoria (PTV) public transport network forum held in Geelong.

These PTV forums are being held across the state and were originally intended to gather community input for future regional public transport network plans. Instead, concerned residents took the opportunity to raise public transport issues and air their opinions about Labor's bungling of the new train and bus timetables, despite the best attempts of local Labor MPs to politicise these forums. The action I seek is that the minister call an

immediate review of all bus and train timetables in the Colac and Geelong regions and provide the appropriate resources and infrastructure in response to the many complaints received so that we have a more reliable service that meets public transport user needs.

Orchard Grove Primary School

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Education, James Merlino, and it relates to Orchard Grove Primary School in Blackburn South. It concerns problems with the drainage, particularly the sewerage pipes underneath the school building, which are badly in need of repair. Recently I was out there with the federal member for Chisholm, Anna Burke, and the school's principal showed us some issues of real concern regarding this problem that they have had at the school for a number of weeks. The action I seek is that the minister make sure his department acts urgently on the issue and remedies this problem as soon as that can be arranged.

Poppy cultivation

Mr PURCELL (Western Victoria) — The adjournment matter I raise is for the Minister for Agriculture, Ms Pulford. Victoria has a huge horticultural opportunity at the moment to increase horticultural land by many tens of thousands of hectares.

For the last 95 years — since 1920 — GlaxoSmithKline has had a manufacturing plant in Port Fairy. Established just after the First World War, the plant has survived the Depression and another world war, and continues to be a very strong company in the area. The plant commenced as a milk-processing plant, and in the Second World War it became a penicillin fermentation plant before it moved into the pharmaceutical business and opiates in the 1970s. The company is a great community corporate citizen and has recently been sold to an Indian corporation, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, which took over the Port Fairy plant last month. When Glaxo left, it gave \$50 000 each to the town's two primary schools, and \$25 000 to the kindergarten. Glaxo has been a great community citizen.

Sun Pharmaceutical is based in Mumbai and will retain all of the 150 employees who currently work at the Glaxo site. Glaxo has a large pharmaceutical and horticultural section. Currently its poppies are grown in Tasmania, and there is huge potential for them also to be grown in Victoria, which would be a job generator for our state. Last year 2000 tonnes of poppy straw was

imported from Turkey, which could well be replaced by Victorian horticulture.

We need to assist this new Australian business to continue to manufacture in Australia for another 95 years. I urge the minister to join me in meeting with Sun Pharmaceutical to support the business to expand in Victoria and to help poppies grow in this state.

Somerville police station

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police. As I have advised the house previously, the brand-new \$16.3 million Somerville police station may well be the first new police station built to which members of the public will have no access. The station will not be open to the public, so if someone is in need of police in the vicinity of that location, then they will not be able to go to that new police station and speak to police or use the station's counter service for access to police.

This situation has caused outrage in Somerville. People in that community understand very clearly that this is a direct result of the Labor government's failure to provide any additional police. Again as I have advised the house, the most recent statistics indicate that the number of police in Victoria is exactly the same as when the coalition left office at the end of November last year — 13 151 full-time equivalent police members in Victoria.

Since that time Victoria's population has grown by tens of thousands, and we have had a changed operating environment as a result of the terrorism threat, the ice scourge and the family violence scourge, which continue to be major factors when it comes to police resourcing and police workloads. As a result of Daniel Andrews's and Wade Noonan's failure to grow Victoria Police by even one additional member, the Somerville community is outraged that the chief commissioner does not have the resources that he should have at his disposal. People in that community want to see action when it comes to the Somerville police station, and they are staging a meeting — a rally — this Saturday morning at 10 o'clock.

I invite Minister Noonan to come to address the rally. Other members of Parliament will be attending, including the member for Hastings in the Assembly, Neale Burgess. I give credit to Neale Burgess for his advocacy for this project over a long time and for his ability to deliver funding when in government. He has been absolutely consistent in what he is seeking for his community. He will be there. As I understand it, the

police association will be there. Many members of the local community will be there.

I invite the minister to attend the meeting at St Andrew's Anglican Church at 2 Eramosa Road West, Somerville, at 10 o'clock this Saturday morning and to explain to the community why it is he has failed in his portfolio to provide Victoria Police with the resources they need and what he is going to do in the future to address this situation, which is completely unacceptable to the local community.

Gippsland ambulance stations

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health, Ms Hennessy. The matter comes off the back of recent announcements to rebuild three ambulance stations in Gippsland — at Orbost, Sale and Traralgon. The existing ambulance facilities are outdated, have been unsafe for some time and lack the facilities required to cater to an increasing number of women paramedics who service very difficult areas in terms of the diversity and number of call-outs that paramedics are required to attend throughout the area.

Often paramedics work in very difficult conditions, including very long shifts, so it is imperative that they have a working environment that is modern, clean, fit for purpose and, most importantly, safe.

It has been a great pleasure to be part of the announcements of the rebuilding of these stations; however, I ask the minister to ensure that information is provided on a regular basis on the progress of the updates for planning and to ensure that the new facilities will be fit for purpose. I also ask that local branches and auxiliaries, as well as communities, be given the benefit of regular information about the three new stations that will be delivered. We all need to have a very clear understanding of the time frames for the completion of each stage and what facilities and amenities will be provided as part of the rebuilds. I refer to improved shower, toilet and locker facilities. We need to ensure that male and female facilities are adequately provided and that training, education and staffing amenities are well planned and well set out.

I ask the minister to make sure that that information is provided on a regular basis and in a clear fashion so that I can ensure that the citizens of these three communities, and Gippsland more generally, can best understand the progress of these promises being delivered.

Custody officers

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police and relates to the rollout of custody officers in my electorate.

I understand that \$148.6 million over four years has been allocated in the state budget to implement the government's commitment to the transition of the management of police cells to new police custody officers. I am advised that custody officers will initially supervise prisoners at 22 police stations across Victoria, including Geelong, and be progressively deployed to other locations over time, depending on resourcing needs and the allocation by Victoria Police.

The action I seek from the minister is that he provide me with an update on the recruitment of these custody officers, a time line for the rollout of these officers and what location they will be deployed to.

Adjournment interrupted.

RULINGS BY THE CHAIR

Questions on notice

The PRESIDENT — Order! I take this opportunity to intervene in the adjournment debate. This is unusual, so I hope I have the agreement of the house to do this. I indicated earlier today that I would determine my position on the questions that Ms Wooldridge had sought to have reinstated because she felt that they had not been answered.

Ms Wooldridge wrote to me on 3 September asking for the reinstatement of questions 868 and 872. Both of these questions are in regard to the funding that might have been necessary to cover additional costs for agencies resulting from the declared public holidays.

In the first instance, question 868 was to the Minister for Families and Children representing the Minister for Ambulance Services, and it sought some information in relation to costs incurred by the ambulance services. The question was actually in five parts. I am of the view that this question should be reinstated. In doing so I simply hope the minister might be able to clarify her position in regard to part 2 of the question in particular. Parts 1 to 3 essentially seek to establish whether the funding for the public holiday was out of existing funds or whether some additional supplementary funds were provided to meet those extra costs. I hope the minister can clarify her position in regard to whether or not it was out of the core or base funding for this service, which is obviously an annual provision, or whether the

funds were supplemented in some way. Parts 1 to 3 are basically about Easter Sunday; parts 4 and 5 are essentially about the grand final eve public holiday.

The opposition has been pursuing the costs associated with public holidays, and in particular this public holiday, for some time, and there is a certain disinclination on the part of the government to provide those costs. I am of the view that in a fair-minded position the cost of running any public holiday ought to be a fairly easily accessible estimate. It does not matter whether it is grand final eve, which happens to fall on Friday, or Melbourne Cup Day, for instance, which falls on Tuesday and, I would have thought, would have a similar cost profile. I am sure someone somewhere in some department actually makes a calculation of how much money they need to put into the budget to cover, for the sake of argument, Cup Day, and I would have thought that would be a pretty good approximation of the cost of the grand final public holiday. I do not think it is out of court for the opposition to be asking that question, which has been going round and round in circles for some time through the various processes. I reinstate that question in regard to parts 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Question 872 does not require a longwinded response from me because it is essentially the same set of questions, and I make the same direction in respect of those matters. This question was in respect of the minister responsible for the Department of Health and Human Services and that department's cost profile.

Ms Wooldridge also wrote to me on 3 September in regard to questions 733 and 734. The first question was to the Minister for Families and Children, representing the Minister for Health, and it concerned the dates on which meetings were held with any representatives from the board of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Foundation between 1 December 2014 and 23 June 2015. The minister answered that she meets from time to time with a number of representatives from various health bodies, and I think we are to take it from that that this includes the Peter MacCallum Cancer Foundation. Given that there was a significant change in the policy of the government in respect of that hospital's establishment, I think the question might well have been answered by the minister and I think there is value in her reconsidering this particular answer. Therefore I order that the question be reinstated.

In regard to question 734, again it is in the same format and it essentially seeks advice also on meetings but this time with representatives from the board of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. It is in effect an identical question. Again, given that there is public interest in the

change to government policy, the minister might well reconsider that answer as well, so I ask that that question also be reinstated.

ADJOURNMENT

Adjournment resumed.

John Fawkner Private Hospital

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and it concerns the John Fawkner Private Hospital expansion. This is an important private hospital in Melbourne's northern suburbs. It provides significant support for the community in the City of Moreland and is owned by Healthscope.

It is a matter of contention at a local level. When I was Minister for Health I met with representatives of Healthscope, and they sought to explain the importance of this to me. I can see the very significant additional investment that will occur in the local area and also the significantly increased employment this will create in the local area. When this process finally leads to an outcome it will not only provide greater services at a local level but also lead to significant economic activity.

Strategically in the Moreland City Council planning schemes the redevelopment occupies a central position and provides an alternative in terms of an outcome. Different alternatives have also been provided by Moreland City Council that it believes may fit more satisfactorily with its planning schemes.

However, I note that Ms Garrett, the local member of Parliament, is implacably opposed to this matter. I draw the house's attention to her adjournment matter in the lower house on 3 April 2014, during which she worked very hard to try to prevent any further progress on the John Fawkner Private Hospital. This is now a matter for a planning panel. On 11 February the Minister for Planning appointed an advisory panel to consider the application for redevelopment.

I note that there was a directions hearing on 31 March. The hearing was scheduled to occur over a period of six days in early May and conclude by 28 May. It is in this context that I seek the assistance of the Minister for Planning. He has taken responsibility for this. He has appointed a planning panel. This is an important piece of economic and social infrastructure, and I call on the minister to make a decision as quickly as he can. He cannot be allowed to dither.

Melbourne–Warrnambool rail services

Mr MORRIS (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport and is in regard to rail services to the great city of Warrnambool. I note that Warrnambool is a growing city; indeed it is expected that in the next 20 years it will grow by some 40 per cent. That is why the previous coalition government committed to introducing a fourth service on the Warrnambool line that would serve the commuters who travel both in the morning and in the afternoon to and from Warrnambool and Melbourne.

It is important to note that the only reason this service can occur is as a result of the significant investment that the coalition government placed directly into the regional rail link — that as we heard earlier today Labor has absolutely botched — and its investment into the new passing loop at Warncoort, which is near Colac.

I request that the minister see the light and commit to reintroducing the fourth train service to Warrnambool, as was committed to by the previous coalition government.

National disability insurance scheme

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing, and it is in regard to the government's announcement today regarding the rollout of the national disability insurance scheme (NDIS) and particularly the disappointing news that areas in my electorate, including the Greater Shepparton, Moira, Strathbogie, Mitchell, Murrindindi, Buloke, Gannawarra, Mildura and Swan Hill municipalities, will be the last to benefit as they have not been scheduled to receive the rollout until 1 January 2019.

The national disability insurance scheme is a long-awaited reform of disability services to ensure that every Australian with a disability receives appropriate support. The former government, under the leadership of Mary Wooldridge as the then minister responsible for the NDIS and me as the minister with the early childhood development portfolio and responsibility for early childhood intervention services, had announced that its first priority would be to ensure that those on the disability support register and the early childhood intervention services waitlist would be the first to benefit from the NDIS rollout by prioritising those on the statewide waiting list.

Instead what we have learnt today is that the current government has changed that focus and will roll out the NDIS on a regional basis between 1 July 2016 and 1 January 2019. It seems that it is no coincidence that the first areas that will benefit from the rollout are in the Banyule, Whittlesea, Yarra, Nillumbik and Darebin municipalities, which are all in Labor-held seats. Once again we see areas like Ballarat and Bendigo benefiting in the first year of the rollout, but some of the most remote areas of the state where services are most scarce will have to wait until last for the rollout.

My request is that the minister immediately allocate additional state funding for the disability support register and for early childhood intervention service packages in areas of the state that are not scheduled to receive the NDIS rollout until January 2019 to ensure that my constituents are not disadvantaged by Labor's rollout schedule.

Waranga Memorial Hospital

Ms FITZHERBERT (Southern Metropolitan) — Last week I thoroughly enjoyed joining the member for Euroa for a series of meetings with healthcare providers and community leaders in her electorate. I met with a number of people in different rural communities who are all working very hard to provide great health care.

We visited Seymour Health, and it was fantastic to see its brand-new oncology centre. I have to say it has an enormously thoughtful design that provides great oversight capacity for nursing staff while giving privacy and external views to patients. I note that this centre was opened by the current government but funded by the previous government. All credit to the former Minister for Health, Mr Davis, for doing this.

I was struck by the huge contrast between the brand spanking new oncology centre in Seymour and the conditions at Waranga Memorial Hospital in Rushworth. The community has long planned to move the hospital and co-locate it with its aged-care facility, which is in the main street of Rushworth. That has great benefits for those who live and work in the facility, as well as the businesses that surround it. The hospital has a well-known bushfire risk, sitting at the very edge of a national forest. Having two separate facilities also creates all sorts of inefficiencies. The community health service is located with the hospital but is relatively isolated, and this has created some well-documented security problems.

The hospital itself has a number of problems. It was terrific to be able to see these firsthand. It has toilet and bathroom facilities that I can best describe as being

minimal. The hospital beds cannot fit through the doors of rooms they are housed in, so if patients need to be evacuated, stretchers are required. Given that the hospital sits right next to a forest, the concern is obvious. The hospital has cracked paths between wings, and it would cost \$50 000 to repair them and remove the trees that are causing the cracking. So there are a number of general maintenance and upkeep issues at this hospital that are expensive, and given the general age and condition of the hospital there is a question about whether that maintenance is something that needs to be done or whether you should just start again.

Prior to the election the coalition committed to deliver \$7 million to co-locate and upgrade the hospital and the aged-care hostel. The current government made no commitments before the election and nor has it since. My request to the Minister for Health is that she explain what she is prepared to do to address the obvious need to upgrade Waranga Memorial Hospital, including the time frame for it, and how she will respond to the very well thought out master plan that has been created by that community in relation to the hospital and the aged-care facility.

Victorian Multicultural Commission

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in relation to the failure of the government and the minister to appoint several Victorian multicultural commissioners, who are crucial to the success of the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

Twelve dedicated commissioners advocate the values of the Victorian Multicultural Commission and act as a conduit between it and the community. The commissioners have a thorough understanding of the issues facing multicultural communities and are very actively involved with them, attending events and playing a vital role in assisting networks and liaising between different faiths and community organisations. Typically the commissioners meet on a monthly basis to develop strategies and discuss community issues that require action.

It is my understanding that there has yet to be an announcement of the appointment or reappointment of six commissioners as a result of the expiration of six commissioners' terms on 30 August. They include Miss Safa Almarhoun, the youth commissioner; Ms Marion Lau, community representative commissioner, who does an amazing job and is absolutely everywhere; Ms Elizabeth Drozd, who I believe may be from the Polish community;

Mr Huseyin Mustafa from the Islamic community, who does an amazing job; and Ms Jenny Matic and Mr Abeselom Nega from the African community.

It is my understanding that because of this delay the commission is unable to hold quorate meetings. There are so many issues that need to be addressed, and the minister, as well as the Victorian Multicultural Commission, needs to benefit from the advice and feedback of the commissioners. That includes clarifying to the community changes in the relationship between the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship and the Victorian Multicultural Commission; changes to applications for funding grants, which have been promised and not delivered; information about the Royal Commission into Family Violence, particularly as it affects culturally and linguistically diverse communities; other important committees and boards that have not been appointed, such as Minister Dalidakis's Victorian multicultural affairs small business committee and the small business council, both of which are of importance to the multicultural communities; initiatives such as the social resilience funds and the need to roll out some short-term programs; the Syrian refugee issues; attendance at functions and events — there are so many issues, and it is a travesty that this commission is now not just limping along but is paralysed by this indecision.

It may well be that the minister has personal reasons for not attending to this, but he needs to get on with it. I call on him to resolve this matter forthwith and make the announcement at the earliest possible opportunity, because not only do these commissioners deserve respect but the multicultural communities deserve their representation.

Sunbury rail services

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I raise a matter this evening for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport. It concerns Labor's broken promise to the people of Sunbury that will result in Sunbury passengers being booted off V/Line trains from 1 January. As I have mentioned to the minister, and as I have mentioned in this house before, I am sure the minister would be well aware if she looked at her inbox that there is a white-hot anger about this outrageous betrayal of the Sunbury community. I can certainly understand why the member for Sunbury in the Assembly is reluctant to be seen in public these days after this government failed the Sunbury community so very badly.

The anger has become fury with the news that any person boarding a V/Line train at Sunbury from 1 January will face an exceedingly heavy fine. I was shocked when I heard how heavy these fines will be. I ask the minister to confirm the two fines — one for boarding the train and another for having the wrong sort of ticket, I am told — and confirm what the fines will be. I have heard two different figures — I have heard somewhere in the vicinity of \$420 and I have heard somewhere in the vicinity of \$480. It seems to me to be a fair whack for getting on a train, but this is apparently what the government has planned for Sunbury residents if they inadvertently wander onto a V/Line train and sit in an empty seat from 1 January next year. It seems to me that this is adding insult to injury, and I regard this as disgraceful treatment of the good people of Sunbury.

In confirming the fines, I also ask the minister to confirm if she is prepared to jail anybody who is fined but refuses to pay the fine, because there are a number of people in the Sunbury community who have told me that they will indulge in civil disobedience by getting on V/Line trains. It is quite extraordinary that in this day and age getting on a train is civil disobedience and carries with it the risk of being fined heavily and maybe being sent to jail. I ask the minister, firstly, to confirm exactly what the fine is and, secondly, if she is prepared to jail anybody who refuses to pay the fine, because I can assure the house that there are a number of Sunbury residents who are prepared to go to jail on the principle of this issue.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! After some consultation it is my view that Mr Finn's adjournment matter was a series of questions. It is not clear what action he is seeking. I ask Mr Finn to rephrase the action component of the matter he has directed to the minister.

Mr FINN — The action I want is for the minister to confirm the fines and whether she is prepared to jail somebody for not paying the fines. Confirmation, I think, is an action. That is my view.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Confirmation of the fine is an action, yes. In terms of the second component, that is still a question.

Family violence

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence. Sadly, we are hearing far too many instances of family violence and of deaths of women and children across our state and nation. In Victoria the incidence of family violence and

the subsequent demand for services have increased in recent months, or are not diminishing, and some of the cases are becoming more complex. Many agencies have spoken to me about the need to meet those demands. There has been an increase in demand partly because of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, but in areas like Ballarat, where the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has held hearings, the demand for some services has also increased.

In recent times there have been a number of media reports about the issue. I refer to one published earlier this week noting the Ballarat Centre Against Sexual Assault. This service is really struggling with the demands of the issues I have highlighted and also with some of the cases it is seeing. They are talking about children-to-children sexual abuse cases that are requiring complex counselling and the outreach service that that agency undertakes in surrounding districts. It is putting great demand on that service.

An article in today's *Age* outlines how a number of agencies are working in partnership on various programs. It states:

The state government pledged \$900 000 in the budget to protect 45 of Victoria's most at-risk women with a formal one-year pilot hoped to be underway ahead of the Royal Commission into Family Violence making recommendations.

We know that the royal commission is due to conclude in February next year, but these partnerships, programs and pilots that I have just referred to are doing some very good work to protect women and children. They are relying on that money being forthcoming so that they can continue with their work.

In a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing earlier this year, in relation to a question about funding the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence said:

This entire budget, in a sense, is a holding pattern, waiting for the royal commission's recommendations ...

As I have just highlighted, we have an increase in demand for services from agencies and organisations dealing with this very critical issue. The action I seek from the minister is that the budget not be kept in this holding pattern but that funding be provided to those services and agencies, especially those pilot programs, that are working to keep Victoria's women and children safe from family violence.

Public holidays

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. I raise this on behalf of Ms Sofia Basile, who is the owner and director of Unico Formulations, and it is in regard to the grand final parade public holiday. Ms Basile says:

I have been running two hair salons in the CBD for over 20 years, and two others on the fringe of the city. The announcement of grand final eve to be a public holiday was absolutely shocking and I was outraged.

The impact this will have on my business will be enormous and I will be forced to close three salons and only able to operate one. Also I will be forced to work myself because the labour costs will be extremely high and I cannot afford for other staff to be rostered on. I am already working six days a week because of the recession we are currently in, not to mention the revenue lost as a result of the public holiday. Businesses are struggling enough as it is and with this public holiday announcement you are effectively taking away revenue from one of the busiest trading days of the week.

I feel the Labor government does not understand the difficulties small business faces today.

Labor, you have lost my vote.

The action I seek from the minister is that he provide me with his response to Ms Basile's position on the grand final parade public holiday. He may wish to respond in writing within the time frame allowed by sessional orders or, given he is the minister at the table tonight, he may wish to respond now, which I would welcome.

Responses

Mr DALIDAKIS (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — Tonight we have had Mr Melhem ask a question of the Minister for Health in relation to Hepatitis Victoria and the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network.

Mr Ramsay raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport regarding bus and train timetables.

Mr Leane raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education regarding drainage at Orchard Grove Primary School.

Mr Purcell requested that the Minister for Agriculture visit his local area and Sun Pharmaceutical Industries with him.

Mr O'Donohue requested that the Minister for Police address a community rally in regard to the Somerville police station.

Ms Shing raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health regarding progress on the building of three local community ambulance stations.

Ms Tierney raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police regarding custody officer recruitment.

Mr Davis raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning regarding a decision in relation to a hospital site.

Mr Morris raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport regarding a commitment to a fourth service on the Warrnambool line.

Ms Lovell raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing regarding areas of her electorate that are not scheduled to receive the national disability insurance scheme rollout until 2019 and their receipt of additional funds in the meantime.

Ms Fitzherbert asked the Minister for Health to explain how she intends to upgrade the hospital in Rushworth.

Mrs Peulich raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in relation to the appointment of six commissioners.

Mr Finn raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport regarding Sunbury passengers not being able to catch V/Line trains at their stop. He asked what the cost of their fine will be if they do.

Ms Crozier raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence regarding additional funding being provided to agencies facing increased demand.

Mr Ondarchie asked a question of me, and I am happy to respond to it now. What I will say to Ms Sofia Basile in relation to the introduction of the two public holidays is that this government has decided that it is a government that honours its election commitments. In 2011 we on this side of the chamber committed to the introduction of the grand final eve public holiday. We had also previously committed to the reintroduction of the public holiday for Easter Sunday trading.

I acknowledge that as a result of both of those decisions Ms Basile may find different experiences in trading on that Grand Final Friday, but my answer to her is that as the owner of her business, she is best positioned to make a decision about what is in the best interests of her business and whether to open or close. I also say to Ms Basile that if she is looking for encouragement from

the Victorian government, the best thing we can do, which we have done in the nine months we have been in government, is see unemployment drop from nearly 7 per cent to 6.1 per cent. That means there are more people working who have disposable income.

If people have disposable income, they are more likely to take advantage of the services of businesses like hers, such as hairdressing salons, and more likely to go more often. Sadly, it has been seen when there has been an economic downturn that one of the services that suffers the most is hairdressing, as people try to put off having haircuts on a regular basis or try to do away with having a range of different hairstyles — from styling to colouring et cetera — and the costs associated with them. We will try to ensure that most people can spend their money how they want, and most businesses can choose to open when they need to. We will commit to trying to run the strongest possible economy that we can. As I said, we have already seen unemployment drop from nearly 7 per cent to 6.1 per cent.

I have written responses to adjournment debate matters raised by Mr Eideh on 3 September and Ms Dunn on 18 August.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.38 p.m.

WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Responses have been incorporated in the form supplied to Hansard.

Public holidays

Question asked by: Mr Ondarchie
Directed to: Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade
Asked on: 15 September 2015
RESPONSE TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

I have been advised by my department that as of close of business on 14 September 2015 there have been no requests for the Small Business Mentoring Service from small businesses in relation to the Friday before the Australian Football League Grand Final public holiday.

Kindergartens

Question asked by: Ms Crozier
Directed to: Minister for Families and Children
Asked on: 15 September 2015
RESPONSE TO SUBSTANTIVE QUESTION:

The *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* ('National Regulations') prescribes the information which must be provided as part of a waiver application. This includes specifying the reasons why the service is unable to comply with the relevant regulation and details of attempts made to comply with the regulation. Applications must also specify the measures taken to protect the well-being of children at the service while the waiver is in force.

The National Regulations do not prescribe any criteria as such so applications for waivers will be considered on a case by case basis.

In relation to applications to waive the new ratio requirement of 1:11 for kindergarten children aged three and over, the Department of Education & Training as the regulator, will have regard to:

- The availability of alternative funded kinder programs in the locality, for example, in rural communities; and/or
- A demonstration that a transition period is necessary in all the circumstances.

A waiver will be subject to the relevant service submitting a transition plan in 2016.

RESPONSE TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

24 waiver applications have been received from services seeking to operate at a 1:12 ratio for 2016. One application has been received from a small rural service seeking a 1:12.5 ratio.

These waiver applications are currently under assessment.