

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT**

**FIRST SESSION**

**Wednesday, 21 October 2015**

**(Extract from book 15)**

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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** — 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 Bourman, 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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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 <sup>2</sup>	Eastern Victoria	Nats	Mulino, Mr Daniel	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Bourman, Mr Jeffrey	Eastern Victoria	SFP	O'Brien, Mr Daniel David <sup>1</sup>	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			

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 25 February 2015

<sup>2</sup> 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, 21 October 2015

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

### PAPERS

#### Laid on table by Clerk:

Auditor-General's Report — Department of Education and Training: Strategic Planning, October 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

Barwon South West Waste and Resource Recovery Group — Minister's report of receipt of 2014–15 report.

Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability — Minister's report of receipt of 2014–15 report.

Essential Services Commission — Final Report on Local Government Rate Capping and Variation Framework Review, September 2015.

Gippsland Waste and Resource Recovery Group — Minister's report of receipt of 2014–15 report.

Grampians Central West Waste and Resource Recovery Group — Minister's report of receipt of 2014–15 report.

Loddon Mallee Waste and Resource Recovery Group — Minister's report of receipt of 2014–15 report.

National Parks Act 1975 — Advice of National Parks Advisory Council to Minister on proposed excisions from existing parks.

North East Waste and Resource Recovery Group — Minister's report of receipt of 2014–15 report.

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

Boroondara Planning Scheme — Amendment C218.

Casey Planning Schemes — Amendments C181, C212, C213 and C216.

Darebin Planning Schemes — Amendments C138 and C147.

Golden Plains Planning Scheme — Amendment C63.

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme — Amendment C265.

Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme — Amendment C108.

Hume Planning Schemes — Amendment C197 and C199.

Kingston Planning Scheme — Amendment C143.

Melbourne Planning Schemes — Amendments C173, C196 and C198.

Monash Planning Scheme — Amendment C124.

Moreland Planning Scheme — Amendment C123.

Nillumbik Planning Scheme — Amendment C111.

South Gippsland Planning Scheme — Amendment C77 (Part 3).

Wellington Planning Scheme — Amendment C86.

Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme — Amendment C112.

State Electricity Commission of Victoria — Report, 2014–15.

Proclamation of the Governor in Council fixing an operative date in respect of the following Act:

Racing Amendment Act 2015 — 21 October 2015 (*Gazette No. S309, 20 October 2015*).

### MINISTERS STATEMENTS

#### Youth policy

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Minister for Youth Affairs) — The Andrews Labor government's new youth policy framework will improve outcomes for all young Victorians, particularly those who are disadvantaged and disengaged. The new whole-of-government policy will guide the development of policies and programs across government and shape the way government engages with young people; identify new government actions to improve outcomes for young people; increase the focus on preventing problems and addressing problems early; and support seamless pathways and transitions between school, training and work that support young people to succeed at school, get a job and be connected to the community.

The youth policy framework will be based on comprehensive and contemporary consultations and input mechanisms with young people, who are able to access an online survey available on the Youth Central website. To date more than 1100 young Victorians have provided their thoughts and ideas through this mechanism. This has included a wide representation, with 43 per cent from across regional and rural areas; 7 per cent who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; over 14 per cent who identify as LGBTI; 12 per cent who have a disability; and 21 per cent who speak a language other than English. Every young person can have a say about the issues that are important to them, and I encourage them to do so whilst the survey is online until the end of this month.

A new youth reference group has also brought together 18 diverse Victorian youth advocates to guide the Andrews Labor government's new youth policy framework. That group met for the first time last month. Last week I launched a discussion paper process to provide an opportunity for the many youth organisations and youth advocates to contribute their

experiences and suggestions to the development of our youth policy framework. Young people also have an opportunity to comment through this mechanism until the end of the month. The various consultative mechanisms are designed to give young people a voice in the future of our state. I encourage young Victorians to participate in the development of the Andrews Labor government's new youth policy framework.

## MEMBERS STATEMENTS

### Jumps racing

**Ms PENNICUIK** (Southern Metropolitan) — Another jumps racing season has ended with yet more horses killed, injured or never to be seen again. Since 2000, 118 horses have been killed in jumps races and trials in Victoria and 4 horses died on the track this season. Around 50 per cent of jumps horses disappear from all forms of racing the following year largely due to injuries sustained in jumps events, not necessarily from a fall on the track. Research has shown that jumps is far more dangerous than flat racing, with catastrophic limb injuries 18 times more likely and cranial, back and neck injuries 121 times more likely in jumps events.

Last September I tabled a petition signed by 532 Victorians calling for an end to steeplechase and hurdle racing in Victoria. The Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses has so far collected a further 4700 signatures on a petition to be tabled next year. This week I will be presenting the Premier with 964 postcards signed by Victorians asking for the end of this form of animal cruelty.

Victoria and South Australia are the only two states that continue to allow jumps racing. Queensland stopped jumps racing in 1903, Western Australia in 1941 and New South Wales in 1997, and the last race held in Tasmania was in 2007. The Greens, along with the RSPCA, the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses, Animals Australia, Animal Liberation, the Humane Society International and the majority of the community, have long been calling for an end to jumps racing in Victoria. How many more horse deaths and injuries to horses and jockeys will it take for this state-sanctioned animal cruelty to stop?

### Diwali festival

**Mr ONDARCHIE** (Northern Metropolitan) — Namaste! This week we celebrate the Diwali Festival of Lights in our Parliament for four days. I am told it is the first time a Parliament anywhere in the world has celebrated the Diwali Festival of Lights for four days. Diwali, the biggest Hindu festival, is a festival to spread

virtues like love, messages of peace and most importantly becoming one family to stand by each other and pray for a better, brighter future full of peace, progress, ethical economic progress and prosperity. The main attraction of this mega celebration is the offering of Annakut, meaning 'mountain of food', to the deities. A vast array of vegetarian foods is traditionally arranged in tiers or steps in front of the altar, resulting in a spectacular display.

I congratulate and thank Sitesh Bhojani, Pulin Amin and the team at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Mill Park, Kishore Gurisahani and the team at Prem Prakash Mandal Mandir in Epping, and Bhakta Dasa and the team at ISKCON Hare Krishna temple at Albert Park for their contribution and the 13 other Indian organisations that have come together to celebrate Diwali in this Parliament. This is a great statement about multiculturalism and a great statement about the wider Indian community coming into our Parliament and celebrating all that is good. I encourage members of Parliament and our community to visit the Diwali celebration in Parliament House. Moreover, I encourage our multicultural communities to make Parliament part of their lives.

### Kurnai College

**Ms SHING** (Eastern Victoria) — I rise today to pay tribute to the staff at Kurnai College's three campuses in Morwell and Churchill in relation to the work they do to include students, irrespective of their circumstances, interests or any challenges they are facing in their lives. It was a great privilege to visit Kurnai College last Thursday and to meet with students and staff to understand what the school is doing in partnership with the students as part of an inclusive and equal playing field to get the very best for students in terms of lifelong opportunities for learning and skills development. In particular I was pleased to be shown around the hut students have built which is used to prepare food grown from their gardens. I was also delighted to see the budgie house they have built, which is used for breeding budgies.

This Thursday the students of Kurnai College are having a healthy eating expo where the three campuses of the school will come together for a group photo. There will be a drone in place to make sure everybody's image is captured. The students will sit down together to enjoy a healthy meal which will further build on the excellent work that is done to promote exercise, good living and good practices around being active. To that end I congratulate everyone involved in the organisation of the healthy

eating expo, and I wish them well for tomorrow's event.

### **Hobsons Bay Business Excellence Awards**

**Mr EIDEH** (Western Metropolitan) — On Friday, 9 October, I had the honour to present the Retail & Hospitality Award at the 2015 Hobsons Bay Business Excellence Awards, representing the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, the Honourable Philip Dalidakis. Also in attendance were my parliamentary colleague Dr Rachel Carling-Jenkins, the mayor and councillors of Hobsons Bay City Council and business leaders from across the Hobsons Bay region.

The Hobsons Bay Business Excellence Awards pay tribute to the dedication, hard work and outstanding achievements of businesses in this vibrant and diverse region. This is the first year the Victorian government has been a sponsor of these awards, and it is wonderful to acknowledge the enormous contributions these businesses make to the rapid growth and development of Melbourne's west. Small business is a significant provider of jobs across Victoria. It is vital to the livelihood, character and strength of our local communities and precincts. It brings people together and also employs large numbers of Victorians, especially young people.

I was delighted to present the award in the retail and hospitality category, which was awarded to Captains Retreat, a fantastic bed and breakfast located in Williamstown. I take this opportunity to congratulate all recipients of the Hobsons Bay Business Excellence Awards, as well as Hobsons Bay City Council and the sponsors on organising this event, which showcases strong business diversity and its important contribution throughout the area.

### **Australia Post gender action plan**

**Ms CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) — Last week I was particularly pleased to be able to represent the federal Minister for Women, Senator Cash, at the launch of the Australia Post *Closing the Gender Gap* action plan. I would like to acknowledge the leadership of the managing director and group CEO of Australia Post, Ahmed Fahour, who is not only talking about addressing the gender gap but is demonstrating that a major organisation such as Australia Post is actually delivering on closing the gender gap by increasing representation of women across all areas of leadership within Australia Post.

Mr Fahour spoke of his first day as managing director, and I note that an article in the *Herald Sun* on Saturday

made the very same point that he made last week at the launch, which was that on his first day in the role he was quite literally stunned by the fact that when addressing the most senior leaders of the organisation the room of 250 was overwhelmingly made up of men. It was then that he made the commitment to promote more women into leadership roles, and that is exactly what he has done.

Australia Post has identified three main areas to target in closing the gender gap: opportunities, accountability and awareness. I am particularly interested in its analysis of female retention at Australia Post. It has also set up initiatives to sponsor female sport, partnering with Netball Australia through the One Netball program and sponsoring the women's Stawell Gift to ensure that prize money is equal to that for the men's race. These two areas are particularly notable, and Australia Post should be congratulated on initiating this sponsorship. Again I acknowledge the work of Australia Post for taking such decisive action and encourage other organisations to consider what has been achieved by this organisation.

### **Great Forest National Park**

**Ms DUNN** (Eastern Metropolitan) — I recently had the pleasure of attending a Yarra Ranges Shire Council meeting. My interest in going back to my old haunt was to listen to the debate on the commissioning of a report on the Great Forest National Park in relation to the Yarra Ranges. I particularly noted the interest of Yarra Ranges councillor Jim Child, who seems to be an avid reader of *Hansard*, particularly in relation to the Great Forest National Park. That council meeting certainly provided ample opportunity for councillors to air various conspiracy theories along the way. It seemed as if the Great Forest National Park was a plot by the Greens, a plot by The Wilderness Society and a plot by a group called My Forest — which even I have not heard of — so I thought I would correct the public record in relation to that.

There seems to be an impression that a national park locks up land, but nothing could be further from the truth. What is being considered in relation to the Great Forest National Park is providing fishing, boating, four-wheel driving, camping, cycling, horseriding, abseiling and hang-gliding, which I certainly do not think lock up public land. It is utilising land to the best of our ability and, through that, underpinning local economies. I commend the council for approving a motion to proceed with that report.

### National Day of the Republic of China

**Mr ELASMAR** (Northern Metropolitan) — On Friday, 9 October, I was pleased to attend, along with several parliamentarians, including the President, the Honourable Bruce Atkinson, a celebration to commemorate the 104th National Day of the Republic of China, Taiwan. It was a terrific occasion, with a large turnout of Australian-Taiwanese guests. I enjoyed the event tremendously, and I thank the organisers for their kind invitation.

### Greek Democritus League

**Mr ELASMAR** — On another matter, on the evening of 10 October I was privileged to represent the Honourable Daniel Andrews, Premier of Victoria, at the 80th anniversary of the Greek Democritus League. Also in attendance on the night was my parliamentary colleague Steve Dimopoulos, the member for Oakleigh in the other place. I met and spoke to many Greek-Australians, and I thoroughly appreciated their hospitality and passion for politics. We were made very welcome by the president and secretary of the league, and in particular I wish to congratulate the committee members for their ongoing commitment to democracy as we know it in Australia.

### Max Fricke

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria) — I would like to take this opportunity to send my best wishes to Mansfield's Max Fricke, who has just returned home from a busy speedway season in the United Kingdom and Europe in time for the Victorian speedway grand prix in Melbourne this coming Saturday. At only 19 years of age Max is the current Australian under-21 speedway champion and has been named as a reserve rider for this weekend's grand final showdown.

Max competes for the Belle Vue Aces from Manchester in the UK's Elite League and finished just short of winning the grand final in September, losing on aggregate by only two points. Max also competed in the Extra League in Denmark and rode for the ŻKS ROW Rybnik speedway team in Poland, further developing his skills in both competitions. Max competed in this year's FIM Speedway Under-21 World Championship and finished sixth overall, and he will represent Australia at the FIM Speedway Under-21 World Team Final in Mildura on Saturday, 31 October.

It is always inspiring to see a young person following their passion and giving it their all to achieve success in their chosen field. Max is a great example of this and no doubt a role model to many.

### Box Hill Institute Lilydale campus

**Mr LEANE** (Eastern Metropolitan) — Along with my buddy Daniel Mulino and hundreds of other people, I was very happy to be in Lilydale when the Premier, the Minister for Education and the Minister for Training and Skills announced that students will return to the purpose-built education site there at the start of the next scholastic year. As I said, hundreds of people were there, including high school students who plan to attend this particular campus and who will not have to drive or travel by public transport to campuses like Hawthorn, spending most of their days travelling and then doing shifts at fast-food stores when they get back.

It is a sad fact that, due to the cuts to TAFE by the previous government and the interactions between the previous government and people in the shire, this site would by now be being used for processing parking fines and handing out dog permits rather than being kept as a purpose-built education centre for the community. It amuses me how some Liberal MPs are trying to buy themselves in with this good announcement when the bottom line is that they were villains.

### REGIONAL AND RURAL ROADS

**Mr MORRIS** (Western Victoria) — I move:

That this house —

- (1) condemns the Andrews Labor government and Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Mr Luke Donnellan, MP, for neglecting Victoria's regional road network;
- (2) notes that Labor have scrapped the coalition's successful \$160 million country roads and bridges program; and
- (3) notes that two of regional Victoria's most dangerous roads are the Myamyn-MacArthur Road and the Portland-Nelson Road, both in south-west Victoria.

I begin by saying that it is quite clear that Labor does not care about regional Victoria, let alone the critical road network that is relied upon by Victorians to get to work, to get to school and to transport goods around the state and to the ports of Victoria for export. Roads are critical pieces of infrastructure, and under this Labor government they are crumbling.

The coalition in government understood the importance of funding councils to assist them in maintaining their local roads, because road infrastructure is important. The coalition understood the strains that councils, especially smaller councils, are under when it comes to maintaining road infrastructure. That is why we were so proud of the country roads and bridges program. This program ensured that 40 of Victoria's smallest councils

were provided with \$1 million in funding, so over the four years of the last Parliament \$160 million in funding was provided to our smallest councils to ensure that they were able to maintain their roads and bridges.

This made a significant difference to the way our smaller councils went about maintaining their local infrastructure. It meant that on many occasions instead of a bridge falling into disrepair and failing it could be restored and continue to connect communities. This funding meant that local roads that were potholed and dangerous to drive on could be fixed, resealed and made safe. It was a good program and a great public policy that benefited those in the community who needed it most.

What did those opposite do? They slashed and burnt. They destroyed a program that benefited regional Victoria and decided that Victorians living in regional Victoria are not deserving of funding for their roads. However, instead of being up front and saying what we all know — that is, those opposite do not care about regional Victoria — they thought, ‘Let’s just say we care about regional Victoria and say we’re going to fund regional roads and bridges. Maybe we could start a program, maybe something called the country bridges program. That way we can go and spend that money in the city, and those country people won’t find out’.

Premier Daniel Andrews has met his match. Regional Victorians are not going to stand idly by while he tries to hoodwink us and say he is spending money on country bridges when the money is going to the city. What kind of clown claims they are going to fund country bridges when they are really funding upgrades to city freeways? But that is what the Premier has done. While roads and bridges in regional Victoria crumble and fail, the Premier has gone on to pull a swiftie and fund 10 bridges in or within 4 kilometres of his metropolitan Assembly electorate of Mulgrave using money from the Stronger Country Bridges program. What an absolute sham from this Premier, who is prepared to play regional Victorians for fools and decide that 10 of the 48 bridges funded under the Stronger Country Bridges program — more than one-fifth of the bridges — will be in or around his electorate. What a sham; what a rort; what a disgrace.

This government is doing something. Instead of fixing roads, it is installing road hazard signs, reducing speed limits and forcing people all across regional Victoria to slow down to 80 kilometres an hour or 60 kilometres an hour on country roads that should have 100-kilometres-an-hour speed limits. The government is not planning to fix these roads; rather, it is ripping funding away from these roads and installing signs so

that regional Victorians have to slow down. The government is slowing down cars, slowing down trucks and putting a handbrake on regional Victoria, and it does not care.

Regional Victorians are sick and tired of being the whipping boys for Labor and sick and tired of being neglected and abused. The coalition believes it is important that local councils are funded appropriately to ensure that they can maintain the roads and bridges that are important to them. There are 40 councils across Victoria that as a result of this government have lost \$160 million in funding.

On Friday of last week I took my life in my hands and drove the infamous Myamyn-Macarthur Road in the Assembly electorate of South-West Coast, which has been described — —

**Mr Ramsay** — You’re lucky to be able to tell the story.

**Mr MORRIS** — I am very fortunate to be standing here right now, Mr Ramsay, I must say. It has been described by many locals as the worst sealed road in Victoria. For those who are unaware — I am sure many of those opposite are unaware — the Myamyn-Macarthur Road is a thoroughfare linking the Henty Highway north of Heywood to the Hamilton-Port Fairy Road near Macarthur. It was first sealed six decades ago, but since then it has fallen into a perilous state of disrepair. I am sure those opposite will retort, ‘What did you do?’. What did we do? We funded regional and rural roads. The former Premier and former member for South-West Coast in the Assembly, the Honourable Dr Denis Napthine, committed to providing \$2.6 million to the Myamyn-Macarthur Road — funding this Labor government has scrapped. This government has not matched this commitment, because it does not care about regional roads and it does not care about regional Victoria.

For heaven’s sake, it should not come as a surprise to regional Victorians that Labor does not care about them. Let us have a look at what is happening in western Victoria at the moment in the two by-elections for the lower house electorates of South-West Coast and Polwarth. Just in case the people of western Victoria did not already understand that Labor has abandoned them, Labor did not stand candidates in these two important by-elections — yet another indication that Labor does not care about western Victoria. Warrnambool is a fabulous city, it is a wonderful city, and it does great things for regional Victoria. Believe it or not, Premier Andrews has not

taken the time to visit the great city of Warrnambool since winning the election. What an absolute disgrace.

The Myamyn-Macarthur Road is a key freight route for the delivery of goods that help drive the economy of the south-west coast, including woodchips, dairy, livestock and other agricultural products. It is critical in connecting these goods to the port of Portland and the surrounding townships. If Myamyn-Macarthur Road is not appropriately funded by the Labor government, the local economy will bear the brunt of the neglect and the economy of south-west Victoria will stall. It is as simple as that. We will see lower productivity and we will see fewer dollars being spent in the local economy as a result of Labor's neglect.

The road is continuing to deteriorate. We had a harsh winter, and despite VicRoads identifying the Myamyn-Macarthur Road as being in need of funding, the Labor government has ripped funding away from it. Just recently a petition was signed by more than 160 residents in an attempt to ensure that this road receives the appropriate funding for upgrades. Myamyn-Macarthur Road falls within the Glenelg and Moyne shires, and both agree that it is critically important for this road to be upgraded. Unfortunately this Labor government has failed to act.

While doing some research on the impact Labor's neglect has had on our regional roads, I found a Facebook page headed 'Fix Our Rural Roads'. It has over 2500 likes, and I encourage those opposite to have a look at it. It features photos of many roads in terrible states of disrepair and roads that are deteriorating as a result of this Labor government slashing road funding and abandoning the critically important country roads and bridges program.

That brings me to the Portland-Nelson Road, another road that has been neglected by this Labor government. The Portland-Nelson Road is a critical road, because during the 2014–15 year the port of Portland handled a record 6.5 million tonnes of trade, which is the fourth year in a row of growth. So we have the port of Portland experiencing significant growth, and as a result of that the roads in and around the port of Portland are experiencing increased truck movements. Indeed 4.25 million tonnes of plantation-grown hardwood and softwood woodchips and logs went through the port of Portland.

This level of activity is critically important for the Victorian economy. What we saw in and around the port of Portland was 280 000 truck movements to and from the port each and every year, and this is expected to increase over the next 5 to 10 years. Many of these

truck movements are occurring along the Princes Highway from South Australia via Heywood, but they are also occurring along the Portland-Nelson Road. We are seeing enormous growth in truck movements, which is causing significant damage to our roads. We know that the two things that cause roads to deteriorate are rain events and heavy truck movements. Despite the increase in the number of these events and movements, we are seeing the Labor government not appropriately funding what are critically important roads.

The previous coalition government funded new passing lanes on the Princes Highway at Greenwald and committed a further \$640 000 to road repairs at Bolwarra and Greenwald. That is the same Bolwarra where this Labor government intends to rip classrooms out of the heart of the great Bolwarra Primary School, destroying that school community, an issue that I am sure will come up later on as well.

Rather than seeing it fit to appropriately fund, upgrade and fix roads in western Victoria, and more specifically in the South-West Coast electorate, members of this Labor government have taken to installing road hazard signs and speed restrictions of 60 and 80 kilometres per hour. Members of this government need to get off their hands, They need to recognise that these roads are critically important.

**Mr Jennings** interjected.

**Mr MORRIS** — They need to stop sitting on their hands, and they need to ensure that these roads are appropriately funded. This is not something that needs to happen in the distant future. It is something that needs to be happening now. These roads are not just hurting the local economy. They are dangerous. The roads are potholed and their edges are deteriorating, and it is causing significant concerns for all in the local community. All Victorians should expect to be safe on our roads and not just those who are driving along the Monash Freeway and in and around the urban areas of Melbourne. Regional Victorians deserve to be assured that our road network is up to the task that is required of it.

Prior to making my contribution today I was fortunate to receive a response to an adjournment matter that I raised in regard to the Myamyn-Macarthur Road. I remind members that it is the worst sealed road in Victoria. The response from the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, the Honourable Luke Donnellan, reads:

At the end of March 2015, VicRoads installed temporary 80 km/h speed limit signs for 6 km of the eastern end of Myamyn-Macarthur Road. VicRoads advises me that this

speed limit will remain until more significant repairs are completed.

My concern about this response to my adjournment matter is that when members of the opposition left government the funding was there to fix the Myamyn-Macarthur Road. That funding has been ripped out by this Labor government to fund inner-city roads and bridges, such as those 10 bridges in and around the Premier's seat of Mulgrave. The adjournment debate response went on:

VicRoads will continue to inspect and monitor Myamyn-Macarthur Road and will perform routine maintenance activities to keep the road in a safe condition. These works will include grading of gravel shoulders to minimise edge drop-offs and vegetation trimming to ensure sight distances are maintained.

This raises concern for me because it appears as though VicRoads is determining exactly where this funding is going, despite the fact that we know the funding was there but was ripped out by this Labor government. On the one hand the minister is saying it is up to VicRoads, and on the other hand the minister is ripping funding out of these critically important roads and ensuring that it is going to metropolitan Melbourne rather than to the regional roads where it is needed.

It is of great concern to me and to everybody on this side of the house that these funds are being removed from what are critically important roads in terms of the economy of regional Victoria and critically important roads when it comes to ensuring that members of our community are safe in regional Victoria. I am aghast at the fact that this Labor government has abandoned regional Victoria and regional roads in the way it has. I know from my experience in local government that the country roads and bridges program was an exceptionally popular and successful program with many smaller regional councils. When we are talking about councils that have budgets in the vicinity of \$50 million, \$1 million a year to invest in road infrastructure is a significant amount. Ripping that funding out and saying, 'Don't worry about it. We'll decide which bridges and roads will be funded, but it's okay; we will fund these roads and bridges', and then using those funds in the city is playing regional Victorians for fools. Regional Victoria expects and deserves more.

In summing up my contribution today, it is a disgrace that this government has neglected our regional road network. It is a disgrace that the Premier and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety are neglecting regional Victoria and not funding appropriately the incredibly important roads in regional Victoria to ensure that our community can remain safe and that the

economy in regional Victoria can grow. What more can I say? Unfortunately this is Labor.

**Ms DUNN** (Eastern Metropolitan) — I rise to make a contribution in relation to Mr Morris's motion today and to recognise that roads, particularly regional roads and local roads, are fundamentally important to local economies and local communities. It is not only the \$160 million that is no longer afforded local councils that is an issue for local councils and their jurisdiction in relation to maintaining and building local roads; it is also the reduction in Roads to Recovery, a federal program, which has seen significant dollars taken out of local government grants, that is impacting enormously on the ability of local governments to maintain roads to a standard that their communities have come to expect.

Local roads are incredibly important for safety, and as I said, they underpin local economies and communities. Local roads should be the focus of our expenditure when it comes to looking at where we are spending money on roads. We should not be spending billions of dollars on arterial project upgrades. We should not be spending billions on east-west tunnels or west-east tunnels or whichever way you want to go. What we see is that when we do spend money on arterials in the metropolitan area, it just creates more congestion. We have seen the cost of congestion to our economy. It is far more sensible to divert funding to regional and local roads rather than having an obsession with constantly upgrading freeways, which does not deliver the benefits to Melburnians, Victorians or our economy because of the costs.

I draw on my own experience of the Monash Freeway. It was called the south-eastern arterial when I started driving. I have seen lane after lane added to that road over the decades, and I can report that it now takes longer to get to the city on the Monash than it has ever done in the past. I would consider that our investment is probably better placed in public transport and having a public transport system that will get the cars off the Monash Freeway rather than just adding lane after lane to city roads.

However, this motion is most definitely targeted at the regional road network, and the Greens understand the critical importance of the regional road network. Certainly there has been a lot of work undertaken on understanding what is happening with our roads. I draw the attention of members to a study report by the Auditor-General done back in 2008, *Maintaining the State's Regional Arterial Road Network*. The report at that time found that the condition and performance of the regional road infrastructure had 'deteriorated in recent years', that an additional \$77 million per year

was needed to properly maintain Victorian roads, that there was a backlog of roadworks needed and that 6 per cent of all roads were in distress. The Auditor-General said that reducing funding on country roads leads to further deterioration and simply costs more in the long run.

Despite country Victoria having only 25 per cent of Victoria's population, regional Victorians make up the majority of the road toll, and that is a tragedy for those communities. In 2014 there were 105 road deaths in rural Victoria in comparison to 82 in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

Roads and the condition of roads play an integral part in the safety of drivers and the safety of the community. There is a theme that has run through the reports of the Auditor-General's office when it has looked at roads — it is a litany of lack of maintenance and lack of investment in infrastructure, and ultimately the community pays the price for that.

I draw the attention of members to a 2011 Auditor-General's report which looked specifically at road bridges. It is called *Management of Road Bridges*. The Auditor-General noted:

An efficient road system underpins economic prosperity and livability.

In relation to bridges he went on to say:

If bridges are not properly maintained or fail to keep up with increasing demands, they become pinch points that prevent the free and efficient movement of people and freight.

In relation to that particular audit the Auditor-General assessed whether VicRoads and selected councils were managing road bridges and major culverts effectively. His conclusion was:

VicRoads is effectively managing the structural safety of bridges and culverts and prioritises annual funding to the areas of greatest short-term need. However, VicRoads has not formed detailed long-term plans nor adequately measured, forecast and reported on the levels of service experienced by road users. Doing these things is a prerequisite for VicRoads to adequately inform longer term resourcing decisions.

I have some sympathy for VicRoads because we have seen a continual cut to its budget, to the point where it can deliver only short-term outcomes and cannot concentrate on the longer term outcomes in relation to roads and bridges.

Looking at councils and their responsibility — because ultimately the responsibility for roads and bridges is split between the state government and local government — local government shares a significant slice of that pie. I turn to the Yarra Ranges Council,

which is considered a metropolitan council. That council is responsible for over 900 kilometres of local roads, which gives a picture of the enormity of the task that local governments are challenged with on behalf of their communities.

In relation to bridges the Victorian Auditor-General, looking at councils, found that:

... their approach to managing these assets limits their ability to fully assure their continued safe operation. Examples of incomplete, out-of-date and unreliable information on bridge condition and weaknesses in councils' asset management processes should be addressed so that councils can demonstrate effective asset management.

It is a concern to me that that was a finding made by the Auditor-General, although I certainly understand it because I look from the perspective of my time as a local government councillor and the work we did in relation to asset management, an asset register and a long-term plan for managing those assets. But I wonder how local councils are going to be able to deal with the enormity of looking after their roads under a rate capping scenario in the future. The experience in other jurisdictions is that one of the first things to go when money is tight is maintenance on roads and infrastructure.

I move now to a more recent Auditor-General's report. This one was undertaken in 2014, and it is titled *Asset Management and Maintenance by Councils*. This report looks at the different asset types that councils manage. Of course councils are responsible for an enormous range of assets, but roads and bridges are amongst them. In this report, the Auditor-General says:

A 1998 report to government warned that unless steps were taken to address councils' asset renewal gaps, the budget councils require for renewal would more than double by 2012. These predictions have materialised despite this warning, and the renewal gap has almost doubled as a proportion of total asset value over the past 16 years.

As recently as 2014 councils were completely under the pump in terms of the funding that they could put into local roads and bridges. I might have already broached this, but I fail to see how under the rate capping scenario that is coming their way very shortly councils will be able to continue to respond positively to the enormous demands of maintaining local roads, bridges, drains, parks, buildings and all the other things they are responsible for. Councils manage over \$73 billion in physical assets, and it is worth noting that for rural councils those assets make up about 30 per cent of what they manage.

We know that the consequences of not effectively managing the asset renewal gap include reduced levels

of services, poorer quality of community life and lower economic activity. Of course spending more money on assets requires raising revenue by increasing council rates, increasing debt through further borrowings or spending less on other services. The Auditor-General was clear when he pointed out that it is a balancing act for local government to fund that asset renewal gap as well as provide appropriate maintenance for roads and bridges. I think we are going to see that balance tip as councils are constrained not only by the rate capping that is coming their way but also by the fact that there seems to be a lack of funding for local government.

The country roads and bridges program is an example of funding that is now lost to local government. It is not a fund it can utilise any longer, which is unfortunate because \$1 million per council per year to 40 regional councils was a good sum of money. It probably did not go far enough. When you consider how much bridges cost — they are very expensive pieces of infrastructure — a million dollars does not go far, but it is better to have a million dollars than no dollars at all. We lament the loss of that to local government, particularly now that councils are going to be constrained by rate capping.

The country roads and bridges program enabled the repair or replacement of approximately 100 bridges and the repair or upgrade of 900 local roads. But given the extent of the road network, that barely scratches the surface, and Victoria is the most road-dense state in the country. There are a lot of roads and there is a lot of population dispersed throughout the state, and our needs in relation to roads are quite different to those in other jurisdictions.

We see constantly that the budget to VicRoads is being cut. The former government cut the budget to VicRoads. Engineers from the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers Australia warned at the time that we would see a general deterioration of roads, and those budget cuts would impact greatly on the state of Victoria. We have seen that come to bear, and anyone who drives around regional Victoria or the fringes of Melbourne can see generally a deterioration of the roads. I even point to a local road in my area — that is, Monbulk Road — which is in a constant state of deterioration and has patch after patch on it, and yet it is a significant and critical link through the Dandenong Ranges.

The warning back in 2012 was that the move was likely to lead VicRoads to cut speed limits on some roads as they deteriorated. Out of interest, I noticed when I travelled down to Hamilton as part of a public hearing into unconventional gas that many roads I travelled on

had a reduced speed limit because they were in a general state of deterioration. Instead of 100-kilometres-per-hour signs, there were 80-kilometres-per-hour signs. That was quite a surprise to me because I had not driven on those roads for some time. To have that level of deterioration and a management process of just putting some signs up as a way to deal with a road issue is inadequate.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Ms DUNN** — I am still working out whether I live in metropolitan Melbourne or not myself, but that is what they say about the Dandenong Ranges.

In relation to the Stronger Country Bridges program, yes, there is funding there, but I draw the attention of the members in the chamber to the Better Roads program for which the government announced \$1 billion in funding to upgrade and repair unsafe and congested roads across regional Victoria. But the real rub with this \$1 billion in funding, according to a document that crossed my path, is that in relation to the Better Roads funding a communication strategy will be prepared to manage any sensitivities around funding not being from new funding. This is not new funding; it is funding that is already in the system.

I am concerned that our roads will not see the sort of wholesale improvement they need to see because we have not done what we have needed to do for many years in relation to that backlog of regional roads, whether they be VicRoads or local government roads. In terms of the pressure generally, we keep pulling money out of VicRoads and local government, and eventually we are going to find the roads across the state outside of metropolitan Melbourne in such a dismal state that it will significantly impact on our economy.

In terms of the local roads that are mentioned in Mr Morris's motion, I cannot speak on the Myamyn-Macarthur Road. I have not driven on it. It does not sound great. However, I have some insight into the Portland-Nelson Road. It was telling for me that at the public hearing I attended in Hamilton, the Protect the West Alliance talked about the Portland-Nelson Road in terms of the road constantly falling apart, being repaired and falling apart again. That is the experience of locals down there. As we have heard, there is significant economic activity there in relation to plantations. I have to put on the record that the Greens are very happy to see a thriving plantation timber industry, but in terms of what we heard on the day, locals are very concerned about the state of their

roads. We saw some photos which indicated that road was in an absolutely appalling state.

I turn to the elements of Mr Morris's motion.

Mr Morris condemns the Andrews Labor government for neglecting Victoria's regional road network. We share those concerns, but we are really concerned about a rate capping scenario and what that means for local communities in the future. We are concerned we will see a deterioration of local roads — that enormous asset base that local governments have — because there simply will not be the funds to keep up with the maintenance required. We already know that local governments cannot match the funding needed for asset management. We already see a gap between the road maintenance needed by the time they get the funding to get the maintenance done. That enormous gap will continue to grow. That will be incredibly bad news for those local communities, because not only do VicRoads roads suffer from a lack of investment, upgrade and maintenance, but now local government-managed roads will share the same fate. The reality for people who are driving on roads is that they do not get the difference between the two methods of road management; they just see it as a road network. Ultimately we will see the same issues across the road network.

In relation to the other parts of the motion, we are happy to note the scrapping of the coalition's \$160 million country roads and bridges program, but with that we note also the reduction in Roads to Recovery funding from the federal government. This is yet another blow to local government, so it seems that local government is getting hit on every side and is the whipping boy from not only the federal government but also from the state government in relation to the assets local governments need to manage. With that I will conclude. We will support this motion but note the enormous burden that is placed on local government in relation to its jurisdiction of managing roads and the significant challenges it will face under a rate capping scenario.

**Mr MULINO** (Eastern Victoria) — It is a pleasure to rise today to talk about this important subject. Ms Dunn observed that this motion targets regional road networks, and I think there is some truth to that, but it is also worth noting that there might be some other targets of this motion. There is a broader context to this discussion which is worth us all having in the back of our minds. I will be making some observations about our contributions to funding these important transport networks.

Mr Morris made some interesting observations in his speech — —

**Mr Morris** — Very good observations.

**Mr MULINO** — Interesting, certainly, in relation to the funding of various roads and different programs. I thought his comments were ones you might expect in the full fury of a campaign. There was a certain element of emotion to them. Mr Morris was aghast at certain elements of the government's program. I am going to do a word search and see how often the word 'aghast' appears, because I think the word might appear more frequently closer to elections. It is not surprising that the word 'aghast' might start to be heard today in the lead-up to certain by-elections. It is commendable that Mr Morris composed himself enough to come in here and read out his contribution, notwithstanding the great anger and fury he feels. It was an impressive controlling of his emotions.

**Mr Jennings** — He could have read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the Assembly last weekend.

**Mr MULINO** — Exactly. What exactly are we talking about? We are talking about some of the most important roads, and more broadly transport connections, in the state. As a person who represents regional areas, as one of the interjectors said, I am fully cognisant of that. However, it is worth taking a step back and, rather than just reeling off project after project, asking how we should approach funding these transport networks. I will argue there are a couple of criterion we should adopt. In doing so, this government is taking a far more coherent and sensible approach than that of the previous government.

Firstly, when we look at the funding of regional roads, we need to take a long-term approach. This government has committed to spending \$1 billion over a long-term period to upgrade unsafe and congested roads and level crossings in regional communities.

Secondly, and this is an overarching comment before getting down to some specific programs, funding needs to be directed on a needs basis rather than having one-size-fits-all programs. One-size-fits-all programs can be all well and good for media releases and slogans, but they are not a sensible way of prioritising spending. If one looks at the way the programs and the approach we are adopting have been supported by other levels of government, one sees that the approach I recommend is one that other levels of government, including a federal government of the other political stripe, are very supportive of.

Thirdly, whenever one looks at something as complicated as the regional road network and at multi-use transport infrastructure which is used not only

for commuting and transporting people for community needs or tourism but also for freight one needs to be aware of the interdependencies within that network and also the intermodal challenges; for example, the connections between the road system and the rail system and the level crossing issues that we see in regional Victoria just as we do in the metropolitan area. We need to have an approach that takes that into account. I argue that the approach we are taking to funding regional roads takes all of those broader policy perspectives into account in a far more coherent and sensible way than was the case previously.

To reiterate, the Andrews Labor government has made an unprecedented investment in improving safety on our regional roads. That is why we are spending \$1 billion on upgrading unsafe and congested roads right across regional Victoria. It is also why we are investing in level crossings — to improve the connection between the road and rail networks.

One particular funding program that is worth looking at in some detail is the \$135.6 million allocated over the next year to repair unsafe and deteriorating roads across Victoria. This will cover hundreds of sites across regional Victoria that need to be resealed. I could list a raft of individual projects, but it is more important to note that there is a significant amount of funding in each of the major regions. There is \$11.4 million for 300 sites across north-eastern Victoria, \$12.6 million for 120 sites across western Victoria, \$14.2 million for 160 sites across south-western Victoria and \$19.8 million for sites across metropolitan Melbourne, many of which will improve access into important metropolitan areas for people from regional Victoria. There is also \$11.6 million for 130 sites across northern Victoria and \$10.4 million for the eastern region — my electorate. When you look at those breakdowns you see that there is significant funding for repairing unsafe and deteriorating roads in all of our key regional areas. There is a spread of literally hundreds of sites, and that is critical.

I also want to identify as a particular program \$42.8 million to upgrade and strengthen 52 bridges for freight efficiency. These bridges are important in terms of access more generally. They are important thoroughfares for commuters and tourists, but the key rationale in an immediate sense is to improve the capacity of these bridges and thoroughfares for high-productivity freight vehicles.

I will put this in a broader context because there are a number of programs being undertaken to strengthen bridges. It is important to understand that these different programs involve not only the state funding a series of

bridges on its own but also a number of projects where the state and the federal governments are working together. One is the Bridges Renewal program, which involves 50-50 funding between the state government and the federal government. That involves funding for a total of six bridges. Then there is the national highway upgrade program, which is 80 per cent commonwealth funded and 20 per cent state funded and which strengthens bridges along a number of major arterial highways. That includes a number of bridges along the Goulburn Valley Highway, the Hume Freeway, the Western Highway and the Monash Freeway. This program is going to strengthen 31 bridges. These are absolutely critical bridges for the freight network in this state. Again, that is an 80 to 20 program where the federal government and state government have worked closely together to prioritise funding on those bridges that are of the most importance to the freight task.

Then there is the bridge strengthening program, which is funded 100 per cent by the state government. That is going to strengthen 52 bridges with an eye to freight efficiency, upgrading bridges to allow many of them to accommodate 68.5-tonne gross mass limits, which would accommodate B-double trucks, which is absolutely critical to allowing our exporters to get access to ports and allowing freight to move across the state. When you look at that program, with \$42.8 million from the state government for 52 bridges for freight efficiency, you see that there are some really significant projects within that — for example, on the Western Highway, the Melton to Ballarat section; and on the Hume Freeway, the M80 to the New South Wales border. The first of those is \$11.7 million; the second is \$7.6 million.

I stress that 52 bridges are getting funding from that project, but it is not a one-size-fits-all approach. We are clearly prioritising those projects that are of the utmost importance to the freight task of this state, and it is a policy-based, targeted way of spending the money. It also reflects the multilayered approach of the bridge renewal and the national highway upgrade programs. We have three different programs, all funding bridge upgrades and bridge strengthening — programs that are coordinated between the federal and the state governments, programs that are taking local government needs into account and programs that are very policy oriented compared to the previous one-size-fits-all approach, under which the way money was spent was often unaccountable. This is a significant improvement.

Significant money is also going into level crossing removals, which we know are extremely important. We often talk in this place about level crossings in the

metro area, but I think people on all sides of this debate would agree that level crossings are also extremely important in regional areas. It is really important that we acknowledge that level crossing upgrades will get significant funding in the government's forward program. The commonwealth and Victorian governments are also partnering on rest stops — another example of coordinating across different levels of government, which is critical in this space. The Agriculture Infrastructure and Jobs Fund is a \$200 million fund that will drive economic growth, create jobs and boost exports. It is a fund that is focused on the first and last mile.

There is an understanding that, yes, we need to focus on projects that are geographically located in the regions — and that is something I have already alluded to — but it is also critical for people in the regions to get access to services in metro areas and just as important if not more important for exporters from the regions to get access to ports and physical infrastructure. That last mile is critical. We cannot imagine for a moment that people in the regions are not interested in getting that last mile fixed as well. That \$200 million Agriculture Infrastructure and Jobs Fund is absolutely critical. I very much hope that all members of this house do what is needed to secure the passage of that fund.

I think we in this house can all agree on the importance of funding regional roads and agree that there are a number of criteria involved. One is safety, one is dealing with congestion and other externalities — we need to make sure that we get the use mix right — and one that I would argue does not get enough attention is making sure that the different layers of the transport system work as well together as they should. We want to make sure that the linkages between the road system and the rail system are as strong as possible and that we get intermodal terminals to be efficient as possible. We want to get rid of level crossings or mitigate their negative effects as much as possible. Those need to be the overarching goals of our policies in this area.

If one were to be ungenerous — and I am certainly not predisposed to be — one might say that there is a certain tinge, a certain spin or a certain timing to this motion, but I will not take that view of it. I say that it is useful that a really important issue is being raised. I put on the record that this government is doing an incredible amount in this area. It is putting in huge amounts of funding in a far more effective, far more planned and far more rational way. That is reflected not just in the areas where we are acting alone — and there are many areas where the state government is fully funding projects that are providing vast improvements

for regional Victoria compared to what was in place before — but also by the fact that other levels of government want to sign up to our agenda.

The commonwealth government wants to join with us on bridge strengthening programs. Local government wants to join up with the state government on a whole range of programs. We are heading in the right direction. It is a long-term plan; it is a policy-based plan; it is an integrated plan; and that is where regional Victoria wants to go. I believe that is what we should be supporting, not tokenistic gestures such as the one that Mr Morris has put forward.

**Mr RAMSAY** (Western Victoria) — It gives me great pleasure to speak to Mr Morris's motion this morning. In doing so I congratulate him on bringing this motion to the house. He is a parliamentary colleague, a great advocate for Western Victoria Region as a local member and also a great advocate for the south-west of Victoria.

I am always bemused when my contribution follows one by Mr Mulino because his contribution is delivered like a true bureaucrat. He does not have a lot of passion or emotion. He makes a fairly academic, technical and dry contribution that provides some detail, but he does not show passion, commitment or fire in the belly in relation to what he is talking about. That is the difference between country members like Mr Morris and me, who live and breathe regional Victoria, and those who live on the fringes, who exit and traverse the green wedge metropolitan boundaries of regional Victoria.

This is an important motion, and it is disappointing to see that the government benches are almost empty. I understand why some members are missing, and I will not go into detail about that, but it is disappointing to see a distinct absence of country members bothering to sit in the chamber to listen to the debate about the importance of funding local government roads. Having said that, I appreciate there is unity in common purpose and agreement in relation to the importance of local roads for regional Victorians, and an appreciation that they are the lifeblood of rural communities. I think we all agree that they are under significant stress and in many places are falling to bits. There are a range of reasons for that, but there is no doubt that the reason for Mr Morris's motion today is to draw attention to the fact that the Napthine government had some very good programs that were helping local government to maintain and upgrade the local road networks it is responsible for and that it was also assisting VicRoads to maintain the roads it was responsible for.

As Mr Jennings said, we keep raising the point about the importance of these funding programs that were so successful under the previous government. We are so disappointed that the government of the day has seen fit to cut these programs and replace them with programs that do not have the same outcomes or provide the value that the previous programs did.

I will not go into significant detail about the country roads and bridges program, because it has been well canvassed in previous contributions and in Mr Morris's contribution today, but we have referred to it many times in this house because it has been such an important program for local government. It gave local councils some certainty of funding they could apply to their budgets each year to do the necessary backlog of works in relation to upgrading both roads and bridges. At \$1 million per year and with a \$160 million projected funding stream, the program provided funding certainty and also allowed councils to start significant work — not just tinkering around the edges — on the backlog of maintenance that stacked up over a number of years.

The other programs it was disappointing to see the Andrews government cut were little programs that had significant value for both local communities and local government. The local infrastructure fund — a \$100 million fund — was also a very important fund that could be matched with co-funding from federal, state or local sources or from private partnerships. It really provided for the sort of infrastructure that local councils would not normally be able to fund or build. In the plethora of new funding mechanisms that the Andrews government has announced I see no replacement for the local infrastructure fund, which was critical to the sorts of infrastructure projects that would not normally be funded under other programs.

The Putting Locals First Fund was another very important program for local government to provide infrastructure opportunities for councils and communities that would not normally fit under any other program. The specific local programs were identified by community members and supported by local councils. They provided things such as improvements at tennis clubs and sporting grounds, and skateboarding and sporting infrastructure. If you drive around regional Victoria, whether it be Smythesdale, Scarsdale, Linton, Meredith, Winchelsea or many other towns, you will see new infrastructure, whether it be sporting and recreational or at schools or meeting halls, that has been revitalised by this program. So it is very disappointing that this government has seen fit to cut that program, which was funded at more than \$100 million.

There has been some argy-bargy about the value of the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund, but there is no doubt that it was a program committed to regional Victoria. Many smaller programs were under the umbrella of the Regional Growth Fund and provided such things as leadership programs right through to assisting with work on multipurpose facilities. Ararat was a classic example, receiving \$1.2 million in funding. Winchelsea upgraded its beautiful bluestone courthouse through the fund; and I could go on. The Regional Growth Fund was specifically for regional Victoria.

One of the real criticisms of this government is that it is relinquishing those programs that were totally committed to regional Victoria and those funds are now to be universally used for both metropolitan and regional Victoria. The arguments put by members on this side of the house today demonstrate how angry we are and how totally disappointed we are that the Andrews government has pinched what was funding committed for regional Victoria through the Stronger Country Bridges program to fund metropolitan infrastructure.

Mr Morris very clearly articulated his anger, frustration and disappointment that the Andrews government would see fit to use that money to build some bridge infrastructure in the Premier's Assembly seat of Mulgrave, and that would be only one example. We will see many instances of the Andrews government pilfering money from the regional Victoria country roads and bridges program and putting it into metropolitan Melbourne to help supplement funding for metropolitan infrastructure works. I am sure we will see that when we get closer to the next budget, where we know the Andrews government's prioritisation of programs will come under significant pressure.

One thing we do agree on is the importance of moving freight from road to rail. That takes pressure off some of our regional road networks. Again, it is disappointing to see that the Andrews government has rail blocked, if I can use that pun, the Murray Basin rail project. It has stalled that project because it has put not a cent into that project, and it has used the coalition government's policy in relation to the sale of Rural Finance, the proceeds of which were identified specifically for regional Victoria, with \$220 million specified for the Murray Basin rail project. That was in the 2014–15 budget; the Andrews government did not provide any money for that. Then it has the cheek to say, 'We're going to the feds for the rest of it. The feds will cough up the other \$200 million, and of course we won't have to spend a cent, so we will just plough all our money into the Metro rail project', where it has a \$9 billion project with no business plan and no funding as yet.

Again, for whatever reason, regional Victorians are being treated as second-class citizens. While the government is engaging in argy-bargy with the feds in relation to gap funding, the project has stalled. Here we are, with road networks all over Victoria falling to bits, yet the Andrews government is refusing to proceed with the Murray Basin rail project to try to move some of the heavy vehicles and heavy containers that are pivotal to moving freight across Victoria to our ports off the road networks and onto rail.

I will get back to the motion and identify the three points Mr Morris has set out. I am reluctant to do so, but I suppose at some point in my contribution I had better actually refer to the motion! The motion asks that this house condemn the Andrews Labor government and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. We have pretty well articulated that we are very disappointed in the Andrews government and the way it has cut those very successful programs that provided funding to local government for upgrading, improving and regenerating our local road networks.

The motion notes that Labor has scrapped the coalition's successful \$160 million country roads and bridges program. I have already indicated how disappointed we are that the government has seen fit to cut that program. I have to say that, like Ms Dunn, I sit on the Standing Committee on the Environment and Planning, which is currently inquiring into the rate capping policy and is ably chaired by David Davis. Clearly all the local councils that have provided testimony to that inquiry have indicated how successful and how valued the country roads and bridges program was to them. Not only is the government foreshadowing a rate cap to councils but it is cutting these significant programs at the same time. That will have a significant impact on councils' ability to continue to maintain our local country roads and bridges networks.

I might say that there has also been some criticism of the indexation of the federal assistance grants to local councils, but I can say that supplementary funding has been provided, particularly in the federal seats of Corangamite and Wannon, which encompass the state Assembly electorates of Polwarth and South-West Coast. In fact more money has been provided to the Roads to Recovery program through the supplementary grants that were announced recently by the federal members for those seats, Sarah Henderson and Dan Tehan respectively. Yes, there has been some indexation in relation to federal assistance grants, but there has also been more money provided through the Roads to Recovery program to certain areas of local government that are under significant pressure and

stress. I might add that the federal government has also provided significant co-funding, as Mr Mulino said, in relation to its Bridges Renewal program, thankfully, because otherwise local government would not be able to continue to maintain and upgrade these old wooden bridges, given the cutting of the country roads and bridges program.

I was down at the Castle Carey Road bridge the other day, which is one of those bridges that is not funded. The Corangamite shire is seeking \$2 million to complete the full replacement of that old wooden bridge in the Glenormiston area. Unfortunately, as we have seen, money is being diverted to Mulgrave to replace a metropolitan bridge as part of the Monash rejuvenation project at the expense of little wooden bridges like the Castle Carey Road bridge in the Noorat area, which is a great disappointment because we cannot get the B-doubles across. What we are finding is that freight charges are going up because some of these transporters are not able to use their larger vehicles across some of these bridges. This bridge should be replaced as a matter of urgency.

I go to paragraph 3 of the motion, which says:

- (3) notes that two of regional Victoria's most dangerous roads are the Myamyn-Macarthur Road and the Portland-Nelson Road —

the latter of which I am very familiar with. Both those roads have been identified in previous contributions as being severely neglected, and significant funding for maintenance of those roads is required as a matter of urgency.

But those are only two that Mr Morris has identified. In Polwarth I could identify the Timboon-Colac Road, which again has been identified in this chamber and also by the Liberal candidate for the Assembly seat of Polwarth, Richard Riordan, who is running a crusade to identify the local roads in Polwarth that require immediate and urgent action. I am sure that Mr Drum, given the opportunity, will acknowledge the work of The Nationals candidate, David O'Brien, in identifying the country roads in that electorate that require some urgent attention.

As Mr Morris has already said, the government's response through VicRoads to these urgent maintenance requirements is to put restricted speed zones on those roads to ease the speed of traffic and provide some safety compliance, but it is also to try to eke out a few more years of road use without any significant maintenance. But that will not wash with local communities, because they can see the huge potholes throughout those road networks. The

shoulders and edges of the pavement are wearing away to a point where you cannot just put signs for slower speed zones on roads; you have to start investing in those road networks in a considerable way.

We understand that the heavier vehicles, the lack of maintenance, the poor materials that have been used in some circumstances, the climatic conditions and the quality of the road making are having an effect on the longevity of some of these roads. The way they are structured now is not giving them the sort of long life we have seen in the past. They require continual maintenance and patching works, perhaps more so than we have seen in the past.

I would like to allow other speakers the opportunity to speak in the debate on this motion, but before I conclude I will highlight the good work that the coalition, both state and federal, has done in relation to the Princes Highway west extension. That duplication to Winchelsea is nearly complete, and planning is well underway for the duplication to Colac. There is strong advocacy from councils from Colac to Portland for the funding of a two-plus-one model for the Princes Highway, and we on this side of the chamber will continue to push for a commitment of funding for the legs from Colac to Warrnambool. I also make note of the duplication works on the Western Highway to Ararat and the requirement for ongoing funding.

All these bigger projects, including the Great Ocean Road, were funded by the coalition government. Not one cent has been funded by the Andrews government, and there seems to be a reluctance from the Andrews government to commit to funding these larger infrastructure projects in regional Victoria as well as the local road networks identified in Mr Morris's motion. I am looking forward to a time when there is a commitment to rail, both freight and passenger rail. I have reported in this house many times the lack of commitment from the Andrews government to provide a fourth and fifth daily rail service to Warrnambool. At this stage there is no commitment of money in the budget to ongoing rail investment in regional Victoria, whether passenger rail or freight rail.

A lack of infrastructure projects have been committed to by the Andrews government in relation to the ongoing duplication of Princes Highway west and Western Highway, which are critical for Western Victoria Region. As I have demonstrated today, all these very good, popular and well-supported programs introduced by the coalition government have been cut by this government. The replacement programs are not for regional Victoria; they are for Victoria generally. The government will identify priority projects, usually

populist projects, as we have seen with the public holidays and rate capping policies, that will no doubt be diverted to Melbourne.

As we have seen with the sale of assets, the port of Melbourne sale has been identified as a key funding revenue opportunity, but it is giving only a small dribble to regional Victoria. We are not even sure that any money from the sale of the port of Melbourne, if it is passed by both houses, will go to regional Victoria. The government has talked about \$200 million, but we know it is already holding the proceeds of the sale of the Rural Finance Corporation in one of the little infrastructure funds it has renamed and rebadged about six times over. There has been no real commitment to any revenue from the sale of the port of Melbourne being specifically identified for use in regional Victoria, whether for infrastructure, road network support or to replace some of these programs.

I am a bit surprised that the Victorian Farmers Federation was so quick out of the blocks to congratulate itself on the work it did to try to identify moneys out of the sale of the port of Melbourne specifically for regional Victoria, because in my view that has not been the case. It has not been demonstrated by any form of commitment from the current government in its document in relation to that proposed sale.

In summary, I congratulate Mr Morris on bringing this motion to the house. He has identified some key roads in the south-west that need immediate maintenance, but all speakers could identify hundreds of roads throughout regional Victoria that require significant maintenance. It is unfortunate that the Guilty Party, as I call it — the Andrews government — has cut all these programs that could provide funding for these important road networks, as is its lack of commitment to both passenger and freight rail services throughout regional Victoria. Instead it is focusing all its priority projects on metropolitan Melbourne. I fully support the motion.

**Mr DRUM** (Northern Victoria) — I appreciate the opportunity to stand and support the motion put forward by Josh Morris today. It is a motion that is well overdue, succinct and straight to the point. It talks about the condemnation that Victorian people should feel towards the Andrews government and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety for neglecting Victoria's regional road network, with the scrapping of the \$160 million country roads and bridges program. It also notes that we now have some of the most dangerous roads in the south-west, that are causing real concern

for motorists who find themselves driving on those roads.

This is something that I think gets tossed around as a political football. Are the roads in a really bad condition or are they not? Is it a hassle or is it not? Is it dangerous or is it not? The answer is: it is incredibly dangerous when you are driving on bad roads in the country, especially when you are driving at night, which many people are forced to do. Driving on bad country roads costs lives. If you do not think it is an important issue, pick up the paper and read the death notices and you will see some of the serious accidents that form part of the road toll.

It is not just deaths that occur. I happened to drive past an accident the other day. I could not work out how this car, 10 kilometres out of Violet Town, could be up against that particular tree. We were there before the ambulances and the police. The only explanation was that the car had actually gone off the side of the road to the left, overcorrected back across the road into the tree on the right-hand side, facing the direction in which they were driving. It is just incredible that this Labor government has so quickly and brazenly turned its back on country Victoria.

We are not talking about the reduction of a fund here; we are not talking about the country roads and bridges roads program having a 5 or 10 per cent cut. The Labor government has abandoned the whole project — \$160 million that was given directly to the councils. Mr Mulino in his presentation today effectively said that the money was not well targeted or well spent. Does the Labor Party think the country roads and bridges program just jumped up one morning and presented itself and someone said, 'That's not a bad idea; let's do it'? The country roads and bridges program took up a large part of our time in opposition. We were in opposition for 11 years. We had conversations with local councils in which we would talk to them about their asset management programs, and we came to understand that some of our smaller councils were having to put in place a 300-year rotational maintenance program because that was the only way they could ever get around to fixing their roads.

Under the previous Labor government things like swimming pools, town halls and recreation reserves were all added into the mix of what a local council had to be able to fund as part of its asset maintenance. But the most expensive asset of all is roads. The only way some councils can effectively keep their heads above water and stay viable is to turn some of these country roads back to gravel or else put in place these

ridiculously long rotational maintenance programs that see these roads become incredibly dangerous.

The country roads and bridges program was aimed at the smallest and poorest 40 councils around the state that did not have the capacity to fix their roads with their own rate base. The idea of a program that gave each of these councils \$1 million to work on their own roads was born out of many years of conversation. This program was born from consultation with the councils to try to work out how we could best help them help themselves.

When you think about it, giving councils \$1 million each for four years is not a lot of money, but it tallies up to a sizable amount. Has anybody from the Labor Party dared to go out into the regions and the country? Do not talk about Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong and think you have been out to regional Victoria. Labor members might have been to our regional cities, but they have not been to country Victoria. They have to get out to Towong. They will meet some interesting people out there who have been able to cut the costs of their operations through a whole range of innovative ideas. They are the ones who have led the way when it comes to cost cutting in a lot of their asset management programs.

It was us talking to these councils that resulted in them being given the opportunity to deliver for the people of Victoria who happen to live in some of our smaller regional shires. These councils would not have had a hope in hell of being able to provide the services ratepayers expect without the coalition's help over the previous four years. It is brazen of the lead speaker for the Labor Party, Mr Mulino, to come in here and say, 'We've put in place a policy's policy, a policy-based policy'. Mr Ramsay mentioned bureaucratic speak. I seriously thought I was watching *Utopia* when the Labor Party's lead speaker came in and said, 'We're putting in place a policy-based policy'.

I do not know what any other policy is. Is it something you dream up one night as you are sitting around having a couple bottles of red? Should we have a drinking red wine-based policy? Should we have a drinking beer-based policy? Is it a matter of how drunk you are when you derive this policy, or do we have a *Utopia*-style policy, where it is just bureaucratic speak and then you do not do anything?

We also heard about this \$1 billion regional roads program. It does not exist. I would love to see where it is, but it does not exist. It is just out there in the ether somewhere; it does not exist. We have a regional jobs program that does exist; it has just not started yet.

Eleven months into government we have a Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund that has not started; we have a regional roads program that does not exist; and we have a Stronger Country Bridges program, where 10 of the bridges are being fixed up in Mulgrave, within 4 kilometres of the seat of the Premier. Is it Kim Jong-un from North Korea?

**Mr Herbert** — Kim Jong-un II.

**Mr DRUM** — Kim Jong-un II. He is the supreme ruler who simply chooses where the money will be spent. All of a sudden Mulgrave and some of the busiest roads in the south-east of Melbourne are considered to be in country Victoria so that the Premier can fix up his city bridges using the Stronger Country Bridges program. It is a most amazing process under this Labor government. The Labor Party has form in walking away from country Victoria, but it normally takes it three, four or five years to actually do it — it does not do it overnight. Having won the election in November 2014, it was not expected to just walk away as soon as the budget came out in early 2015 in the way it has done.

There is also no Putting Locals First Fund, which was a \$100 million program for country councils. All of this is related because it affects the ability of councils to deliver for their people. The Local Government Infrastructure Fund is another \$100 million that has been taken away from these councils, again making it more difficult for them to deliver for their people. This situation is going to escalate because on top of all of these funding withdrawals we have rate capping at a council level. Ms Dunn from the Greens went straight to the core of the issue: how will these councils deliver for their people when they are constrained by the ripping of funding from all of these programs coupled with rate capping? It really is a ridiculous cocktail of disaster.

On top of all those things, if you look at VicRoads and the road asset management funding in the budget, you will see that there is a 9.8 per cent reduction from what was spent in 2014–15 to what is going to be spent in 2015–16. A 9.8 per cent reduction in that bucket of money is a loss of \$84 million — and that is just basic maintenance funding. It is an \$84 million cut from the system just to compound all the other cuts to country Victoria.

You might have thought you would never see it, but we often hear about lines on the rail freight network in regional Victoria that are in such a state of disrepair that trains have to travel as slowly as 30, 40 or 50 kilometres per hour. It is ridiculous, but you sort of

understand it because they are isolated lines, so rather than take the trains off them, we can just slow them down. The Labor Party in Victoria has started taking that approach to some of our country roads. Rather than fix a road, it is simply slowing vehicles down to 80 kilometres per hour. We have grade 1 national highways — roads which the state and federal governments have combined responsibility to maintain — that the state government is refusing to fix because it can just slow down the traffic.

This is happening in the east of our state, this is happening in the south-west of our state and this is happening in the north of our state where there are roads that would normally have a speed limit of 100 kilometres per hour — on both A-class roads and B-class roads, and I imagine there are also some smaller C-class roads on which this is happening, though I have not yet seen them firsthand. It is just the most ridiculous thing for a government to say, ‘Yes, we understand that the roads need to be fixed; we are just not going to fix them. We are not going to give you the maintenance funding to fix these roads, but we are going to instruct VicRoads to slow the traffic. On these potholed highways where the shoulder has ebbed its way into the mainstream of the road, we will simply slow the traffic down so that it is a little bit safer to drive on these roads that have fallen into a state of total disrepair’.

I urge the members of the government to set up a stand at field days in the Wimmera, the Mallee and Elmore and say, ‘If you have any inquiries about the condition of country roads, sit down and have a cup of tea with us’. They will have a queue of people running around the corner, out the gate and halfway to Elmore, because this is when you can really mix with the people who are taking produce from the farms to the markets.

This is where letting the roads fall into disrepair because of Labor’s inaction — or because of its action in cutting these programs — has a genuine impact on our primary producers. It costs them real money. If you talk to these farmers and to these industries, they will tell you about the maintenance bill for a truck increasing by 50, 60, 70 or even 100 per cent due to the state of the roads. They drive down the Sunraysia Highway, they drive down the Pacific Highway and they drive down Princes Highway west and Princes Highway east, and they will talk about the way their vehicles are shaken to within an inch of their life. The maintenance work that has to take place at the conclusion of those trips costs real money, let alone when they happen to hit a pothole at serious speed and blow a tyre, which will cost \$400 or \$500 there and then, if not more.

We are talking about a policy — as Mr Mulino, the lead speaker for the government, said, a policy-based policy — that is supposedly better targeted than the old country roads and bridges program. What that means in layman's speak is that the government is not putting any money in because it has no program. It has one program out in the ether. It has not worked out where it will get the money to fund it. It has announced it, and it will keep announcing it and keep talking about it as if it is real, but we all know it is not real. There is no \$1 billion country roads program, and there is no money for it, so let us just call a spade a spade and not build on things that simply do not exist.

As I said, this has all come on top of the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund program that, nearly 11 months into the government's time in office, has not started yet. We have just seen the unemployment figures, which show that Victoria is the only state to see increased unemployment. The Minister for Regional Development in this government has a \$500 million regional development program that, after nearly 11 months into government, she has not yet started. She is still trying to work out what she is going to do with it. It is all beautifully set up in different categories and streams, yet it is not going. No-one has found out where the key is, so we are just shining this car at the moment without having driven it. Not one job has been created through the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund that is now a few days away from being 11 months old.

This smacks of either a government that was not ready for government when it won the election or a government whose members really do not care about employment, regional job programs and regional programs generally. This smacks of a government that is trying to stall because its members do not know what to do.

We have a Premier in this state at the moment who takes every opportunity to tell the world he was born in Wangaratta, but he is the most city-centric Premier I can remember. One year Jeff Kennett handed down a budget and said it was a budget for the suburbs, but in that year he spent more time in regional Victoria than either Steve Bracks or John Brumby put together.

**Mr Herbert** interjected.

**Mr DRUM** — Members of the Labor Party continue to talk about how Jeff Kennett referred to regional Victoria as the toenails of the state, but we all know that behind the scenes nothing could be further from the truth. Jeff Kennett spent much time in the regions in order to understand regional Victoria.

Let us compare that with what we have at the moment. We have a Premier who is absolutely ripping money out of regional Victoria with an intensity that we have never experienced before. It is totally arrogant and unethical of the Premier to claim that his government has a Stronger Country Bridges program. If he wants to spend money in Mulgrave and thinks it a good idea to strengthen bridges in his electorate, then why would he not start up a south-eastern Melbourne bridges program? Then he could look the camera in the eye with some degree of integrity and honesty and say, 'This is a program for south-eastern Melbourne, and I'm very proud to deliver it', rather than think he can sneak in these bridges in the south east of the city and rip that money out of country Victoria.

The government's explanation is, 'This is all about allowing produce to get to market', but there are still B-doubles in regional Victoria that are having to take 40 and 50-kilometre detours to find a bridge strong enough to enable them to cross. The Premier can talk about strengthening bridges in Mulgrave all he likes, but for goodness sake, he should have the integrity and the honesty to create his own fund from which he can take money to fix those bridges. I am sure that there is a real need to fix bridges in the south east. All that opposition members are saying is that the Premier should not think he can deceitfully announce a project for regional Victoria or country Victoria and try to sell the message to Victorians that he cares about regional Victoria and about access to market for primary producers. He should not try to sell the message that he cares for the regions and cares for the country and then, at the 11th hour, sneak 10 south-eastern Melbourne bridge locations onto the map and hope that no-one ever finds out where the money is coming from. It is a ridiculous situation.

Members of this government think country Victoria is Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong and the Latrobe Valley and have no understanding of the rest of the state. Government members think they can cut \$84 million from a basic road maintenance asset renewal program, cut \$160 million from the country roads and bridges program, take money out of local government — \$100 million for the Local Government Infrastructure Fund and another \$100 million for the Putting Locals First program — and then cap rates on top of that, yet they do not think anything is wrong. This is one of the most staggering abuses of regional Victoria — country Victoria — that I have witnessed in my time in this place.

The coalition in opposition has four fantastic candidates standing at by-elections in the south west of the state — two for The Nationals and two for the Liberal Party —

and as they all try to make their way into this Parliament they find that their no. 1 issue is the state of country roads. Members of the Labor Party do not want to stand candidates at those by-elections. They do not think it is necessary to provide for the people of Bannockburn, Colac, Warrnambool and Portland because they know they are severely short-changing Victorians who live in that part of the state. Members of the government are turning their backs on country Victoria and regional Victoria, and it is time they took a good look at what is the no. 1 issue for the two by-elections that will be held in a week-and-a-half's time.

We have a situation where, if members of the Labor Party do not care, it is up to the people of Victoria to remind government members they would not be in office but for the grace of the people of country Victoria, so they had better start looking at their allocations in the government's \$52 billion budget and be a little more fair-minded and concerned about equal resourcing. At the moment budget allocations are being made with arrogance and through deceit and a system that I have never seen before. The Labor Party is in government, but its members are turning their backs on the regions.

This motion from Mr Morris goes straight to the point that the roads minister and the Premier need to be condemned for what they are doing. As I have said, it is a total scrapping of a vital program; you only have to ask the councils that were receiving this \$1 million a year about the work they will no longer be able to do. It is something that needs to be acknowledged. I just wish the government would see the light and understand the damage that it is perpetrating on these smaller regional councils. I congratulate Mr Morris on bringing this motion to the house.

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) — I would like to comment briefly on Mr Morris's motion. I have to say at the outset that I find it kind of rich that members of the opposition are condemning the Premier and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety when they had a Premier and a minister for transport who represented electorates in that area who, from what I am hearing, did very little down there in that time.

We have a great candidate running in the electorate of Polwarth for the Legislative Assembly, Dr Meredith Doig. She and I have been spending a bit of time down in Colac and Polwarth listening to the traders. They are shaking their heads and saying, 'It's the same old thing. It's the government promising this and the government promising that. We had a Premier and a minister for transport here, and nothing happened'. Dr Meredith

Doig's grandfather was a doctor down in Colac. She has been travelling down to Colac for some 40 years, and she comments that the roads have not changed since she was a young girl.

**Mr Finn** — Have you been down there?

**Ms PATTEN** — I have been down there. Dr Doig said she travelled down there every weekend as a young child to spend time with her grandmother. She had family homes in Lorne and Colac, and she spent time every week down there with her grandmother, cousins and uncle. She confirmed to me that the roads have not changed since she was down there as a young child 40 years ago.

**Mr Ramsay** — We've spent \$800 million on duplication. Ms Patten, you do not have a clue.

**Ms PATTEN** — I have been on the Timboon-Colac Road, Mr Ramsay — 40 kilometres on that road. I find it rich that the coalition is calling the government out on this issue when it did nothing in government in the last four years. I speak to the traders in Colac, and that is what they say to me — and I was there just last weekend.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Dunn)** — Order! Mr Ramsay and Mr Finn will let Ms Patten continue.

**Mr Finn** — But she is talking crap.

**Ms PATTEN** — You would know, Mr Finn.

**Mr Finn** interjected.

**Ms PATTEN** — You have had great practice at it. I agree that more does need to be done down there. I totally agree with that, and I am very supportive of more money being spent on these regional areas. I am also supportive of enabling people from these regional areas to get to the Epping market, the airport and the port of Melbourne. We need better roads, and not just in the regional areas. We need them in some of those metropolitan areas. Some of those roads will enable farmers and business operators from the west and south-west to get to the Epping market in my region or to the port of Melbourne or the airport. I think it is important, but I think it is very rich of Mr Morris to condemn the government for not investing in this area when the opposition itself is just as guilty of not investing in this area.

**Ms LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) — I rise to speak on the motion that has been moved by Josh Morris. I

congratulate Josh on bringing this very important motion to the chamber today, because country roads and bridges are important to those of us who live in country Victoria, and indeed they are important to the whole economy of our state.

Since the change of government one of the things that has been discussed with me by local government in particular has been the scrapping of the coalition's \$160 million country roads and bridges fund. This fund provided \$1 million per year to 40 of our smallest councils. Rural councils have relied on this money because they have such large road networks. They have hundreds of kilometres of roads, but they also have very small rate bases. Many of their roads are subject to heavy use by large trucks, particularly milk tankers, which use many of our country roads twice daily. The wear and tear on a lot of these local government network roads is intense, and local governments cannot keep up with the maintenance. The Labor Party, however, has cruelly withdrawn the \$1 million a year that was provided to local councils by the coalition government to assist with their road maintenance.

Local governments are telling me that the loss of that money combined with rate capping is going to make it very difficult for them to maintain their roads and the necessary investment in their road networks. This government takes from local councils \$160 million over four years, it imposes on them rate capping and then it still expects them to maintain road networks. It is not going to work. If the government is going to cap local council rates, it is going to have to contribute to assist councils to maintain their roads and bridges and also their sporting grounds and a whole range of other things that local governments are going to need assistance with.

In northern Victoria we are back in drought times. Local governments will be starting to think about what that drought means for our roads. We know that as the ground under the road base dries out it compromises the road base. If we then have a heavy rainfall event, it washes away much of the dirt underneath the road base and leads to the deterioration of the road.

In February the Labor government announced \$35.8 million in funding to strengthen 48 bridges in regional Victoria, or so the press release said. The government got quite good coverage for this right throughout regional Victoria. But there were two problems with it. The first problem was there was no money for local government for local roads and bridges — the money was allocated only for bridges that were already the responsibility of VicRoads. I can tell members that local governments were disappointed.

They had looked at this and thought that it may have at least helped to compensate for some of the loss of the country roads and bridges money they would have received from a coalition government, but they were very disappointed when they realised it was going only to bridges that are the responsibility of VicRoads.

Still regional and rural Victorians accepted the announcement as a positive, because any investment in any of our roads and bridges in country Victoria is a good thing. They accepted it as a good announcement until the list of bridges and crossings to be upgraded under the program was obtained. That is when the second problem was exposed. That list revealed that country Victorians have been hoodwinked by Daniel Andrews. The government has fleeced this fund of significant money to upgrade 10 bridges that are within 4 kilometres of the Premier's metropolitan electorate. What a sham — they are within 4 kilometres of the Premier's electorate. Premier Andrews's electorate is within 20 kilometres of the Melbourne GPO, so those 10 bridges that will be upgraded out of the Stronger Country Bridges program are not in regional Victoria — they are not even close to being in regional Victoria. However, the Andrews Labor government has chosen to upgrade 10 bridges in the Premier's electorate rather than 10 bridges in regional Victoria.

Country roads are vital to this state. They are freight corridors. They transport our food and fibre from the farms to the food processors, the markets and the port of Melbourne. Country roads are also vital for those of us who reside in country Victoria. We have very limited public transport so we rely on our cars and on our road networks for getting around. We have all heard the Transport Accident Commission slogan 'Country people die on country roads'. It is vital that there is adequate investment in our road network so those roads can be made as safe as possible to prevent accidents and deaths on the roads.

Country Victorians do not expect to have internal freeways in our towns like the Tullamarine Freeway et cetera here in Melbourne. However, those of us who live in country Victoria have the right to expect well-maintained and safe roads, and in order for that to happen there needs to be state government investment in country roads.

The state of many country roads also adds to the perception of disadvantage in many Victorian country towns. Poorly maintained roads make an area look down and out, and visitors to the area think of it as being perhaps not a place where they would want to live. If the government is going to have more focus on moving people out of the cities and into country

Victoria, there will need to be better maintained roads in order not only to aesthetically please people but also to allow for the safe passage of those people if they are to come to country Victoria.

It is also vital that we are able to get large transport vehicles out of regional towns and cities. People in my home town of Shepparton in particular have been lobbying for many years — in fact since before I was elected to this place in 2002 — for a bypass to be funded. They got absolutely no joy out of the previous Labor government. They moved a step closer to having the bypass funded under the Liberal government when during the election it promised funding for planning of the first stage of the bypass. However, the Liberals did not win that election, Labor won the election, and we now have a Labor government that has failed to make any commitments to the city of Shepparton. Under this government the bypass looks like it will sit on the backburner for many years to come.

Labor's country bridges program is a joke. Labor should announce that it will immediately make a real investment in country roads and bridges. As a local representative representing Northern Victoria Region I will continue to advocate for strong investment in roads in northern Victoria, and I will continue to advocate for investment in the Shepparton bypass, which is desperately needed. The bypass would come quite close to my home. I do not complain about that, as we have heard many people in metropolitan Melbourne do when roads come close to their homes, because I understand that it is a vital piece of infrastructure for our city. It is vital for the safety of people within our CBD, and it is vital for the safety of people travelling from the south of Shepparton to the north of Shepparton. We want to see the investment in that road to make our city a safer place and to make our roads safer places.

We need to see investment in country roads and bridges to make the whole of country Victoria safer. Recently I was travelling between Ararat and Warrnambool. I was absolutely staggered to come across a section of the Ararat–Lake Bolac road at about the Willaura turn-off that was so badly potholed that it had been reduced to a 40-kilometres-an-hour zone. There is a bridge in that section, the Ross bridge I think it is called. It is permanently 40 kilometres an hour because the road surface on the bridge is just so bad. I know there are many similar areas in my electorate as well. As I said, I will continue to advocate for my electorate, but I will also continue to advocate for all country Victorians to have a safe road network.

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) — It is with pleasure that I rise today to speak in support of Mr Morris's

motion condemning the Andrews Labor government for neglecting Victoria's regional road network and scrapping the coalition's successful \$160 million country roads and bridges program. Councils within my electorate are devastated by the decision to cut the \$160 million country roads and bridges program, which provides councils with \$1 million each year to fund road and bridge infrastructure and maintenance projects. That is \$1 million for each rural council across Victoria. During my travels throughout Eastern Victoria Region meeting with the mayors and local stakeholders, one opinion resonated: the country roads and bridges program was invaluable for the councils and people of regional Victoria.

Regional roads are vital for industry, families and this state's prosperity. Maintaining local roads is one of the largest costs faced by local government. Councils in my electorate have voiced their frustration to me over Labor's decision to cut this important and successful funding program. The program funded much-needed support for basic road maintenance, including pothole repairs, resealing, bridge maintenance and replacements, as well as other important repairs. With thousands of kilometres of roads and few ratepayers in some shires, these basic maintenance duties impose a great burden on local councils. The South Gippsland shire alone has over 2000 kilometres of roads.

Eastern Victoria's roads are a lifeline for the tourism industry in our area. We have beautiful national parks at Wilsons Promontory, Cape Conran and Mallacoota, and they need a good road network so that tourists can access these beautiful areas. The dairy, mining and timber industries also require adequate transport to move their freight around. Whilst in government the Liberal-Nationals coalition ensured that money was provided to assist councils with this burden and to make Gippsland roads safer. Funding provided by the country roads and bridges program included, but was not limited to, the following projects: the rehabilitation of Station Street in Korumburra; the shoulder improvements on the Rosedale-Flynns Creek Road and the Boisdale-Newry Road; the Yarram-Morwell Road reconstruction, which I saw a few days ago; the Brewery Road floodway reconstruction in Alberton; and the Lyons Bridge replacement at Woodside.

I could go on all day listing the great projects that councils have been able to fund through this program. By improving roads across Gippsland we are improving lives and saving lives. Works on the Goads Road bridge replacement, which replaced a composite bridge with a new concrete bridge, allowed for safer travel for heavy load trucks and new avenues of transport for goods of

larger size, which meant that transporting our valuable resources was not a problem.

In Eastern Victoria Region we are lucky enough to have a good transport spine that runs from east to west. However, capacity on this spine is already stretched. There is overcrowding on trains in Gippsland, and, as always with public transport, there are unforeseeable delays, resulting in reliability issues, which makes roads more and more important.

We heard today that Labor this year released its Stronger Country Bridges program. I think this is a misnomer. We also heard during question time that as part of its bridge construction program the Labor government is supporting rail corridors. Rail corridors are important, but we should call them metropolitan road improvements rather than bridge improvements. They should not be included in the Stronger Country Bridges program.

The Premier announced the Stronger Country Bridges program in Traralgon, but only 1 out of the 48 bridges funded in Victoria is in Gippsland. Gippsland takes up approximately 18 per cent of the area of Victoria. Doing the maths on that, it would be fair to say that Gippsland should have approximately nine bridges upgraded, but it has only one bridge being updated, which is near Tyers. We are grateful for that, but we need to see more. Across Gippsland there are about 700 heavy vehicle bridges, so 1 out of 700 is certainly not a good percentage.

The issue of the condition of roads is not unique to Eastern Victoria Region or Gippsland — it spreads throughout our regions. The country roads and bridges program allowed regional councils to fix their road problems. The Nationals candidate for Polwarth, Mr David O'Brien, has been a strong advocate for improving the quality of road infrastructure in that region, including in and around Colac, Camperdown, Mortlake, Skipton and Simpson. Roads are vital for three important industries in western Victoria: dairying, timber and wind energy. David also points out that not only was the country roads and bridges program strongly supported by rural shires, it was also welcomed by the Municipal Association of Victoria, the RACV and the Victorian Farmers Federation, and it ought to be reinstated.

Liberal candidates Richard Riordan and Roma Britnell are strong advocates for the country roads and bridges program, as is The Nationals candidate for the Assembly seat of South-West Coast, Michael Neoh, who has urged the Andrew's government to provide

funding for the horrendous Myamyn-Macarthur Road and the Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road.

Quality road infrastructure leads to reduced transport costs, which is a direct way of improving the domestic and international competitiveness of both Gippsland and western Victorian industries, as well as underpinning job security and new investments.

David O'Brien identifies that a substantial proportion of the roads in western Victoria have deteriorated to a hazardous state due to a lack of maintenance spending and recent flood events. The high volume of heavy trucks travelling on these roads has also caused damage in particular to Foxhow Road north of Camperdown and Ayres Road. Mr O'Brien is passionate about fixing this road problem.

In Eastern Victoria Region the federal government is responsible for maintenance of the Princes Highway. The previous coalition government funded 20 per cent of the Princes Highway infrastructure upgrade between Traralgon and Sale in the state budget, and the federal government designated 80 per cent from its budget for this dual-lane upgrade. That is being undertaken at the moment; however, as I travel from Sale to the border I have seen a number of highway sections with signs designating a reduction to 80 kilometres per hour. The state government is responsible for those roads from Sale to the border, and it is an atrocious mistake and a lack of consideration that, rather than fix the roads, the government is putting up signs that tell drivers to just slow down. The Princes Highway is the main thoroughfare and drivers are being told to just slow down. I have seen those signs in and around Orbost and Cann River.

As I have said, this is a thoroughfare for our tourism industry, and slowing motorists down on this major arterial road is just a tragedy. Without this program the burden that is now placed upon our local councils is worrying. I do not want to see road accidents occur because of potholes, dangerous shoulders and other issues where the road has just deteriorated. I would like to see the towns within my electorate prosper, but in order to achieve this they need decent infrastructure, including roads. With better roads come more job opportunities and increased business opportunities due to easier access to markets. Unfortunately, with the current city-centric policy set forth for our roads, it is the regions that are again being forgotten. We are left to scramble and scrap for crumbs under the Labor government's table. I endorse Mr Morris's motion, note that we are hurting in the country, and the lack of road infrastructure presents considerable risks to our health and wellbeing.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise today to speak on Mr Morris's very important motion, which talks about roads and bridges in regional Victoria. I start by saying that the focus on our regions by this government has been sadly lacking. In fact around the regions I have travelled people call the Daniel Andrews Labor government the government of Melbourne and not the government of rural and regional Victoria. I have travelled far and wide across this state to places like Ballarat, Colac, Warrnambool and the Assembly seats of South-West Coast and Polwarth. Everywhere that I have travelled, people say, 'Does Daniel Andrews even know that we exist?'

**Mr Dalidakis** interjected.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — The minister for neglect of small business asks this house, by way of interjection, who I am, but the real question to the minister is: who are you? The minister who lacks facts, lacks details and shows a lack of care for the struggles that small businesses and their families face interjects by asking, 'Who are you?'. I tell you what, the way to make a small business in Victoria is to give Philip Dalidakis a big one. That is how you do it in Victoria.

As we run toward question time, I say that Mr Morris is right in acknowledging that this house condemns the Andrews Labor government and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety for neglecting Victoria's regional road network. I know that Mr Morris, Mr Ramsay and many of our other regional members and city-based members who have travelled these roads far and wide have seen continual neglect by this government. This is a government that scrapped the \$160 million country roads and bridges program that serviced and supported regional Victoria. The neglect of regional Victoria by Daniel Andrews is abhorrent.

The motion also notes that two of Victoria's most important and dangerous regional roads, both in south-west Victoria, have not had adequate support from this government. Despite continual asking for assistance by Mr Morris, Mr Ramsay and others, the government continues to ignore those two key Victorian roads, and why? It is because Daniel Andrews has demonstrated since day one that he does not care about regional Victoria and does not have regard for the regions, because the coalition government — —

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! Thank you, Mr Ondarchie.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

## QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

### Disability services

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Families and Children, Ms Mikakos, who is the representative in this house of the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing. I note that the Department of Health and Human Services annual report tabled in Parliament last sitting week did not report on the financial return to the state government from the Kew Cottages development project, despite the Ombudsman's recommendation in 2010 that the department should do so. Families of residents of the original Kew Cottages were promised that returns from the sale of land for redevelopment would be reinvested into services for people with disabilities, including medical and recreational facilities. Yet this is yet to materialise.

Therefore can the minister inform the house what has been the net financial return to the state government to date from the sale of public land surrounding Kew Cottages and what percentage of the financial return has been made available to services for people with intellectual disabilities?

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her question. It should come as no surprise to the member that the significant reason there is no final sales figure available as yet for the Kew Cottages is the long and drawn-out mess left to us by the infamous former planning minister and now Leader of the Opposition in the other place, Matthew Guy. So it falls again to the government to — —

**Mr Davis** — On a point of order, President, just as a matter of fact, I think there is a risk that the member may be misleading the house.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! A point of order is not an opportunity to raise a matter of fact, as Mr Davis well knows. If he persists in putting a matter of fact, then I will insist on him going out for a cup of tea. If he has a point of order, that is fine. The minister has just commenced the answer. Whilst the member might not like the answer, there are other forums of the house for him to debate those matters. Points of order are not an opportunity to try to dispute the information that has been put before the house.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — The point that I was making is that we have been left a mess by the previous government, and the previous planning minister in particular. It has fallen to the Andrews Labor

government to fix this mess and ensure that people with disabilities benefit from the closure of this institution, as was intended.

On 7 September 2015 the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal approved a permit to construct a 26-apartment multilevel residential building with basement car parking. At this hearing, as part of a separate application, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal also approved a second application, which was an amendment to the development plan which included a reduction in the public open space from 30 per cent to 29 per cent. A final sales figure for the project is yet to be calculated for this reason. However, the government will seek to ensure that the normal processes of government address the need to fix the mess that Matthew Guy left us.

As Victoria begins to roll out the national disability insurance scheme with the expansion of disability services — a more than doubling of government investment — the impact of any sale of the former institution could well contribute to the support of more community-based facilities, and it is the government's every intention for that to occur.

*Supplementary question*

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for her answer, which was a little bit hard to hear. Families and members of the Kew Cottages Coalition have, as the minister knows, been long anticipating a restoration of the medical and recreational facilities for people with disabilities. I appreciate that there is a history and there are Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal decisions being made, but I ask: what commitment can the government give in regard to ensuring that funding that is supposed to be made available to disability services through the Kew Cottages redevelopment will not be spent elsewhere?

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Minister for Families and Children) — I thank the member for her supplementary question. I know she was struggling to hear the answer with all the interjections going on. As I indicated to the house, we have significant changes underway with the rollout of the national disability insurance scheme, and a significant expansion of disability services will be occurring as part of that — a more than doubling of government investment — so the impact of any sale of Kew Cottages could well contribute to the support of more community-based facilities. As I said to the member, it is the government's every intention that that will in fact occur.

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

**Taxi and hire car industry**

**Mr PURCELL** (Western Victoria) — My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Public Transport. UberX is a taxi service. UberX is operating without a taxi licence and is therefore operating illegally. There have been numerous reviews and reports prepared on how to improve the taxi industry, and I was unable to find any report that suggested the best way was to remove all regulations and allow a business like UberX to take over. The taxi industry is well regulated for good reason, owners and drivers are screened for good reason and cameras are in taxis for good reason. My question is: will the minister put a stop to UberX before someone gets seriously hurt or killed?

**Mr JENNINGS** (Special Minister of State) — I thank Mr Purcell for his question. This is a very important public policy consideration, not only in Victoria but across the nation and indeed across the world, in relation to what should be the appropriate form of regulation within the taxi industry and for passenger services more generally.

The member would obviously be aware, because of his concerns, that there are currently proceedings in Victorian courts and national courts in relation to the circumstances by which UberX may have operated in this jurisdiction. The courts will make some determinations in the near future which will provide us with some guidance about the way we should provide for the appropriate degree of regulation and the consistency of quality assurance that applies across the taxi industry and passenger services in a broader context.

He is absolutely on the money that this is an important area of public policy. It is being tested in the courts. It is also being assessed through a ministerial forum in Victoria. My colleague the Minister for Public Transport is convening a ministerial forum to bring together representatives of the taxi industry and other relevant stakeholders and give them an opportunity to discuss the appropriate regulatory regime to create a level playing field between the taxi industry and any other passenger service, to ensure that we provide for safety and quality assurance, and to ensure in terms of the cost structures and the onerous nature of providing the services that equity is brought into the regulatory environment.

That work is currently being undertaken by my ministerial colleague. She will be mindful of the outcome of the court cases. She will be respectful of where the ministerial forum leads in its conclusion. I

am certain that within the months ahead she will provide advice to the government, and indeed we will provide advice to the Parliament, about the way we seek to respond to these issues.

*Supplementary question*

**Mr PURCELL** (Western Victoria) — I thank the minister for his response. I understand he suggested there will be some in the upcoming months. Six weeks ago the Premier said that this service, the UberX service, was not okay. He told the ABC:

Clearly, we can't have a situation where people are purchasing a service where there's not proper regulation, insurance, accreditation, simple things like complaints processes, lost property, security.

Considering the Premier's statement, my question is: how soon can we expect some protection for the taxi industry and the drivers and passengers using UberX?

**Mr JENNINGS** (Special Minister of State) — Mr Purcell is quite right that the Victorian government has provided some clarity that UberX is in fact illegal, but we have to understand that Uber Black provides a licensed and regulated service, so even within the auspices of what Uber does there are different aspects of the service it provides, so we have to acknowledge that. That is one issue.

In my substantive answer I said that our approach, in terms of the legislative or regulatory environment, will need to be mindful of the court proceedings that are on foot. The quality, the depth and the timing of our work will ultimately reflect upon the sequence from that determination in the courts. As soon as possible thereafter a regulatory environment will be recommended by my colleague.

**National assessment program — literacy and numeracy**

**Ms PENNICUIK** (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Training and Skills in his capacity as representing the Minister for Education. It relates to the management, delivery and implementation of the national assessment program — literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN) in Victoria. Contract CR32837 on the Department of Treasury and Finance website lists NCS Pearson as supplier of a range of services to the department with regard to NAPLAN, including data capture and marking. Pearson also sells teaching resources related to NAPLAN. Can the minister advise whether NCS Pearson is the sole supplier in Victoria of the 11 NAPLAN services listed

on the Department of Treasury and Finance website under its contract?

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — I cannot, but I shall look into NCS Pearson. What I can say is that in terms of NAPLAN there is an agreement between the commonwealth and every state for financial contributions to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to basically design and administer the annual NAPLAN tests. That has been going on for some time. The latest agreement and memorandum of understanding was in 2013.

In each state there is a test administration authority, I think it is called. In Victoria it is the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). Other states have different arrangements. In New South Wales it was the department, but I understand it is now the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW. They are basically contracted to run the NAPLAN — to design it, to administer it — and from 2017 to administer an online NAPLAN test rather than a paper one. I can advise that. I cannot advise details of NCS Pearson and whether there is a relationship there with ACARA, but I will get back to the member on that one.

*Supplementary question*

**Ms PENNICUIK** (Southern Metropolitan) — On the DTF website it says NCS Pearson is contracted to the department of education with a \$7 million-plus contract. Under the contract NCS Pearson supplies services including web-based test administration, production of guides, data capture, online marking and editing of test books, marking of objective test items and distribution of reporting packages to schools. Clearly it has access to a great deal of information. Pearson's website lists a range of commercial products as 'Effective teaching resources' under the heading 'NAPLAN preparation'. Can the minister advise whether any of these commercial products have been purchased by Victorian public schools?

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — I shall take that on. As I say, I am familiar with the contractual arrangements through ACARA and I know that the VCAA has some other work contracted out with ACARA — for instance, the national curriculum work; I think the language component is still an active part of that contractual arrangement — and it does things such as contract it to look at work sampling and that sort of thing. But with regard to NCS Pearson, I shall get back to the member on that one.

**Public holidays**

**Ms WOOLDRIDGE** (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. The minister's regulatory impact statement committed to evaluating the impact of new public holidays. Can the minister outline who will undertake the evaluation and what form it will take?

**Mr DALIDAKIS** (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I thank the member for her question. The regulatory impact statement will no doubt be followed. It is important to note that a former leader of the Liberal Party in the other place, Robert Doyle, said that he thought that the crowd at the grand final parade was the biggest ever, with over 150 000 people attending. When we look at evaluations, there is no more authoritative person than a former leader of the state Liberal Party, who said that it was the biggest crowd ever. One of the best things about the grand final public holiday was that this government kept its election promise. That is what we will do: each and every time we stand up, we commit to implementing our election promises.

In relation to Grand Final Friday, it was not just a former leader of the state Liberal Party, Robert Doyle, who thought it was the best grand final parade ever, with 150 000 people attending — —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! The question was quite specific and did not ask for cheerleaders on what happened. It asked what the formal evaluation process is. Whilst I accept the minister has been providing some context, I think it would be appropriate for him to move to the specific question.

**Mr DALIDAKIS** — As I said in the lead-up to Grand Final Friday, which had the best-attended parade ever, I had personally already assured a range of chambers of commerce around Victoria — particularly ones I had met in Geelong and Ballarat — the Ai Group and the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry that I would personally conduct consultations either myself or via my office with them.

In terms of an evaluation process, the Premier has also said on the public record that we will undertake an evaluation process about it. In relation to the time frames, this government will not be bound by what the Liberal Party wants to do or play politics with. We will undertake a review in the fullness of time and we will ensure that that process includes an opportunity for all of our stakeholders to participate.

*Supplementary question*

**Ms WOOLDRIDGE** (Eastern Metropolitan) — President, in your consideration of answers, in relation to my clear question about who will undertake the evaluation and what form it will take, which was not in the slightest way actually responded to by the minister, it may be that the minister will be requested to provide that in writing. Given some general statements in relation to the evaluation, I do seek further information about the evaluation from the minister, and I would appreciate his input on when that evaluation might be concluded, whether public submissions will be allowed and will those findings be publicly released.

**Mr Dalidakis** — On a point of order, President, can I ask that you assess whether that was one question or multiple questions?

**Ms Wooldridge** — On the point of order, President, you have previously ruled that it is possible to ask a general question and outline some detailed specific questions that are sub-questions to an overarching question. My supplementary question was very much couched in that mechanism, which is asking for further details in relation to the evaluation, on which there were three points I requested. I ask you to rule that that is consistent with your previous rulings and is a relevant supplementary question.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! It is my understanding that multipart questions are actually restricted to secondary schools and universities. We do not do multipart questions here. You only get one opportunity to pose a question. In the context of the supplementary and the substantive questions that have been posted for Mr Dalidakis's point of order, certainly the time frame of the review was sought in the substantive question. Ms Wooldridge, not being satisfied with that answer, was asking, 'Can you give me a bit more on that?'. I would ask the minister on this occasion, in terms of a response to the house now, to focus more on the public submissions and a time frame in which those public submissions in fact might be called.

**Mr DALIDAKIS** (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I thank the member for her question. As I said in the substantive answer, I personally and my office will be undertaking the review for and on behalf of the government, which deals very directly with the question that was put to me, which was: who will be undertaking the review? I very specifically answered that question. In relation to the question on the time frame, I said that I would be undertaking the review in a timely manner, not necessarily in keeping with the time frame of the

request or the choosing of those opposite, who happen to be in opposition and actually not running the government agenda. Specifically, President, I can assure you and I can assure the Parliament that that review will be completed well before the beginning of that public holiday next year.

**Ordered that answers be considered next day on motion of Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan).**

### Grand Final Friday

**Mr ONDARCHIE** (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. A number of Victorian employees — small, medium and large — as well as government departments failed to recognise the 2015 grand final parade as a public holiday, instead giving employees an informal day in lieu. According to the minister's latest advice, can he advise how many Victorian businesses and local, state and federal government departments based in Victoria took this approach?

**Mr DALIDAKIS** (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I thank the member for his question. In the many questions I was asked in the lead-up to the Grand Final Friday holiday — which contributed to the most successful grand final parade ever, with 150 000 people in attendance — I made it very clear that this government did not place any trading restrictions on businesses whether they chose to trade or not. In relation to provisions that an employer has arranged with their employees, that is a matter for them and not an issue of which I have any direct responsibility over whatsoever.

#### *Supplementary question*

**Mr ONDARCHIE** (Northern Metropolitan) — I will ask a supplementary question, but I have not had an answer to my substantive question yet. Lack of consultation, lack of notice and protest of the public holiday were some of the reasons given for offering the informal day in lieu. Does the minister guarantee that the evaluation of the grand final parade public holiday that is due to take place, in his words, 'in the fullness of time', in his office by himself, for the only answer that he wants, will evaluate these issues?

**Mr Dalidakis** — On a point of order, President, I would argue very strongly that that supplementary question bore no relation to the substantive question whatsoever.

**Mr Ondarchie** — On the point of order, President, my question was actually a supplementary question; it was not a point of order. The minister said he was responding to my point of order. It was actually a supplementary question.

**Mrs Peulich** — On the point of order, President, the point of order raised by the minister should be dismissed. The substantive question asked by Mr Ondarchie was in relation to the implementation of the government's policy and the granting of days in lieu, obviously at odds with the policy itself. His supplementary question was about the evaluation. I would have thought the two were directly linked and therefore the minister's point of order should be dismissed.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! On the point of order, Mr Ondarchie has given me the courtesy of looking at both the substantive and supplementary questions, and I am of the view that the supplementary question is directly related to the substantive question.

**Mr DALIDAKIS** (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — President, can I then ask the member to re-ask that question for me?

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! I assume that the judgement that it was a point of order rather than an answer to the question was based on the fact that the minister did not hear the question. Mr Ondarchie will ask the supplementary question again.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** (Northern Metropolitan) — It clearly is *Back to the Future Day*, is it not? Lack of consultation, lack of notice and protest about the public holiday were some of the reasons given for offering the informal day in lieu. Does the minister guarantee that the evaluation he said will be done in the fullness of time by his office, in his office and responded to by his office on the grand final parade public holiday will evaluate these issues?

**Mr DALIDAKIS** (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I always welcome questions from the honourable member in relation to Grand Final Friday, the most successful public holiday ever in the state's history, because the one thing I can guarantee is that come 2018 those opposite are going to rip this public holiday away from all Victorians across the state. The people — —

**Mr Ondarchie** — On a point of order, President, you have counselled the minister on the fact that this question is clearly related to my substantive question — it is a very narrow question that simply asks whether he will take these matters into account when he does his

so-called evaluation. It is a simple question, and I ask you to bring him back to it.

**Mrs Peulich** — On the point of order, President, clearly the minister has been debating the question, which is not answering the supplementary question as asked.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! Mrs Peulich's point of order was a lot more focused than Mr Ondarchie's because indeed the issue was debating. I just make this comment: I can understand in a response to a substantive question that a minister might well wish to provide some context to an answer, but when it comes to a supplementary question, where there is only 1 minute for the response, then it is incumbent upon a minister to really get to the point and to answer the question rather than to tap-dance and try to provide debate on that matter.

Mr Ondarchie's supplementary question goes to the issues he raised in the substantive question. It simply said, 'Will they be considered as part of the review?'. I would have thought that was fairly easy to respond to, and I do not think it invites debate on how wonderful this event was and whether there might be a change of policy with a change of government. The question is relevant to the substantive question, and it deserves an answer, as I said, particularly in the context where we have supplementary questions with a very short time frame for responses. Ministers ought to respect that in getting to the point.

**Mr DALIDAKIS** — President, I thank you for your ruling. In relation to the question at hand — very carefully — we on this side of the chamber will not tell businesses or people who participate in any feedback we seek what they should or should not say, just as we did not tell them whether they should or should not open. We will allow people to provide us feedback on whatever issue they believe pertains to the issue of the public holidays in question, and I shall not stand up here and tell businesses what they can and cannot provide me as feedback.

### Youth employment

**Mr MORRIS** (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Youth Affairs. How many fewer young Victorians are in full-time employment since December 2014, when Ms Mikakos became the Minister for Youth Affairs and Daniel Andrews became the Premier?

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Minister for Youth Affairs) — I thank the member for the question because it gives me

an opportunity to outline to the house exactly how the Andrews Labor government is working to address the issue of unemployment and youth unemployment in particular. I remind the member, who was not a member at the time, that the previous government oversaw an administration that slashed TAFE funding, which the Minister for Training and Skills, Mr Herbert, is addressing at the moment. It slashed education funding, which the Deputy Premier is addressing at the moment.

**Mrs Peulich** — On a point of order, President, the minister is actually engaging in debate, and I suggest that you bring her back into line.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! Notwithstanding my remarks about the 1-minute time frame that applies to supplementary questions, I actually did say in that that I can understand a minister providing context in the longer form of the answer to a substantive question. In that sense the minister is entitled to provide that context now and is doing so. I would urge her not to overstep the mark in terms of going into a great debate about history, but context I accept.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you, President, and I always appreciate your guidance. It is important to give members context because we have come into office needing to fix up the messes of the previous government in so many areas. We have inherited an environment where the previous government, despite putting out a very glossy youth policy document that referenced issues around education and training, and employment, was simultaneously embarking upon a massive wrecking exercise, destroying TAFE in our state and destroying education in our state. This drove up youth unemployment quite considerably.

**Mrs Peulich** — On a point of order, President, I think your ruling is being flouted. The minister is engaging in fairly robust debate, not just providing context. I ask that you bring her back to order.

**Ms Shing** — On the point of order, President, if I heard correctly, Mr Morris's question was 'how many fewer', and by using the word 'fewer' he is inviting a comparison, which is precisely what the minister is providing.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! There is some relevance to what Ms Shing indicated in that comment, but it begs the question that Mr Morris has put, which is: what are the numbers? That has not been addressed as part of the answer to this point.

In terms of Mrs Peulich's point of order, I must say that I am becoming less comfortable with the minister's

answer as she returns to some of the narrative we started out with a minute or so before. I would be more comfortable if the minister moved to the actual question rather than again traipsing back over history.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you, President, for your guidance. I have 4 minutes available to me to provide an answer to the house, and I am very keen to utilise the time that I have available to me to give Mr Morris a bit of a history lesson in terms of what occurred under the coalition government, because obviously that has a significant bearing on the economic circumstances as well as the employment circumstances we inherited.

I advise the member that the average youth unemployment rate in the 12 months to September 2015 was 14.9 per cent, but I remind the member opposite that when the coalition came to office in December 2010 youth employment was at 12.5 per cent and that when the coalition left office it was at 18 per cent. When the coalition left office in December 2014 the youth unemployment rate had increased significantly to 18 per cent. These are the circumstances in which we have inherited a situation where the previous government was embarking upon a range of policies that were driving up youth unemployment in our state.

What we have been doing in response is that we have introduced the \$100 million *Back to Work* plan, which includes the Regional Jobs Fund and the Back to Work scheme, and that plan provides payments to employers, including for the hiring of unemployed youth. We have created the \$508 million Premier's Jobs and Investment Fund, which will draw upon the expertise of economic and industry leaders. We have created the \$50 million TAFE Back to Work plan. The Minister for Training and Skills, Mr Herbert, has been responsible for a significant rescue of our TAFE system, with a massive investment of \$320 million for the TAFE Rescue Fund, \$32 million for local learning and employment networks and \$12 million for the establishment of technical schools. We as a government have a range of measures in the budget to address the mess that was left to us by the coalition government.

*Supplementary question*

**Mr MORRIS** (Western Victoria) — I thank the minister for that response, but unfortunately we did not receive the number we were looking for. Can the minister detail to the house her target as Minister for Youth Affairs for how many of the new 100 000 full-time jobs Daniel Andrews promised by December 2016 are for young Victorians?

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Minister for Youth Affairs) — I point out to the member, who clearly does not understand issues around ministerial responsibilities, that I am not the Minister for Employment. I am the Minister for Youth Affairs, and as the Minister for Youth Affairs — —

**Ms Wooldridge** — On a point of order, President, I put to you that we have a consistent response from ministers present saying they are not responsible for things and trying to avoid answering questions. The Office for Youth clearly outlines that the Minister for Youth Affairs and the Office for Youth are responsible for the economic participation of young people, and the minister in her main answer outlined a list of programs that both her department and the government are implementing, so I ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question, for which she clearly has responsibility.

**Mr Dalidakis** — On the point of order, President, very clearly the supplementary question dealt with the *Back to Work* plan of 100 000 jobs, which is absolutely not in the purview of the minister in question. We on this side cannot help if the questions are not directed to the appropriate minister or representing minister.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! I take this opportunity to mention that members should refer to other members appropriately in this place. I noticed in the previous debate I was listening to that there were some references to what a good job Joshua had done, and that was not an appropriate reference, notwithstanding that people might know him very well. The reality is that in terms of references in this place he should have been called Mr Morris.

In terms of the interjection made by Mr Ondarchie, I am also not comfortable with the suggestion that the minister, being referred to by her first name, ought to be doing anything at all. We refer to ministers by their surname or their title.

**Mrs Peulich** — On the point of order, President, standing order 8.01(1)(a) addresses the issue of whether or not a matter is to be responded to by a minister, by simply saying:

- (1) Questions may be put to —
  - (a) ministers of the Crown relating to public affairs for which the minister is directly connected, or has responsibility when representing a minister from the Assembly, or to any matter of administration for which the minister is responsible ...

It is not just direct responsibility; it is also a connection. Therefore the point of order raised by Ms Wooldridge should be upheld.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! Mrs Peulich is battling well today. I accept the point she made in her point of order. It does get to the nub of the issue, and I concur. I indicate that the minister has not yet finished her answer, so it is quite possible that she will move to respond directly to that question anyway, notwithstanding that she has made the point that she is not directly responsible for the overarching program that is designed to deliver 100 000 jobs.

I would have an expectation that the minister in her portfolio would have some hope or expectation of what that program might mean for youth unemployment. As Ms Wooldridge said in her point of order, the minister in her substantive answer enunciated quite a number of programs that were designed for youth unemployment. The minister has gone into that territory, and therefore the question is appropriate and the minister ought to be in a position to respond to it, in the context of the standing order raised by Mrs Peulich, which I agree with.

But the minister has not yet finished her answer and does have that opportunity. I accept that her indication to the house that she is not responsible for the overall program is a fair response in that sense. In asking this minister the question we are really going to her expectation of how many jobs for the youth sector might be achieved under that program, and she may well have formed a view on that in terms of her ministerial responsibility for youth.

**Ms MIKAKOS** — Thank you, President, for your guidance to the house on these matters. Just so we are clear on this, obviously I as Minister for Youth Affairs work with all my relevant colleagues around issues that relate to young people, and youth unemployment is but one of those issues. Across government we have a range of programs, which I have outlined to the house already, designed to address the issue of youth unemployment. They are not programs that sit under my direct portfolio responsibility, but they sit with other appropriate and relevant ministers. We have a clear target, as a government, which we took the election and which is well understood, of 100 000 jobs over the two years.

### **Water board appointment**

**Mrs PEULICH** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is directed to the Minister for Training and Skills. I ask: did the minister remove himself from

cabinet when the submission appointing his wife, Liza McDonald, to one of Victoria's water boards was considered?

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — I thank the member for her question. Ms McDonald is indeed my wife, and she is a very capable person with huge qualifications. There was an independent evaluation in regard to cabinet. I can advise that, in regard to all cabinet processes, I complied with them 100 per cent.

### *Supplementary question*

**Mrs PEULICH** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — The minister has not answered yes or no. The question goes not to the merit of the appointment, which I am not questioning. It is simply his obligation as a minister to declare a conflict of interest and to step out of the room, as has been the practice — I know that as a Cabinet Secretary in the past. Given his answer, I assume that the minister did not step out of the cabinet office. Given that more than 20 Labor Party figures and members were appointed to water boards, is the minister aware of any state government minister actually stepping out of the room when these board submissions were considered?

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! This does canvass much broader territory in terms of the supplementary question that has been put. The concern that I have in terms of assessing this matter is that the minister said that he had complied with the appropriate practices or protocols of cabinet. The supplementary question, to me, does not go specifically to the individuals in that broad canvass. The question essentially, distilled, is whether or not the practice or protocol of cabinet is for members to exempt themselves from matters where they have some potential conflict — it might not be a real conflict; it is a matter of being seen to be above and beyond. I accept the supplementary question in that context rather than exploring affiliations directly — as more what that protocol is.

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — I thank the member for her supplementary question. I should not have assumed that you knew the protocols. Yes, the Andrews government is incredibly committed to appropriate protocols, and if there are any conflicts of interest, we will always declare them. In this case, the protocol is that of course I exempted myself; I did, and every cabinet member would.

### TAFE board membership

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Training and Skills. I refer the minister to comments made by the Auditor-General last year when he acknowledged the coalition government's efforts to:

... improve aspects of accountability and oversight framework —

of TAFEs, including —

... removing chief executive officers from TAFE institute boards in 2013 to clarify the relationship between governance and management and reduce the potential for conflicts of interest ...

I therefore ask: why did the minister ignore the Victorian Auditor-General's advice and instead agree to union demands to reintroduce staff, students and CEOs back onto Victoria's TAFE boards?

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — I am happy to answer it, but there is a bill in the other chamber. I am not sure — perhaps I could seek your advice, President, on protocol. I believe it was introduced yesterday.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! The view of this house is that what happens over there we could not care less about! Essentially Mr Herbert seeks my guidance on whether anticipation applies in terms of the question that has been put when a bill has been introduced to the other house. At this point the anticipation rule would not apply in this instance.

**Mr Jennings** — On a point of order, President, while that may be the view of the house, it may well be the view of the government that it is not common practice for the government, except in certain circumstances, to release details of legislation that may be first read but not second read in the Legislative Assembly. Indeed yesterday I actually acknowledged in the breach that I did on the adjournment respond to an issue that had been raised by a member in this chamber about the content of a bill because the issue that was raised by that member was dealt with in the legislation that was introduced in the Assembly. I chose to do that on the basis of what I thought was a reasonable response to a question but not because of an obligation for me to do so. I just remind the chamber that it has been a convention of many governments not to release information between the first and second readings.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! I accept that. I do not have any conflict with that position, but I simply point out that the question can stand on its own merit. I think

in this case the question does stand on its own merit, irrespective of what might be contained there. Obviously the minister has an opportunity to answer in an appropriate way based on his knowledge also of what might be coming down the track.

**Mr HERBERT** — I thank the member for his question, and I look forward to a fulsome debate when the bill comes into this chamber. The question relates to a direct election commitment, which I understand was made by the Premier at the Victorian TAFE Association's annual general meeting. It was a very clear and straightforward election commitment. It has nothing to do with unions. In fact what it has to do with is the measures taken by the previous government, which we opposed in opposition, where it sacked chairs and nobbled CEOs who spoke out against its draconian funding cuts.

**Mrs Peulich** — On a point of order, President, the minister is debating the question now, and I ask that you draw him back to his answer.

**Ms Shing** — On the point of order, President, the question was posed in such a blatantly provocative way that it is open to the minister to respond to that question as asked.

**Mrs Peulich** — Further on the point of order, President, quoting the assessments and an Auditor-General's report could not be construed as being provocative.

**Ms Shing** — Further on the point of order, President, there was reference to acceding to 'union demands' in that question, and on that basis it is perfectly open to the minister to respond to that in providing the answer to the substantive question.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! I agree with Ms Shing that, with the question being posed as the government having acceded to union demands, indeed the minister's response is apposite to that part of the question. A member might want certain parts of their question answered and certain parts of their preamble for other purposes, but once those parts are put in, the minister has the option of answering any part of that question the minister wants to answer. I am not in a position to direct a minister — how to answer the question. If the words are there and the minister is responding to words that have been posed in the question, that is where we are at. The minister is doing so.

**Mr HERBERT** — As I was saying, I am looking forward to a fulsome debate. We have a viewpoint on this side of the chamber that those who are directly involved in the education of so many young people —

those who are the students and those who are the teachers — should have a say in the provision of that education. It is a very simple premise. It is a premise that is based on and rooted in democracy. It is a premise that occurs in so many fine institutions around the world.

We rejected the way the measures were taken by the previous government. It is not about kowtowing to unions or whatever Mr Dalla-Riva said in his question. Quite frankly, what we saw in TAFE was 3000 staff sacked out of TAFEs, morale absolutely rock bottom, student satisfaction rock bottom and employer satisfaction rock bottom. We need to change that, and we need to change the governance arrangements to effect that change.

*Supplementary question*

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** (Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his response. Given that the minister's decision is to reintroduce chief executive officers back onto the boards of TAFEs — and it flies in the face of the advice from the Auditor-General — what will the minister do to guarantee that there will be no conflict of interest, particularly in relation to the remuneration and performance management of CEOs, in Victoria's TAFE boards?

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — I will take that as a question in the committee stage. We are quite clear. The second-reading speech, when Mr Dalla-Riva gets a chance to read it, provides absolute clarity about the probity arrangements, about government arrangements, about governance arrangements and about training that will occur in our institutions that did not occur under the previous government.

**Vocational education and training**

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Training and Skills, and I ask: will the minister detail how many students are currently enrolled in and studying barista-related courses in Victoria?

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — It is like giving me a smorgasbord to talk about. It is fabulous. I absolutely love this question time. But what can we say? Barista courses are among several thousand courses which are offered in Victoria. They are courses that ballooned out under the previous government's administration — them and many more — where we have seen tens of thousands of people trained, or pseudo-trained, by poor-quality

providers because there was a lack of oversight, and given training that either did not exist or was of poor quality and never led to a job.

In regard to that issue, that is one of the issues that has been canvassed and will be covered in the Mackenzie report and in the government's full response to that report. On the numbers, I am happy to provide those numbers. I will do a check on the latest numbers, both now and in previous years.

*Supplementary question*

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) — I ask the minister: do barista students undertake work experience as a part of the course? If so, have any barista students undertaken work experience in the minister's ministerial office, utilising his new coffee machine and milk frother?

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — I reject the premise there. In fact there is no new coffee machine. The coffee machine was installed there by the previous government, as was the contract for the coffee pods, which I am now lumbered with. I am now lumbered with that contract. I would not spend money on buying a new one, but it is not much of a coffee machine, let me tell you, that the previous administration put in. And no, we do not have anyone learning how to be a barista in there, quite frankly.

If the member wants me to be serious, I can say that in terms of the issue of my ministerial expenses, they are in line with most other ministerial expenses. They are about half what the now Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Matthew Guy's, were when he was planning minister in terms of destroying planning in this state — about half — and I am trying to save TAFEs.

**Mrs Peulich** — On a point of order, President, that is really crossing the boundaries of debating. It is another portfolio, another minister and — —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! Again Mrs Peulich is right, but the nature of the supplementary question was one that actually antagonised in a way that frankly the minister could have said anything and I would have had difficulty in containing it.

**Mr HERBERT** — On the issue Mr Finn raises, the opposition thinks I am the Kim Kardashian of Victorian politics — have a look at me! — but I say to Mr Finn that if I am the Kim Kardashian of Victorian politics, Matthew Guy is the Donald Trump.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! In regard to Dr Carling-Jenkins's supplementary question to Ms Mikakos relating to the direction of funding from the sale of Kew Cottages properties to services, I would ask for a written response that clarifies that. My understanding of government would be that capital funds would normally be returned to another capital purpose rather than to service programs.

I think that is the point Dr Carling-Jenkins was seeking information on — that is, whether it is going into programs or some other capital fund for disability services or whatever. The minister indicated that obviously there are a number of layers to this, particularly with the national disability insurance scheme starting and so forth, so it is not necessarily a clear-cut matter. However, I ask the minister to clarify whether we are talking about capital funds being directed back into services or capital going somewhere else for other capital purposes. The minister has two days on that one.

Ms Pennicuik asked substantive and supplementary questions of Mr Herbert in regard to national assessment program — literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN) services and the contractual arrangements with NCS Pearson. By way of the substantive question she asked whether it provided all of the services that were listed on the website regarding NAPLAN. In respect of the supplementary question, she asked whether there were other commercial products or extra products bought by the Victorian government as part of those services from NCS Pearson. I ask the minister for a written response to both the substantive and supplementary questions in two days.

Mr Finn's substantive question was on the number of baristas. Mr Herbert has indicated that he is prepared to provide some numbers on the people doing that particular course. That would be one day.

The nub of Mr Dalla-Riva's question that I seek a response on is why the government has not adopted the Auditor-General's recommendation in terms of the construct of the boards. The minister may well make reference to the legislation that is coming through. However, the nub of that question was not what the previous government did or did not do but that the Auditor-General has made some recommendations and the government seems to be at variance with those recommendations. That is the nub of the question on which I seek a written response.

I indicate one other thing in terms of first readings in the other place. I am not suggesting this would happen, but we could have a situation. One of the reasons this

house acts independently of the affairs of the other house is because it would be possible, for instance, for a government to first read a whole string of bills that would never actually proceed to a second reading but if we were to take the premise that something might be coming, it could prevent a line of questioning on many areas. That is one of the reasons anticipation is perhaps more narrowly defined today than it may have been in the past, and I think appropriately.

Mr Morris asked a question of Ms Mikakos about the number of unemployed young people and the number of youth who might be expected to gain jobs under the overarching \$100 000 program. The opposition interjected a number of times about what the actual number was, and I note that the minister did not provide a number as such. However, in the minister's defence, it is my experience that every time we refer to unemployment it is expressed in percentage terms, and the minister did provide percentages. When the media covers it, it is always about the unemployment rate being 6.5 per cent or whatever. It is always expressed in percentage terms, and I think the minister's answer was fair in that sense.

In terms of the substantive question, if it is possible to equate that percentage with a number of young people, I would appreciate that, but it is not something I think the minister was ducking the question on. I think her response was fair, but I would ask if it is possible for her to provide that number and also to perhaps indicate, as was sought by way of the supplementary question, whether there is an expectation of her department about the number of young people who might be able to gain jobs through the overarching program. I do that in the context of the expectation of her department, not her direct responsibility for the program.

In terms of Mr Ondarchie's question to Mr Dalidakis about a number of issues that might have influenced the way some employers treated their employees, I ask that Mr Dalidakis respond to the supplementary question, which was whether the issues that Mr Ondarchie raised will be considered as part of Mr Dalidakis's review. It is the issues, not what the employers could themselves do. Members are right; they run their own businesses. It is about whether those issues will be taken into account as some of the things that are teased out in the review.

In respect of that review and Ms Wooldridge's question to Mr Dalidakis, I think we have elicited the fact that the minister's department is to undertake the evaluation, but I would ask the minister if he might clarify that by way of a written response to indicate what form the evaluation will take, including a time frame and whether public submissions will be taken as part of that

review. In other words, the form of that review and a time frame. I note that the minister did at one point say it would be a timely review, but at another point he used the quaint phrase ‘the fullness of time’. I think the house should expect that we nail it down a little bit more than that.

In respect of both Mr Dalidakis’s responses, for the Mr Ondarchie question and the Ms Wooldridge question, we are talking about one day. In respect of Mr Morris’s question to Ms Mikakos, given that she might need to have some dialogue with the minister who is responsible for the overarching program, I would make that two days. I think that has covered them all. Essentially they are supplementary questions. In Ms Wooldridge’s case both the substantive and supplementary questions were rolled into one in terms of the matters sought.

**Mr Morris** — On a point of order, President, in regard to some of the commentary on unemployment rates, I think it is important to compare apples with apples and oranges with oranges. We have a raw number that the government has committed to in 100 000, yet the response that we have received was with regard to an unemployment rate. It is important that the specific question related to a number that can be compared to the election commitment from the government rather than an unemployment rate, which has not been referred to by the government.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! A percentage of the 100 000 would look daft anyway, so I think we are talking about the same thing. I accept what Mr Morris is saying, but what I was indicating is that I do not think the minister was being evasive in terms of talking about unemployment, when she did express it in what is the common measurement of unemployment and an understood measurement of unemployment that all governments use. That was a defence of the minister’s response to the question, which I thought was appropriate. But in respect of the number of young people, as I said, I have asked: can we convert that to an actual number? Certainly in terms of the 100 000, if it is 20 per cent of the jobs, then my maths says it is 20 000 people; if it is 18 per cent, my maths says it is 18 000. Either way, we are going to get the same result.

**Sitting suspended 1.12 p.m. until 2.17 p.m.**

## CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

### Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Ms WOOLDRIDGE** (Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question today is to the Minister for

Emergency Services, and it is: why has the completed Eltham fire station not yet been opened? This is an important project. In 2012 the coalition government announced \$9.6 million for the land and a new fire station to house a four-bay drive-through motor room, accommodate up to six staff per shift and provide meeting and training areas as well as space for storage, staff amenities and support staff. The first sod was turned in May 2014, and the government made a commitment that the work would be completed by March 2015. Burglaries delayed the project for a month or two, but it is now seven months after it was meant to be completed and opened, and it is not yet open. The fact is that it has been finished for months. Why is it not open? We need to improve the capacity of our local Country Fire Authority to protect lives and properties. Is it really true that the unions have stopped its opening? When will it be open? This is not good enough. The government needs to open the Eltham fire station —

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

### South Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Planning. I refer to the request by Mirvac to change the planning permit for the Waverley Park estate to remove the longstanding requirement that it underground the existing high-tension powerlines at an estimated cost of \$30 million. Despite this being in the Premier’s electorate, the government has failed to resolve the issue and reassure local residents that Mirvac will be required to deliver on its obligation. I ask: will the minister provide an assurance that he will hold Mirvac to the existing permit and require it to underground the high-tension powerlines as local residents require?

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing. Gippsland Carers Association improves the lives of unpaid family carers and those for whom they care. The association has had a part-time administration officer, who was funded by the coalition government, to improve its services. This position frees up a carer-mentor to support local carers who look after their loved ones for extended periods of time. So far Labor has not reinstated this funding. The Gippsland Carers Association is of the strong belief that this position is vital in helping it further support local carers and therefore reduce the strain on the public health system.

Given that family carers save the state government over \$12 billion a year, will this government match the previous government's commitment of \$100 000 over four years to fund a part-time administration officer at Gippsland Carers Association? We need to care for our — —

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

### **Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Mr LEANE** (Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Education, James Merlino. On Monday the minister announced that as well as a TAFE and higher education facility at the Lilydale TAFE site a tech school will also be established there. Could the minister let me know how this school will complement the whole education precinct.

### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Mr YOUNG** (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. More than once over recent weeks I have been contacted by fishermen raising concerns over illegal netting practices in Corio Bay. One particular location which is often mentioned is the Avalon boat ramp. Boats have been sighted with no identifying numbers, no lights and having been launched from cars that, for some reason, have no number plates. The response from Fisheries Victoria has not been satisfactory and suggests that those handling complaints have little knowledge of the activities taking place. So I ask: how many times this year has Fisheries done compliance checks on commercial fishermen by random selection and as the result of a complaint?

### **Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Training and Skills. Workplace learning coordinators (WLC) have been available in each Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) area in my electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region, and they helped facilitate workplace-based learning experiences for students. Coordinators work with LLENs, secondary schools, vocational education and training providers, the Learn Local adult and community education sector and local employers to coordinate work placements for school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, structured workplace learning and work experience.

The WLC program is a valuable program that many schools in the north have come to rely on, particularly for students who may be vulnerable or struggling to find suitable work placements and who may be studying in vocational pathways. The WLC program aligns closely to the work of the 31 LLENs across the state, such as those in Hume and Whittlesea, but not all of the LLENs currently deliver this program.

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

### **Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Mr ONDARCHIE** (Northern Metropolitan) — My constituency question today is for the Minister for Public Transport and it concerns bus travel and bus routes between La Trobe University and Reservoir station. This government said it would honour all of its election commitments, and it said it would improve the bus services between Reservoir station and La Trobe University, which is a very important university in my electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region. A number of international students catch the train to Reservoir station and then get on the bus that the government said it would improve. Here we are almost 12 months on and we do not have an improved bus service. My question on behalf of my constituents is: when will the bus service be improved?

### **Western Victoria Region**

**Mr MORRIS** (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Energy and Resources and relates to the geothermal energy bore in Portland. A great opportunity exists in Portland, which Glenelg Shire Council recognises and which the coalition recognised as well. That is why we committed to match the \$1.6 million of funding committed by Glenelg shire to reopen the geothermal bore in Portland. At the moment a significant energy source is going to waste as this government sits on its hands and refuses to fund a project that is an absolute no-brainer. My question is: will the minister provide the funding that is required to reopen Portland's geothermal energy bore?

### **Western Victoria Region**

**Mr RAMSAY** (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water, and it relates to the increased camping fees charged for the Glenaire camping ground. Glenaire, in the Assembly seat of Polwarth, is a very popular tourist spot for campers but sadly requires significant infrastructure investment for

upgrades within the camping grounds. Constituents have been saying, 'We're happy to pay the increase in camping fees, but we'd also like to see a bit of return on investment for those increasing fees in the infrastructure at the camping ground'. My request of the minister is to provide advice on when we can expect that infrastructure investment.

### Northern Victoria Region

**Ms LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) — My question is for the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water, and it regards the upcoming invitation-only Murray-Darling Basin water summit that the minister is attending in Tatura on 28 October. I have recently been contacted by a number of constituents, who have advised that they had approached the office of the Assembly member for Shepparton to ask if they could attend the summit. The constituents were advised the summit is invitation only. I am also aware of a major food producer who was not invited but has requested to attend and address the meeting.

The future of all irrigators and food processors in the entire Goulburn-Murray irrigation district is dependent on the availability of an adequate and secure water supply. The summit is to discuss scenarios for the northern Victoria community resulting from the sustainable diversion limit negotiations with the federal government. All water users need to be involved in these discussions and have the ability to put forward their opinions. My question is: will the minister ensure that the summit is open to all irrigators and food producers, whose futures are dependent on an adequate and secure water supply?

The practice of closed meetings is reminiscent of former Premier John Brumby and former Minister for Water Tim Holding, who used to sneak into Shepparton and only meet with those who agreed with them on water issues. Such as the expensive —

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

### REGIONAL AND RURAL ROADS

#### Debate resumed.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** (Northern Metropolitan) — I continue my support of Mr Morris's motion condemning this government for its complete neglect of rural Victoria. Melbourne Labor has not realised that outside Melbourne's jurisdiction there is a population and there are residents and people who have needs. The first thing it did was to cut the coalition's \$160 million

country roads and bridges program, and it added to that another 10 per cent cut to roads funding. I note that Mr Morris's motion condemns their neglect of Victoria's regional road network.

**Ms Mikakos** interjected.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — If we are serious about providing safe access and travel for Victorians, you would think the government would walk the talk. In fact it has done quite the opposite, because Melbourne Labor — or as Ms Mikakos calls it, Daniel Andrews's Melbourne Labor — is just focused on the area of Melbourne, Victoria, and not regional Victoria.

One of the things the government has suggested by way of appeasing — it thinks — regional Victorians is to offer up a miserly 3 per cent of the port of Melbourne sale to regional Victoria. To regional Victoria, which through agribusiness and product supplies so much through the port of Melbourne, the government has said by way of appeasement, 'We will give you a huge 3 per cent of the sale of the port of Melbourne'. At the very least, that is an insult. Then again, when it comes to the Daniel Andrews Melbourne Labor government, it would say, 'Not all is lost', because it has put a lot of focus under its regional roads and bridges program on the very beautiful country hamlet of Mulgrave — that well-known regional city of Mulgrave, that well-known village of Mulgrave.

It would not surprise members that 10 out of the 48 bridges earmarked for upgrade under the Labor government's country bridges program are located within 4 kilometres of the Premier's own electorate. This is hidden in his filing cabinet under the column called 'Pork-barrelling'. This is the folder they have dragged out, and the country roads program is a complete farce. As people in regional Victoria have said, 'It is sheer deceit'. If government members want to call it — as people in regional Victoria have referred to it — the Melbourne Bridges program, they should; but using this money to support the metropolitan electorate of Mulgrave, the Premier's own electorate, shows complete contempt for regional and rural Victorians.

In February the Premier and Minister for Roads and Road Safety announced the \$38.5 million Stronger Country Bridges program — stronger, more sustainable country, apparently in Mulgrave. They would say, 'It is part of an overall effort'. But it is not sheer coincidence that the money associated with supporting our small businesses and jobs in regional Victoria is being shopping trolleyed straight into the Assembly electorate of Mulgrave. Perhaps the Premier thinks his electorate

is a little village — a country hamlet — but that would demonstrate that he has no concept of what is going on in regional and rural Victoria. The roads are in disarray, and the bridges need support. We are losing lives on roads in regional Victoria. This government has shown utter contempt for the people of regional Victoria. I condemn its actions; moreover, I support Mr Morris's motion.

**Mr MORRIS** (Western Victoria) — I acknowledge the contributions that have been made by all the members who have spoken on this motion. It is a critically important motion, and I was pleased to hear it receive great support from members in this chamber. It is important to highlight that where we are now is far from where we were under the former coalition government.

I heard Ms Patten's contribution from my office, and I note that she was somewhat critical of the former government. I must say to Ms Patten that there is always more work to be done, but at least the coalition was moving in the right direction. Ripping \$160 million out of the country roads and bridges program is not moving in the right direction. Ripping \$2.6 million out of the upgrades to the Myamyn-Macarthur Road is not moving in the right direction. It is critically important to note that the coalition also supported a \$50 million upgrade to the Great Ocean Road, as well as \$500 million for the duplication of the Princes Highway.

The Labor government is using its Stronger Country Bridges program to upgrade 10 bridges on the Monash Freeway in or around the Premier's own electorate of Mulgrave. The way it is handling our country roads is an indictment of the Labor government. I commend the motion to the house.

#### House divided on motion:

##### *Ayes, 21*

Barber, Mr	O'Donohue, Mr
Bath, Ms	Ondarchie, Mr
Carling-Jenkins, Dr	Patten, Ms
Crozier, Ms	Pennicuik, Ms ( <i>Teller</i> )
Dalla-Riva, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )	Peulich, Mrs
Davis, Mr	Purcell, Mr
Drum, Mr	Ramsay, Mr
Dunn, Ms	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Hartland, Ms	Springle, Ms
Lovell, Ms	Wooldridge, Ms
Morris, Mr	

##### *Noes, 14*

Bourman, Mr	Mikakos, Ms
Dalidakis, Mr	Mulino, Mr
Eideh, Mr	Shing, Ms
Elasmar, Mr	Somyurek, Mr ( <i>Teller</i> )

Herbert, Mr  
Jennings, Mr  
Leane, Mr

Symes, Ms  
Tierney, Ms  
Young, Mr (*Teller*)

#### *Pairs*

Finn, Mr  
Fitzherbert, Ms

Pulford, Ms  
Melhem, Mr

#### Motion agreed to.

### LAW REFORM, ROAD AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

#### Reference

#### Debate resumed from 19 August; motion of Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria):

That this house, pursuant to section 33 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, requires the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee to inquire into, consider and report no later than 30 June 2016 on the effectiveness of the existing gun laws in Victoria in providing public safety, and —

- (1) give particular consideration to the benefits of —
  - (a) registering firearms;
  - (b) the permit to acquire system;
  - (c) the firearms category and classification system;
  - (d) classifying firearms based on appearance;
  - (e) handgun regulation;
  - (f) legalising suppressors;
  - (g) ammunition storage laws;
  - (h) including paintball markers in the current licensing and registration scheme;
  - (i) the national firearms agreement and national handgun agreement; and
- (2) make recommendations that will have the least negative effect on law-abiding citizens of the Victorian community.

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria) — I rise to complete my contribution to the debate on Mr Bourman's motion to refer to a parliamentary committee an inquiry into the effectiveness of gun laws in Victoria. It is over two months since I was interrupted by the need to move on to statements on reports and papers, so I reviewed *Hansard* overnight to see where I got to. I will start by reminding the house that I had outlined the Victorian government's commitment to maintaining firearm laws which protect the community alongside the interests of those for

whom firearm use is a necessity, such as our primary producers.

Since we were last debating this motion the Parliament has dealt with the Firearms Amendment (Trafficking and Other Measures) Bill 2015, which aims to strengthen a number of provisions in the Firearms Act 1996, including aiding the successful prosecution of firearms trafficking offences by lowering the number of unregistered firearms required for a trafficable quantity from 10 within a period of seven days to 3 within a period of 12 months, creating a new offence for theft of a firearm and creating a specific offence for the unlawful manufacture of firearms, as well as making changes to the definition of evidence of possession, which aims to move the focus away from a person's relationship with the firearm to the relationship between the person and the premises or vehicle that the firearm may be found in.

It must be noted that through those changes there is no intention to capture licensed shooters who lawfully possess a registered firearm. This motion does not refer to whether firearm regulation is sufficiently robust, effective or appropriate in the context of current risks to the community from organised criminality, including terrorism threats. It must be acknowledged that the government is responsible for balancing any consideration of legitimate gun use against the vital task of keeping our community safe. It is also important to consider the value of a national approach to firearm laws and working towards national consistency. Victoria is currently working with governments across the country to ensure a nationally consistent approach, and the *Martin Place Siege — Joint Commonwealth-New South Wales Review* examines the technical elements of the national firearms agreement at national level, involving all the states and territories. It is therefore the view of the government that in this context any review of the national firearms agreements would be impractical.

I would like to thank Mr Bourman for raising the issues in the house. It is very clear to all of us that he and Mr Young are passionate about and will continue to seek reform in this area. The government is very happy to continue those discussions with them in this space. However, the government is not prepared to support this motion as currently worded.

**Ms PENNICUIK** (Southern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on Mr Bourman's motion to refer several issues regarding the current gun laws to the joint Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee. The Greens will not be supporting this motion. The Greens have a long history of supporting strict gun control,

which started in the Parliament of Tasmania in the 1980s when attempts were made by the Greens to ban automatic and semiautomatic weapons due to ongoing concerns about public safety and the number of guns in circulation not only in Tasmania but nationally at the time.

As I mentioned in the recent debate on the Firearms Amendment (Trafficking and Other Measures) Bill 2015 introduced by the government in relation to illegal firearms, after the tragedy of the Port Arthur massacre, where 35 people were killed and 23 injured, we saw a national approach to gun law reform that put community safety first. It involved an amnesty and gun buyback that took some 600 000 firearms out of the community. These reforms have become the envy of the world. Other countries look to Australia for our gun laws, which are something that many countries — in particular the United States — would like to introduce. Recently there have been several more mass shootings in the United States. Statistics vary depending on where you are looking, but one site says that as many as 994 shootings have occurred in the last 1004 days. The president of the United States, Barack Obama, has pointed to Australia's gun laws as the benchmark for his country.

Before national gun law reform in 1996, almost 20 years ago, there was a hotchpotch of state legislation and regulation and no national licensing and registration system, so these were important and long-overdue reforms. The principles were that people needed to have a genuine reason to own a gun, that a national tracking system for guns be introduced and that to own a gun is a privilege not a right. In my point of view and that of the Greens, those principles have not been implemented strictly enough — for example, what is a genuine reason to own a gun? There are problems with the national tracking system as well.

As I mentioned, some 600 000 firearms were taken out of the community under the buyback scheme, and this has had a big impact on safety. There have been no massacres since that time, except for a recent family tragedy in the New South Wales city of Wagga Wagga. The strong evidence is that the more guns that are in circulation, the more likely there is to be injury to people from firearms.

We are particularly concerned when we hear about shootings in the public arena and on our streets; and the recent shooting in New South Wales was very distressing for everybody. But of course we also know that one of the major ways of committing suicide in Australia is through the use of a firearm and that firearms are used in family violence situations. It is

important that firearms are taken out of circulation, taken out of homes and taken away from people wherever possible.

Professor Andrew Goldsmith, strategic professor of criminology at Flinders University, has said that in terms of Australia's achievement the 1996 reforms have had a positive effect on reducing homicides in Australia and that we should be looking at gun control from a public health point of view. He has also said that where there is a prevalence of guns there is gun injury, and there is evidence and information on accidental and incidental gun-related harm that is often left out of the discussion on the effectiveness of gun laws.

We have had many reports that the number of guns in the community is increasing again, and in some states we have seen some watering down in terms of the national agreement. While there is still strong commitment to the national agreement among the states and territories and from the federal government, the state and federal police forces and others who are involved in this discussion at a national level, there has still been some watering down at state levels — for example, in Victoria under the last government there was a watering down of the number of shooting competitions sporting shooters were required to demonstrate they had actually participated in to retain their firearm licence. The Greens did not support that because the principle at stake was that in order to demonstrate that you had what is called 'a genuine reason' to own a gun, you need to demonstrate that you are a bona fide participant in those competitions and not just a participant on paper. Any watering down of those ways of demonstrating that you are a bona fide participant in sports shooting competitions is a concern.

Not that long ago we saw reports on police discovering guns in cars every two days in some Melbourne suburbs.

**Mr Dalidakis** interjected.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Mr Dalidakis might not think this is a serious subject, but I do.

As I was saying, the police are reporting that they are routinely discovering guns every two days when they are searching cars. That is one of the reasons the recent introduction of the Firearms Amendment (Trafficking and Other Measures) Bill 2015 was supported by the Greens, because it assisted police in dealing with this problem. Ron Iddles, the secretary of the Police Association Victoria, has said that it is a concerning development and that it puts at risk all police officers who may be required to stop a car, be it for a routine

inspection or for a breathalyser test, for example. Finding firearms in cars is a major concern to the police, particularly when looked at in the context of the rising number of firearms in circulation in the community.

The police have reported that there are firearm incidents — such as drive-by shootings — happening every six days, as well as there being an increasing trend of children as young as 16 years old carrying guns. They have reported that they regularly find guns, including sawn-off shotguns and automatic machine guns, during routine car intercepts. According to the Australian Crime Commission there are more than 250 000 longarm firearms and more than 10 000 handguns in the illicit firearms market. Some experts believe that many of the firearms on the black market were never handed in when the national firearms agreement was established. Former Greens Senator Penny Wright said after the recent Senate inquiry into illegal firearms, which she chaired, that it was clear:

... firearm theft from registered owners is a significant contributor to the number of illicit firearms on Australian streets.

The need to improve our gun control laws was recently highlighted by the siege in Sydney's Martin Place. A review into that incident by the New South Wales and commonwealth governments revealed weaknesses in Australia's national system for maintaining and sharing firearms information between jurisdictions. These are problems which are expected to be addressed with the introduction of a new national tracking system. As I mentioned earlier, there have been ongoing problems with that particular tracking system. That review also recommended that the state and territory police forces conduct an urgent audit of their firearms data holdings and urged governments to consider more measures to deal with illegal firearms.

In April the Senate committee also recommended an ongoing Australia-wide gun amnesty. Nick O'Brien, the former head of international counterterrorism at New Scotland Yard and now an associate professor at Charles Sturt University, agrees that there should be another firearms amnesty. He said that Australia risks losing its reputation for world's best practice in gun control if it does not do more to control the number of firearms in circulation now. Australia's firearms laws and the national agreement that underpins them have been very effective in reducing homicides, suicides, mass shootings and accidental shootings. While more needs to be done to address the theft of firearms, which is linked with the number of illegal guns in circulation, and the importation of firearms, there is a need for

another guns amnesty. There are still areas that need tightening.

The Greens would like to see a ban on handguns and all semiautomatic weapons, and we have serious concerns about the Adler self-loading gun, which is not the sort of weapon we want to see circulating in the community. We need to ban semiautomatic handguns. Another area where improvement needs to be made relates to caps on the number of guns that any one person is able to possess. In Victoria there is no such cap, but there are caps in some other jurisdictions.

The security and storage of registered firearms is an ongoing issue that was revealed by the Senate inquiry, and the Australian Institute of Criminology and other sources also revealed that firearms that are not securely kept are often stolen and enter circulation. I went into some detail about that when we were recently debating a firearms bill in the Parliament and talked about how certain criminals in fact target private residences or other places where guns are kept. I mentioned the national tracking system.

On the issue of new models of guns, just because they are available and people might want to possess them does not mean that they should be available and able to be possessed.

We know there is a process underway at the moment where the justice and police departments are reviewing our national firearms agreement and our national and state laws. We know this is an issue that is going to go to the Council of Australian Governments next year. Those are the forums that have been established over the last almost 20 years in Australia to deal with firearms and firearms regulation and laws, and we do not see any reason that should also be examined at state level. In the way Mr Bourman's motion is actually structured and expressed, you can see that Mr Bourman is suggesting that we need to relax the registration of firearms, the permit system, the classification system, handgun regulation, regulation of suppressors, storage of ammunition et cetera, and the Greens cannot possibly support a motion that has those purposes.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** (Eastern Victoria) — I am pleased to speak on behalf of the opposition in relation to the motion moved by Mr Bourman. I note, as Ms Symes noted in concluding her contribution to the debate on the motion, that this debate started some months ago. Since that time legislation has passed this place which changes and tightens some of the regulations and legislation around prohibited firearms. Much of that legislation was in fact replicating a bill that was introduced by the former government but did

not make its way through the Parliament before the election last year.

Mr Bourman is seeking that the house require the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee to inquire into, consider and report no later than 30 June 2016 on the effectiveness of the existing gun laws in Victoria in providing public safety, and his motion then provides particulars to be given consideration to, such as registering firearms, the permit to acquire system, the firearms category and classification system, classifying firearms based on appearance, handgun regulation, legalising suppressors, ammunitions storage laws, including paintball markers in the current licensing and registration scheme, the national firearms agreement (NFA) and the national handgun agreement (NHA). I congratulate Mr Bourman on bringing this motion and putting these issues before the house for consideration, because they are indeed issues of public importance.

In the context of the national firearms agreement and the national handgun agreement, where much of the regulation now resides, this motion brings forward a bigger issue. As our system of government has evolved over decades, as communication has improved, as Australia has operated effectively more and more as a single market and the interjurisdictional boundaries between states and territories within Australia in some areas have diminished, there has been a keenness on behalf of governments and regulators to have systems that operate across jurisdictions. We have seen a number of pieces of legislation and regulatory schemes where states have in effect ceded all their regulatory power or part thereof to a commonwealth body or to a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) body in the interests of national harmonisation and national regulation.

As a former member of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, I know that the operation of these schemes — the continual supervision, perhaps, of these schemes — can from time to time raise concerns.

While in a policy sense it may be appropriate for many reasons to cede some powers to a federal jurisdiction or a body that represents all states and territories of the commonwealth, we as a Parliament do not rescind our responsibility to ensure that the frameworks put in place at a particular time continue to have relevance and demonstrate best practice in the modern day. It is important from time to time to revisit national agreements to make sure that they are still warranted, that their terms are still current and that they take into account any changes that have taken place in technology or communications and any other changes

that may impact on the established regulatory framework.

I will divert for a second and make mention of a parliamentary committee inquiry I was a member of in the last Parliament. The Council gave a reference to a committee to examine the benefits of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. It was deemed through the COAG process that the regulation of healthcare professionals, from doctors and physiotherapists through to a range of other healthcare professionals, should transition from a state-based model to a federal model, and that led to the establishment of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

The objectives of the creation of that national body were clear — harmonisation across states and the ability of practitioners to operate in an interjurisdictional fashion — and as a parliamentary committee we examined how that implementation had gone and how it had been for practitioners and for the wider community. That was a prudent thing to do. The establishment of the committee drew criticism from some members of the then opposition, but the work the committee did and some of the issues it uncovered ultimately demonstrated its worth.

To go to the motion moved by Mr Bourman, it is wise from time to time for the Parliament to review national agreements when the Parliament has ceded authority for a range of reasons to a federal or interjurisdictional level. The question then becomes, given Mr Bourman's motion: is this an appropriate time to review the NFA and the NHA in particular and the other items articulated in Mr Bourman's motion? I noted when Mr Bourman moved the motion that he was concerned that we need to have a review of the operability of the current framework and that the states have a role in leadership and in providing greater transparency and greater data.

After hearing Mr Bourman's concerns, I did some research into what the commonwealth is doing, and I noted a press release from the Minister for Justice, the Honourable Michael Keenan, on 12 August, headed 'Industry reference group to advise government on NFA review', which says:

Consultation with industry and licensed shooters will be vital to produce sensible reforms as the government reviews the technical elements of the national firearms agreement (NFA).

It goes on to say:

All states and territories agreed to this recommendation at the May 2015 meeting of the Law, Crime and Community Safety Council (LCCSC). Ministers and attorneys-general from all

jurisdictions will consider any proposed updates to the NFA at the November 2015 meeting of the LCCSC ahead of consideration by the first Council of Australian Governments meeting in 2016.

The objective of the review is to ensure our existing firearms regulations — which have not been substantively reviewed for almost two decades — have kept pace with advancements in technology and changes to the firearms market.

It is important that the NFA strikes an appropriate balance between the interests of licensed gun owners and advice from our law enforcement agencies to ensure the broader community is safe and secure.

I also note comments of support for this process from Darren Chester, the federal member for Gippsland — much of his electorate overlaps with mine — and from others.

In summary, the concept of a regular review or of the chamber, the Parliament and the government being cognisant of ensuring that national agreements that are signed from time to time remain current, appropriate and up to date is a worthy thing. I again congratulate Mr Bourman for moving this motion to highlight that point. From what Mr Bourman has said, I do not believe the case has been made to undertake the review he is proposing when the federal government is currently undertaking a similar review.

I note that Mr Keenan's press release cites the upcoming November meeting of the LCCSC ahead of consideration by the first Council of Australian Governments meeting in 2016. We should soon be able to see some outcome from the work that Mr Keenan announced in August, so unless Mr Bourman in his summation can provide additional compelling material, the position as I see it is that the case has not been made for a separate review independent of the work taking place at the COAG level with involvement from Victoria under the leadership of the justice minister, Michael Keenan.

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to speak to Mr Bourman's motion, which refers to the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee an inquiry into a broad range of existing gun laws in Victoria and their effectiveness. I am a member of that committee, so I am interested to hear more. Sitting next to my colleagues from the Shooters and Fishers, I have learnt an awful lot about guns since I came in here, possibly more than I ever knew I needed to know, but I am looking forward to — —

**Mr Dalidakis** interjected.

**Ms PATTEN** — They are very fine guns, Mr Dalidakis. Let that be noted in *Hansard*. Often the

Sex Party is seen to represent a maligned group of society, and sometimes shooters are also maligned in our society, particularly as I have learnt over the last few months.

We are talking about law-abiding citizens who have never broken a law and who now seem to have to jump through an enormous number of hoops to ensure that they do not break a law, so I think this inquiry is warranted. The fact that some of them are sitting in the chamber today is also justification for enabling an inquiry like this.

In my opinion we have the best gun laws in the world, despite everything my colleagues have told me. It seems as if President Obama agrees that Australia has some of the best gun laws in the world, and due to both those laws and our law-abiding citizens we have the lowest rates of gun violence anywhere. In 1996, after the Port Arthur massacre, we chose to overhaul those gun laws. We really wanted to make it hard for lunatics to get guns. We might possibly have made it harder for law-abiding citizens to also get guns; I recognise that. I do not think the Prime Minister at the time, John Howard, had any choice. It was the will of the people. We were crying out for something to be done. Prime Minister Howard did that. Even today when we look at the polls around gun ownership and gun laws, we find that the majority of Australians either think we are doing the right thing or we could be doing more. I certainly believe that goes not just for my electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region but more broadly for Victoria.

A poll conducted in July by Essential Media Communications found that 40 per cent of Australians thought we had gun ownership laws just about right and 45 per cent thought we should strengthen them. I was interested to note that those people most likely to want the laws strengthened were men over 55. Those who thought they were just right were women aged 18 to 34 living in Victoria. A few years ago that would have been me. However, the question was probably not being asked of gun owners. It was perhaps the case that many people who had absolutely no interest in guns and who had not participated in any sporting or recreational activities that involve guns were asked.

The inquiry will be interesting because it will tease out how our gun laws are affecting those people who use guns. The inquiry will be very broad; I would consider it almost to be a blank cheque inquiry. It will look at everything gun related, including registration, permits, classification systems, ammunition storage laws, the use and legalisation of suppressors, and the national firearm and handgun agreements. It is a lot to cover, but

I think the committee to which Mr Bourman has referred it is up to the job. I know that as one of its members, I certainly am. However, it could possibly have been more targeted, if you will pardon the pun.

I noted in Mr Bourman's contribution that he seems to agree that Victoria has some of the best registration systems in the country. I do not want to see that changed. However, it does seem that there is some crazy hoop jumping that we ask law-abiding citizens to go through that is regulation for the sake of regulation, and when you have regulation for the sake of regulation that generally leads to over-regulation.

Here is a fun fact: a spud gun is a firearm in Victoria. No doubt my mum did not know that when I got one for Christmas — —

**Mr Dalidakis** — You got a mum for Christmas?

**Ms PATTEN** — I got a spud gun for Christmas one year. I also noted in Mr Bourman's contribution that we classify guns differently just because of their colour, so if it is a lovely wood and metal gun, we classify it one way, but if it looks black and mean, we classify it in another. These are real anomalies that are worth exploring.

To me, gun laws boil down to public safety. Recently we have seen some good gun laws introduced in this house with regard to stolen guns, the manufacture of guns and the distribution of unlicensed guns. We are really looking at public safety. That is obviously the most important issue when we are looking at gun laws. I am interested in the inquiry and what it will find. It may find that we need to tighten our gun laws or it may find that we have them just right. I certainly think this is a reference worth exploring and I commend the motion to the house.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a few remarks this afternoon on the motion proposed by Mr Bourman, which is fundamentally about the issue of fit-for-purpose and best practice regulation and whether the current framework we have in Victoria and Australia for firearms regulation represents a best practice framework. I approach this debate as somebody who is not a firearm owner and who does not hold and has never held a shooters licence. I also approach it as somebody with a keen interest in efficient and proportional regulation. This is something that all members of this and other parliaments should have an interest in — that is, undertaking regulation in a way that is proportional to

the types of risks we are looking to mitigate and doing so efficiently.

At the outset of this debate I acknowledge, and we should all acknowledge, the legitimacy of recreational shooting as an outdoor recreational activity. In fact we should recognise recreational shooting, or shooting disciplines, as something that has been represented, for example, at the modern Olympics since 1896. Throughout the entire period of the modern Olympics shooting has been recognised as an appropriate discipline or event. Therefore as a Parliament we should recognise that the people who are affected by the regulations that Mr Bourman seeks a review of are undertaking a legitimate recreational activity.

Equally we should acknowledge the concerns of law-abiding firearm owners, people who in pursuing their recreation are frequently tagged and associated with criminal activities and, increasingly, terrorism. What must that mean for those individuals who are pursuing a legitimate recreational activity to be tagged as being associated with terrorism? That is the type of debate we have often seen around the issue of firearms regulation in this country. Whether it is firearms regulation or any other regulation, as legislators we cannot be basing regulation on prejudice, ideology or on what we see in sensationalised YouTube videos. Regulation must be based on a sound evidentiary basis, not on sensationalism, ideology or prejudice.

What is required to get legislation and regulation that is based on a sound evidential base is leadership both at a parliamentary level and at a government level. The reality is that so much of what we see in this Parliament, despite what we might think as legislators, is not driven by us. It is driven by governments, it is driven by ministers and it is driven by bureaucrats and officers in government agencies. In looking to that leadership on this issue we need to ask the question: what are we seeking to achieve with our firearms regulation and with our licensing and registration regulations? The fundamental answer is that we are seeking to reduce gun-related crime and gun-related violence. Therefore what we do with regulation should be within that framework and considered in that framework.

We have seen in the last couple of years the Canadian government consider the question of appropriate regulation of firearms with regard to the objective of reducing gun-related violence and gun-related crime. The Canadian government undertook an examination of its firearm laws to determine whether they reduced gun-related crime and gun-related violence or whether they merely acted as a deterrent and as an impediment

to legitimate recreational activity — whether they were merely deterring people from undertaking their recreation of choice or were actually reducing gun-related crime and gun-related violence.

That Canadian review was very telling, because the Canadian government reached the conclusion that, to quote the second-reading speech for the legislation that was subsequently introduced to the Canadian Parliament, the registration system for firearms was regarded as:

... a good example of red tape without any added value.

The responsible minister, in introducing the new legislation in Canada, made the point that:

For too long, gun control in Canada has been about disarming all Canadians. It was about making hunting and sport shooting so onerous, so filled with time-consuming paperwork, that no-one would be interested in pursuing these Canadian heritage activities.

As a consequence of that review by the Canadian government and of that recognition of the fact that Canadian regulations were merely imposing an onerous regulatory burden on recreational shooters rather than achieving the reductions in gun-related violence and crime that Canadians were seeking, the Canadian government introduced the Common Sense Firearms Licensing Act in 2014. As a consequence of that legislation a major overhaul was undertaken of registration requirements in Canada to the point that conventional longarm firearms are no longer subject to registration in Canada, and I understand this is also the situation in New Zealand.

So the Canadian government was able to undertake an evidence-based review of its firearms legislation. It was able to do it dispassionately, and it was able to do it with a view to looking at what actually achieves reductions in firearm-related crime and violence rather than what is simply an impediment to legitimate recreational activity. Given the commonwealth has flagged a review of the technical aspects of the national firearms agreement following the events in Sydney last year, the challenge now falls to the commonwealth Minister for Justice, Michael Keenan, and the Victorian Minister for Police, Wade Noonan, who has responsibility for the Victorian implementation of national agreements.

I take up the point made by Mr O'Donohue in his remarks about national agreements and the appropriateness of looking at national agreements. One of my experiences as a minister tasked with implementing a national agreement agreed to by the previous Labor government — this was the national

agreement on occupational health and safety harmonisation — highlighted that reaching national agreement on a policy does not mean it is a good regulatory framework. What we saw with national OHS harmonisation was that Victoria was being asked to implement a framework which would have sent Victorians back 5 steps merely so states like New South Wales and Queensland could move forward 10 steps. National agreements are not necessarily good agreements for all jurisdictions — and I see the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, Minister Dalidakis, grinning at this point, and I note that the current Labor government in Victoria has also not moved to implement that national agreement on OHS harmonisation.

The point is that national harmonisation of itself does not necessarily result in good outcomes for all jurisdictions, and that is where a leadership role remains for the Victorian government and for the Victorian minister to ensure that the framework we have in Victoria is appropriate and that it addresses the issue of gun-related crime and gun-related violence without impeding the legitimate recreational activities of sporting shooters and recreational shooters.

This question is very much about leadership. It comes down to whether federal minister Michael Keenan, the federal government, Victorian minister Wade Noonan and the Victorian government can show the type of leadership that was seen in Canada to ensure that we have a framework of firearms registration, shooting regulation and firearms licensing here in Victoria that delivers on the objectives of reducing gun-related violence and gun-related crime while ensuring we do not unnecessarily impede the legitimate recreational activities of thousands of Victorians.

**Mr YOUNG** (Northern Victoria) — I also rise today to speak on the motion presented to this house by my colleague Mr Bourman, which has been an ongoing issue for us and something that we have worked towards for quite a while. Simply, what we seek is a transparent look at some of the laws and regulations we have in Victoria that guide what we are and are not able to do while pursuing shooting activities. I understand to a degree the intended reasoning behind most of the laws that surround gun ownership and use — they are for the safety of the public; public safety is very important, and we must have laws that ensure public safety — but there is a tipping point after which they become ineffective.

All too often we see examples of people who, despite our gun laws, come into possession of illegal firearms that are used for criminal activity. It begs the question:

are all of these restrictions on law-abiding, good-natured members of our society actually having any effect on criminal conduct and activity? Are some things working and are other things not working? Is it of any benefit to me to have to wait 28 days to purchase a firearm when I already have several of them sitting at home and if I were inclined to do anything evil with them I would be well and truly able to do so?

Does it matter if I go down to the range and shoot my pistols only 8 times a year instead of 10? That seems very silly to me, but all of a sudden, because I am not competing in my sport enough, I am a bad person. What is the difference between me and a mate shooting some targets on his property with a shotgun or a rifle and us doing the same thing with a handgun that I am legally allowed to keep at my house with all the ammunition?

These are the types of questions that shooters ask themselves every day, and we are made to feel like criminals every time we try to talk about this. When others bring up this topic, it is always of a political nature and after an event. Whether it is a media stir up or a stunt by another politician, one thing is sure: when someone commits a crime with a gun we never hear an embracing speech from the Prime Minister to encourage the people of this country to educate themselves about shooting and to welcome shooters into the community. Instead we are blamed. Members of the shooting community want a chance to express our views on the imposition of silly and, more importantly, useless red tape and the effect it has on us when we participate in sports which we see as being no different to football, tennis or anything else that people enjoy, except that it is more fun.

The use of parliamentary inquiries was quite foreign to me when I came to this place. I have now had the experience of sitting on two committees, and I have seen the value of the work done by committees; therefore I think it is very important to the Shooters and Fishers Party that we give our constituents and our people the opportunity not only to see this inquiry play out but also to contribute to it. People in the shooting community get very little attention when we are faced with difficulties due to the fact that most governments do not want to be seen as being weak on crime, but by constantly picking on the innocent they are being very weak. A strong government should stand its ground and say, 'No, we will not punish those who have done nothing wrong; we will take action to prevent crime'.

We want a number of things looked at in this inquiry, including the registration of firearms and whether it is appropriate for someone who has no criminal history to

go through that process and need to register their firearms, or whether the firearms registry is of any benefit in solving crimes. We also want to look at the permit-to-acquire system, which to me is probably the silliest part of all this — I have to ask permission to go and purchase another firearm although I already have several which are completely legal for me to have. It is well and truly within the law and there are no limits on what I can do in that space, yet I have to ask permission from Victoria Police's licensing and regulation division, which has to approve my application. The process takes up to two weeks and can be very hard when I am trying to complete a financial transaction with someone. It can put a lot of pressure on both parties.

Quite simply the firearms category and classification system has been wrong from the start, and there are a few things in it that are very silly and definitely need to be looked at. There are things it does not take into account, such as the action of a firearm when comparing it to the calibre of a firearm — for example, a category C semiautomatic pistol is still only a .22 in some cases — a .22 calibre. It is a very low-powered firearm, yet it is in a higher category than some other centre-fire rifles which are only category B. These are the sorts of anomalies that need to be looked at and brought back to reality, because a semiautomatic .22 long rifle is not a danger to anyone in the hands of a good, law-abiding person.

Classifying firearms based on appearance is absolutely ludicrous. An example was given of someone who changes the stock on a firearm to a black plastic scary stock. To suggest that that firearm now has a different purpose in a different place in our society is just stupid. We should not be reclassifying firearms based on appearance, because the only thing that actually matters is the functionality of the firearm — how it is used and by whom it is used. In most cases a licensed person should not have their firearm taken off them in a case of reclassification.

I turn to handgun regulation. I am going through the process of getting my handgun licence as we speak. I think it has been going on for about five months.

**Mr Dalidakis** interjected.

**Mr YOUNG** — Mr Dalidakis is indicating that he is also going through the process, so he would know how arduous and stressful it is to have to go through that process. It really is just crazy that I should have to join a club for X amount of time and then have my membership of that club approved even though I know all the people from the club. Then I have to go through

a waiting period for a different kind of licence. I already have a longarm licence and I already have registered firearms, but to get another one I have to go through a period of 28 days just to get the licence, and then another waiting period of 28 days to buy a handgun. It is ludicrous, unnecessary and achieves nothing.

Legalising suppressors is something that has been looked at in several other states and countries, and it is really a common-sense approach in that it is an occupational health and safety issue in some instances where people are professionally shooting. There are circumstances in which they are allowed to use suppressors. We think it is appropriate that recreational shooters be allowed to use suppressors in similar circumstances, whether it be just helping at a farm or with mitigation or hunting somewhere near a township. Suppressors should be allowed in the interests of public safety because they have an impact on your health. That is particularly important to me, because I am quite deaf.

**Mr Dalidakis** — What?

**Mr YOUNG** — Exactly. Including paintball markers in the current licensing and registration regime is something else that does not make sense to me. They are not a typical firearm in the sense of any other type of firearm, and they are used for a pretty controlled recreational activity on a range in most cases. They just do not fit the typical target that we are trying to achieve when addressing firearm laws and criminal activity. The last time I saw a news report that someone had robbed someone with a paintball gun? I cannot actually think of one, because I daresay that it has never happened.

The second paragraph of Mr Bourman's motion asks the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee to make recommendations that will have the least negative effect on law-abiding citizens of the Victorian community. To me, this last point is probably the most important aspect of the motion. Whilst the specifics in paragraph 1 outline many areas in which shooters feel they are unfairly treated, the second paragraph of this motion is designed to ensure that these matters are addressed in such a way that we are not suffering for the sake of laws and regulations that achieve nothing.

There are many examples of overregulation and excessive red tape and huge costs for administration in other sectors. Efficiency programs and initiatives are often implemented to bring some sanity into the practical world we live in. This area is no different, and if an existing law or regulation does not target the intended audience, then it needs to change. To combat

drink driving, we do not take cars from those who do not drink; we educate. To prevent domestic violence, we do not separate non-violent people from their families; we educate. People who do not commit crimes with firearms should not be restricted unfairly or prevented from living their lives the way they want to. Instead the community needs to be educated. The intention of this inquiry is not to weaken or strengthen our firearms laws in Victoria. It is about making them more efficient in dealing with illegal firearms that are used in crime without inappropriately affecting those who are good-natured and decent people in our society.

In relation to the review of the national firearms agreement, I remind the house that firearms laws are legislated at a state level. This kind of inquiry would be valuable to those participating in that review by providing some on-the-ground information about the implementation of firearms laws and the practicalities of whether they are effective. I will finish on the word effective. It is the core of why this motion has been presented to the house. The Shooters and Fishers Party does not believe that the current firearms laws are effective at targeting criminal use of firearms and instead place too much of an imposition on good people.

**Mr BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) — One thing needs to be stressed about my motion: it is about discussion, it is not about change. Change may or may not come as part of this discussion, but it would seem that some people are bent on thinking that this motion is about changing or watering down the laws. Personally I would never suggest anything that would reduce public safety, but it is clear that what we are currently doing is not effective and that placing further restrictions on law-aiding people is not logical based on that.

We constantly hear about the number of illegal firearms being seized every second day in the north-western suburbs alone. What are known as — and I use this term sarcastically — best practice gun laws, some of the toughest in the world, are not actually effective, so making them even tougher is only going to affect the people who obey the laws, not the criminals. It is the criminals who do criminal deeds.

The proposals in my motion should also be seen as part of a reduction in red tape. As Mr Young is finding out while going for his handgun licence, there is a lot of onerous red tape that is inefficient. I agree with my colleague from the Greens that it needs to be hard to get a licence, but once you get a licence it means you are a trustworthy person, you have been vetted by the state and you should have more than what we have got now. This brings me to the review currently being undertaken by the firearms and weapons policy working group, which will eventually feed into the

Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and eventually into every state. The states will enact the recommendations based on factors at the time. What we have are bureaucrats making decisions at the expense of due diligence, openness, transparency and fairness. Not one of them has been elected to anything, and not one of them is accountable to the voters. They go to work, they come home and that is it.

There are many other issues. We hear about the requirements of due diligence, openness, transparency and fairness, and indeed it is fair, but we do not hear this about firearms laws. All we hear is, 'Make it tougher, make it tougher, make it tougher'. As I said, at some point the recommendations from COAG will land in state Parliament. At that time we will have two options: we can blindly adopt them, or we can debate them. To be perfectly honest it is obvious and logical to me that we should be researching and debating this issue before the recommendations from COAG land; otherwise we will be taking someone else's word for it. I have not had the pleasure of going to COAG, and I probably never will. I would suggest that COAG members do not sit around for a number of weeks debating whether firearms laws are good, bad, efficient or inefficient or whether there is too much red tape. I dare say they have a lot on their plate; a report will be tabled, recommendations will be made, and they will move on. That simple process affects way too many people who are not part of the problem, and I think it is incumbent upon this Parliament to conduct an inquiry.

I am not going to respond to the usual regurgitation from the Greens; it is pointless. We will never educate them. I would like to end my statement and bring this to a vote.

#### House divided on motion:

*Ayes, 5*

Bourman, Mr (*Teller*)  
Carling-Jenkins, Dr  
Patten, Ms

Purcell, Mr  
Young, Mr (*Teller*)

*Noes, 30*

Atkinson, Mr  
Barber, Mr (*Teller*)  
Bath, Ms  
Crozier, Ms  
Dalidakis, Mr  
Davis, Mr  
Drum, Mr  
Dunn, Ms  
Eideh, Mr  
Elasmar, Mr  
Finn, Mr  
Hartland, Ms  
Herbert, Mr  
Jennings, Mr  
Leane, Mr

Lovell, Ms  
Mikakos, Ms  
Morris, Mr  
Mulino, Mr  
O'Donohue, Mr  
Pennicuik, Ms  
Peulich, Mrs  
Ramsay, Mr (*Teller*)  
Rich-Phillips, Mr  
Shing, Ms  
Somyurek, Mr  
Springle, Ms  
Symes, Ms  
Tierney, Ms  
Wooldridge, Ms

**Motion negatived.**

## POLICE NUMBERS

**Mr O'DONOHUE** (Eastern Victoria) — I move:

That this house notes —

- (1) in November 2014, when the coalition left government there were 13 151 equivalent full-time sworn police officers in Victoria;
- (2) as at the end of June 2015 there were 13 151 equivalent full-time sworn police officers in Victoria;
- (3) the failure of the Andrews Labor government to add even one additional sworn police member despite population growth of approximately 100 000 per annum and the challenges of terrorism, ice and family violence;
- (4) that while the Premier, Daniel Andrews, MP, has not prioritised additional police, he has found hundreds of millions of dollars to not build a road and \$20 million for a new logo; and
- (5) the failure of Labor to invest in more police stands in stark contrast to the coalition's record of 1900 additional police and 950 protective services officers during its term in office.

I am very pleased to move this motion, which highlights the lack of investment by this government in Victoria Police and the way it is neglecting and failing to provide the resources to Victoria Police that it requires.

Before I get into the motion let me say that I am sure we all agree that being a member of the police force is an extremely difficult job. Perhaps it is only getting harder and harder. With the issues of ice, terrorism and family violence, the demands on our police are greater and their challenges are increasing every day, and we as a community and as a Parliament, and the government, which is in charge of the purse strings, should make community safety and our police force a top priority.

Let me also say before I get into the substantive motion that it has been very difficult and challenging for Victoria Police in recent times. Tragically two members of Victoria Police have died in the most sad and difficult circumstances. One thing I have gained an appreciation of after visiting many, many police stations since December last year is that Victoria Police is like a big family. Everyone knows each other through one or two connections. Indeed at a police station I visited last week that issue was brought forward when one of the members referenced his relationship with one of the tragedies that has recently occurred.

I also say by way of introduction that I acknowledge and give my sympathies — and I am sure we all concur — to the members of the force and to the families and friends of those two police members at this

most difficult time for them. I say again that the challenges for members of the force appear to be growing and the demands are ever more complex, and it is the job of the Parliament and the job of the government to respond with the resources that the Chief Commissioner of Police needs to have at his or her — obviously now at his — disposal to respond to those challenges.

I will now start talking about the motion itself. Many anecdotes have been told to me by senior members of the force as I have travelled around stations across Victoria. I have been lucky enough to have been briefed by the officer in charge at various stations around the state, and often the officer in charge has said, 'I've been in the force for 25 years' — or 30 years or 20 years — 'and I'm glad I'm not driving the van now, because the job is so much more complex, the demands are so much greater, the responses are so varied and the issues are so varied'. That probably sums up some of the challenges that members confront: getting called out to family violence jobs and trying to resolve deep and challenging family disputes and issues, which are incredibly complex; and dealing with the demands of ice and the behaviour it drives in those who are addicted to or taking that drug, and the erratic, violent and unpredictable responses it can generate.

When the coalition was in office it made community safety a top priority for government. Government is all about priorities and choices, as the now Premier has said on many occasions. When the coalition was in government it made Victoria Police and community safety a priority. It recruited, trained and deployed 1900 additional police officers. It invested \$275 million to recruit, train and deploy protective services officers (PSOs) on our railway stations. Let me say that the Deputy Premier has never apologised for referring to the hardworking men and women who are our fine protective services officers as 'plastic police'.

**Ms Shing** interjected.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — It is an absolute disgrace.

**Ms Shing** — Read *Hansard*.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — I take up Ms Shing's interjection — because I have read *Hansard*, Ms Shing.

**Ms Shing** interjected.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — I have read *Hansard*, and Mr Merlino cited the UK and said the equivalent in the UK are called 'plastic police', implying and stating in a very veiled way that the PSOs here in Victoria are some form of second-class plastic police — an absolute

disgrace. It is an absolute disgrace, coming from someone in a senior leadership position, as Mr Merlino was then, and now he is the Deputy Premier of Victoria. Is it not ironic that the people he denigrated are the people who protect us in this building? Up there in the chamber gallery, in this building or at the front gate, if there is some issue that requires immediate response, who will come to protect us? The PSOs. It is an absolute disgrace, and Mr Merlino should apologise for that slur on those hardworking men and women.

We do not need to revisit history for a lengthy period, but let me just say that there were very few supporters of the coalition when it announced the PSOs policy. The community supported it, but when it came to the then opposition and a range of other peak bodies and organisations, most derided the idea of PSOs on railway stations. But the PSOs have proven to be a remarkable success, and they have given confidence back to commuters and provided safety on our railway stations.

To house and provide appropriate accommodation and resources for so many extra police and PSOs the former government invested \$253 million in new and upgraded police infrastructure during its term of government. Government is about choices, and the coalition made community safety and Victoria Police a priority and increased its funding by 22 per cent over its four years.

This takes me to the first limb of the motion. When the coalition left office, after creating 1900 additional police over four years, there were 13 151 full-time equivalent sworn police officers in Victoria. The former coalition government wanted transparency about what was called our Project 1700, which turned out to be 1900 extra police. Each month on the Victoria Police website there was an update provided about the number of full-time equivalent members of Victoria Police. We wanted monthly updates so there was transparency and so the community understood where that promise and that commitment were in terms of delivery.

What Labor did when it came to government was take away that transparency — or diminish it. We now get only quarterly reporting. From the most recent figures available, 13 151 police were working to protect the community in Victoria as at November last year. Since that time Victoria's population has probably grown by 70 000 or 80 000 or possibly more. A range of new challenges have presented themselves to the community and, through the community, to Victoria Police to respond and deal with. How many additional police are there today, on the most recent available figures, to respond to that increased population? By the time we get to Christmas, Victoria's population will

have grown by a number approaching the entire population of the wonderful City of Ballarat. How many extra police have the Premier, Daniel Andrews, and the Minister for Police, Wade Noonan, delivered to respond to that population growth and those challenges? According to the most recent figures — and the most recent figures again are only as at June, because we do not have the transparency that we used to have under the former government — zero police have been delivered.

I have had the opportunity to visit the Victoria Police Academy on several occasions. It is a fantastic complex. The government that purchased that site when the Catholic Church no longer wished to hold it showed great foresight. I think it was the Bolte government, but I stand ready to be corrected. Its infrastructure has been significantly upgraded in recent years with new technologies, new classrooms and new training centres — fantastic new facilities that can teach modern techniques to respond to the modern challenges that confront Victoria Police. One thing that always strikes me when I am out there is that there is hardly anyone there, because the academy is barely training enough people to replace those lost through natural attrition. There is this new, upgraded and important infrastructure, but there is no-one there to learn and no-one coming through the pipeline.

We have a growing population, and we have growing challenges around ice and family violence. The government has said that family violence is its no. 1 priority. Family violence is a scourge that needs to be tackled in a consistent and long-term fashion. It is a challenge that across the aisles of the Parliament we need to respond to and beat, just as we seek to do with the road toll and a range of other policy initiatives. But who are the ones who respond to family violence incidents? Who are the ones charged with responding and providing support — providing referrals and providing help at that first response? Invariably it is the hardworking men and women of Victoria Police.

In preparing for today's debate I have had cause to again read the submission of the Police Association Victoria to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. It is a very detailed analysis and a stark reminder of the challenges that members of Victoria Police face in responding to the very complex and difficult issue of family violence, but when you boil down its submission and look at its no. 1 recommendation, as stated on page 22, it is very simple:

Recommendation 1: in order to tend to the ever-growing community need with respect to family violence a significant increase in frontline numbers is required as a matter of urgency.

As I have said already, the government has not committed to any extra police, from the figures available thus far it has not provided any extra police and it has failed to make Victoria Police a priority when it comes to resource allocation. I will touch on some of the areas where, through this lack of investment by the government, we are starting to see some issues emerge and where some issues have been emerging now for months.

The police association was very clear in what it wanted late last year. It basically wanted what the coalition government had done in the preceding four years repeated. It was calling for an additional 1880 sworn members over the next four years. In particular it identified some of the growth corridors as being critically short of police and needing a significant injection of police into the future. For example, to use the analysis of the association, in the City of Casey there were 165 first response police officers in 2014. The population of Casey is due to grow to 313 000 by 2019, up from 276 000. Using a benchmark of 102 first response police officers per 100 000 population as a ratio, which is what has been advocated by the police association, by 2019 an extra 155 police would be needed in the City of Casey alone. In the City of Wyndham an extra 159 police would be required; in the City of Whittlesea an extra 110 would be required; in the City of Hume, an extra 62; in the City of Maribyrnong, an extra 32; in the City of Melton, an extra 81; and in the Shire of Cardinia, an extra 36.

We have seen that these challenges are manifesting themselves now. The local press has recently reported calls from the City of Casey for additional police and the prospect of an additional police station in the Clyde area, but we do not need to wait until 2019 to see some of those pressures evolve. I will touch on some of the police stations where services are being cut and reduced. Before I touch on this group of stations, this is by no means a criticism of the Chief Commissioner of Police, because the job of government is to give the chief commissioner the resources needed to respond to the issues identified. The chief commissioner can only deal with the resources with which they are provided. What is clear from the examples I am about to provide is that Victoria Police is not being given the resources it needs.

Ashburton police station has a long history. During the time of the former member for Burwood in the Assembly, Bob Stensholt, the number of police at Ashburton police station was cut. When the former Labor government lost office, the hours of the Ashburton police station had been reduced. The then member, Mr Stensholt, took some comfort that the

station was not closed and was still open on a part-time basis. Nonetheless, the station had its hours significantly reduced. As a result of the advocacy of the current member for Burwood and the extra resources that the former coalition government delivered to Victoria Police, in 2013 the Ashburton police station was restored to a seven-day-a-week police station. For seven days a week the community had the comfort of knowing that the police station was open and able to respond to community issues and needs.

Last month, on 20 September, the station was back to being open just two days a week. The community of Ashburton has gone from having a station that is open seven days a week, thanks to the recruitment, training and deployment of those 1900 extra police, to one that is open just two days a week. The people of Ashburton will only be able to access their local police station on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which will be a significant disappointment to many members of that Ashburton community. Given the advocacy of the Ashburton Traders Association, its former president and others in 2013 for the station to open seven days a week, it is extremely disappointing that services have now been cut back to just two days a week. But there are many more examples of this, unfortunately.

The coalition government committed \$16 million for a new police station at Somerville. The Mornington Peninsula community continues to grow, and the broader Frankston-Mornington Peninsula area has grown substantially in recent years. I pay tribute to Neale Burgess, the member for Hastings in the other place, for his tireless and continuous advocacy for improved and additional resources for Victoria Police and specifically for a police station at Somerville.

Wade Noonan, as the Minister for Police, and Daniel Andrews, as the Premier of Victoria, quite possibly are the first minister and Premier to oversee the completion of construction of a police station that is not open to the public. Because of the lack of resources provided to Victoria Police, Somerville police station is not open to the community. It is a purpose-built building, designed as a police station with a front counter. It was designed to discharge all the functions of a police station, with the best modern techniques and design features across the station infrastructure. But now under the leadership of Minister Noonan, it is a police building that is closed to the public. This purpose-built police station cost \$16 million of taxpayers funds, and it is closed because of the Labor government's failure to provide enough resources to Victoria Police. The Somerville community is absolutely outraged at this development.

We also have now a number of 24-hour police stations that, as I am advised, do not have the resources to remain open on a 24-hour basis. I have heard reports that stations such as Reservoir, Epping and Greensborough are not open — —

**Ms Mikakos** interjected.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — The minister may want to make light of the fact that a 24-hour station in her electorate is not open for 24 hours a day. It is actually a — —

**Ms Mikakos** — It is an operational decision. Are you saying that the minister has made that decision?

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — I am happy to take up the minister's defence of the fact that a 24-hour police station in her electorate is now not open 24 hours a day because of her government's failure. She is a cabinet minister — —

**Ms Mikakos** interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr)** — Order! Minister!

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — The minister sits at the cabinet table where the allocation of resources to the various parts of the Victorian government is decided as part of the budget process.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr)** — Order! Enough is enough. The member has the call.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — As I said in the preamble to this part of my contribution, the chief commissioner deals with the resources that he is provided by government.

This government has not made Victoria Police a priority. It has not given Victoria Police the resources it needs, and we are now seeing the consequences. The Minister for Families and Children has a 24-hour police station in her electorate that can no longer be open on an a 24-hour basis, and she is trying to defend that. I suggest to the minister that she put her energy towards ensuring, as a minister sitting at the cabinet table, that in the future Victoria Police has the resources it requires — —

**Mr Finn** — You can't allocate something you haven't got.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — I thank Mr Finn for his — —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr)** — Order! Mr Finn! Both sides!

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — We have a most concerning development where 24-hour police stations in various locations are being forced to shut, often at 11.00 p.m., due to understaffing because of the lack of resources. This is not just happening in metropolitan Melbourne. We understand that the Stawell police station, a 24-hour police station, is also closing at various times because of a lack of resources and a lack of numbers to keep it open 24 hours a day.

We have a growing population. We have growing challenges with ice and family violence. The government has so far failed to deliver to Victoria Police the resources it needs to maintain operating hours at a range of police stations and to provide the resources for Victoria Police to grow and invest in our growth corridors and other areas where additional police are required.

I will touch on some of the initiatives that the government says respond to Victoria Police's challenges. I am sure that government members will touch on the custody officers program. We will have a more fulsome debate when that legislation, which is being debated in the other place this week, comes before the house, but I will touch on it briefly. At a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing, the Minister for Police, Mr Noonan, said that he looked forward to the recruitment and deployment of custody officers early in the 2015–16 year. In his press release of 5 May he said that custody officers will be deployed this year.

Here we are in October; the custody officers legislation has not passed the Parliament, the training has not begun and the first deployment will not take place until next year. The timetable was set by the government — not 18 months or two years ago while in opposition but just a few months ago in government, with the resources of government and the full knowledge of and full briefing on all the issues around implementation. Already, according to its own benchmarks of just a few months ago, the government has failed. The custody officer program is behind time already.

The minister promised before the election, and reaffirmed that promise in January, to upgrade the country radio system at a cost of \$10 million. We learnt in the budget the true cost of that program: \$35 million. Where does the minister expect Victoria Police to find the money? Is the minister providing the \$35 million to

Victoria Police through the budget? No. Because of the minister's inability to properly cost the project, with a cost blowout from \$10 million to \$35 million, the government is providing only \$11 million and forcing Victoria Police to reprioritise \$23 million. At a time when 24-hour police stations cannot open for 24 hours a day and there is a brand-new police station that is closed to the public, provides no counter service and is a police building not a police station, the minister is expecting the chief commissioner to cover the minister's financial blunders to the tune of \$23.8 million. It is an absolute disgrace. If the minister cannot get his maths right and cannot properly cost a project, he should not expect the chief commissioner to pick up the tab and find the money, particularly at a time when the police have not been given the budget they need to respond to the challenges that they have.

This takes me to the next point. I will pick up a previous interjection from Ms Shing on Homesafe, Labor's late-night transport plan.

**Ms Shing** — No, my interjection was not about that. Don't verbal me!

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — I am getting to it, Ms Shing — don't worry.

Homesafe, costed conservatively, according to the Premier — \$50 million, no problem. It turns out in the budget that the government was out by \$33 million. A \$50 million project was costed at \$83 million. What about the PSOs for Homesafe? Will they be on all stations, as was coalition policy on late-night train services? No. The government has rolled back the PSO policy — as part of Homesafe, PSOs will only be available at premium stations.

In summary the government has done little. It has failed to make policing a priority when it comes to the budget and to providing the chief commissioner with the resources he needs. The things the government has tried to do it has not done on budget or on time. Rather than taking responsibility for that and delivering the resources needed, particularly with the country radio program, it is forcing the chief commissioner to find the money. It is an absolute disgrace to force the chief commissioner to find \$23 million when the police budget is under pressure and challenge from a range of competing priorities.

I will make a final point about the challenges Victoria Police confronts, and Minister Noonan confirmed it today in question time in the Assembly. The two-up policy is creating resourcing challenges for Victoria Police. I do not second-guess, and it is not my position

to second-guess the decisions of the chief commissioner. The operational environment has significantly changed, and we have seen numerous examples of heightened threats to Victoria Police. What has Labor done to respond to the resource implications of the two-up policy? It has been put to me that the resource implications equate to hundreds of extra police officers. What has Labor done? It has not provided, on the most recent figures, even one extra police officer in Victoria. There were 13 151 in November 2014; in June 2015, the most recent figures available, there were 13 151 — not one extra police officer.

At a time when the Premier could find hundreds of millions of dollars not to build a road, \$20 million for a new logo and money for a range of other priorities that are a much lower priority than community safety, Victoria Police is not being provided with the resources and the investment it requires. It is time that Labor got its priorities right. It is time that Labor gave Victoria Police the resources it needs to respond to the changed operating environment and to the challenges of ice, family violence and terrorism, as well as to the challenges of a growing community. I call on government members to articulate how the government is going to provide those extra resources and that extra investment that Victoria Police needs.

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria) — In response to today's motion on police resources, I will start with the indisputable facts. Under the coalition crime went up. The prison population exploded, with more people returning to prison following their release more often. Crime across Victoria rose every single year of the Liberal-Nationals government. This followed years of decline under the previous Labor government. In the coalition's four years we had crime in Victoria increasing by 20 per cent. Crime against the person was up by nearly one-third and drug crimes were up by 75 per cent. With crime going up, it was astonishing to many that the Victoria Police budget was going down. Police officers were being forced to do more work with less support and fewer resources. Slogans and titles do not make up for an absence of good, effective policy and resourcing, particularly in the area of policing and with the irrefutable statistics before us.

I am happy to take up Mr O'Donohue's invitation to use the debate on this motion to outline the Andrews government's plans for restoring our policing system. The Andrews Labor government will return hundreds of police to the beat as part of its \$226.2 million plan to keep our community safe. The plan will get them out of offices and onto the streets where they are needed and indeed meant to be. This plan was detailed in our first budget and demonstrates our commitment to give

Victorian police the resources they need to do their jobs effectively. It is a pretty popular policy when I visit police stations with watch houses. It means those officers are no longer going to be forced to babysit those prisoners. In fact they can get back onto the beat and do the job they were drawn to in the first place.

Labor has a pretty good track record of delivering Victoria Police the resources it needs. In the May 2010–11 state budget Labor committed to and funded 1966 additional police for the front line. While the opposition often claims credit for these officers, they were funded by the previous Labor government. In the first budget of the Andrews Labor government we delivered a record \$2.5 billion police budget. This is an increase of 3.2 per cent.

Before his resignation, respected former Chief Commissioner of Police, Ken Lay, said:

We have spent the past four years being tough on crime. Perhaps it is time that we changed the debate to get smart on crime. Last election [2010] turned into a Dutch auction on police numbers. First it was 1500 then it was 1600 then 1700 and 940 protective service officers.

But not once did anyone come to police command and ask what was best for the organisation.

**Ms Crozier** — I don't think that's right.

**Ms SYMES** — I was directly quoting the former commissioner of police, Ken Lay. I can provide Ms Crozier with the quote.

Labor is committed to taking this advice. It is a simplistic argument to link population growth with the requirement for additional police. It is not an argument we would use in any other field. We certainly do not use it in the case of nurses, for instance. We will work with Victoria Police to hear what resources it needs, rather than getting into a police numbers bidding war now or on the eve of an election. At any one time there are 400 police babysitting prisoners in police cells. Addressing this was a Labor commitment before the election that was matched by the coalition government just a couple of weeks before the election last year. As I have indicated, the creation of custody officers will release 400 frontline police back into the community where they can focus on tackling crime and keeping the community safe.

In less than 12 months since coming to government we have committed to an increase of over 600 police personnel. I will detail those now. In addition to the redeployment of 400 police officers by virtue of the police custody officers policy, we will add more than 170 police personnel to implement the Homesafe trial,

which is the 24-hour public transport program for Friday and Saturday nights. These staff will work throughout the night at stations and, importantly, on the trains to make sure that commuters get home safely. There will be additional sworn officers as part of the newly established Corrections Victoria serious sex offenders unit. This unit responds to risks posed by serious sex offenders. There are an additional 15 sworn members to address community need in the Geelong-Bellarine region, which I am sure Mr Ramsay will come to. We have eight additional forensic scientists going to the forensic drug branch to help police. These scientists provide police with vital intelligence to track down drug dealers and close drug labs. These police personnel reflect the need for a modern police force that responds to what Victoria Police identifies as emerging areas of crime.

Much has been said about the opening hours of some stations, and I will touch on that briefly. I concur with Minister Mikakos in that I would not like to be questioning operational decisions of police except in terms of how they affect me and my family, and I question putting police officers at the front counter of a police station in a country town or a suburb. I have never gone to a police station to seek help at 3 o'clock in the morning. People normally call the police, so it is better if those police are out in their cars patrolling the streets. Fortunately I have had very few occasions when I have had to call for police assistance, but the couple of times I have been in that situation they have come pretty quickly because they were in their cars and near where I was. This is not because they were waiting behind the desk for a call or for someone to walk in and ask a question.

Another aspect of our comprehensive policy on policing and listening to police is our commitment to deliver a secure digital radio network across Victoria. Then acting chief commissioner, Tim Cartwright, mentioned at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings earlier this year that this was his no. 1 priority in giving police the resources they need. More than the resourcing and logistics of operational policing, this is a way of committing to a plan that addresses the root causes of crime.

One such area is that of family violence, which is absorbing an extraordinary number of police hours. I commend our modern police force for the way it responds to family violence. I have had the opportunity to speak to officers working in family violence divisions and this work is not the second cousin of police work that it used to be. It is a career decision for many police officers now and they see it as an important function for a police officer. It is a unit that is

attracting high-calibre, talented officers. I thank them for their work in that sector. It is obviously very important due to the demand; during 2014 Victoria Police attended to over 60 000 family violence incident reports.

With family violence constituting 40 per cent of police work, it is important to look at not just policies that are police related but policies that go across government areas that can also help to prevent family violence from happening. Labor appointed Australia's first ever Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence to put a title to a real issue that was taken up by the Labor opposition and the now Premier, Daniel Andrews. We are also delivering Australia's first Royal Commission into Family Violence. It is investigating the entire system from the ground up, and we are hoping it will give us the answers we need to change our broken support system. Hopefully this will in turn take some pressure off our hardworking police, and we look forward to receiving recommendations by the end of year.

We are also trialling security upgrades for families at risk, including duress alarms and CCTV. This will have a direct impact on police resourcing as well because it can reduce call-outs, it can make women feel safer, there will be less false alarms and there will be deterrents to keep perpetrators away from victims, so in turn that will hopefully reduce some of the burden on our police officers. These things are true crime prevention initiatives.

The other issue I want to touch on briefly is the other blight on our community. It is destroying lives as well as absorbing police resources, social resources and family resources, and it is causing havoc across Victoria, particularly in country Victoria. It is the prevalence of ice use. The number of ice-related deaths has more than tripled in the past three years. Upon coming to office the Labor government was very quick to act and has now delivered the *Ice Action Plan*, developed with the input of Victoria Police. There is an investment of \$45.5 million for targeted and strategic responses, focused on getting to the root cause and delivering solutions that will turn this mess around.

Some of the policy outcomes connected to that are new offences, new penalties and more resources for police. We are investing \$17.7 million for new drug and booze buses, which will also result in 200 000 random roadside drug tests over the next two years. Users of ice are driving on our roads as we speak. One in 10 people who are drug tested are coming up with illicit drugs in their system, so not only will this investment hopefully detect more drug-affected drivers but it will also have

the other effect of deterring drug users from getting behind the wheel because there will be a very obvious presence on our roads of booze buses and police trying to stamp out this dangerous practice. I have already mentioned the additional staff for the forensic drug branch, and they are going to help close down clandestine drug labs more quickly. That is an outline of some of things we are doing in this space.

Coming back to the motion, specifically in relation to police numbers, the recently tabled Victoria Police annual report in itself disproves the premise of this motion. If you look at page 68 of the report, it shows that on 30 June 2015 there were 13 151.7 full-time equivalent police officers, 1186.7 full-time equivalent protective services officers and 2698.8 full-time equivalent unsworn Victoria public service (VPS) employees. This is an increase of 137.6 sworn staff and 107.8 VPS staff and reservists, or a total of 245.4 additional police personnel compared to 30 June in the previous year.

Labor has plans. We have already commenced delivering many of those for police. We are about real action, delivering measurable and effective results for our valued police personnel and the community. Ultimately we want to make Victoria more safe. I always welcome discussions about crime safety and police, but this motion as it stands is really scraping the bottom of the barrel, and I will not be supporting it.

**Ms CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to rise to speak to this excellent motion that has been put forward by Mr O'Donohue. This motion notes that when the coalition left government there were 13 151 equivalent full-time sworn police officers in Victoria and that as of June 2015 those exact same numbers remain. It also notes the failures of the Andrews Labor government to add any additional police, despite the fact that we know our population is increasing by close to 100 000 people each year.

That is a really important point which I will return to in a moment, but to go to other elements of the motion, it talks about the priorities of this government in spending money on compensation not to build a road, meaning the east-west link. The need for that road is becoming more evident each and every day. When I speak to people out in the south-eastern suburbs they tell me about this. In fact I had somebody come to visit me today, and it took 1 hour and 40 minutes for them to get from Berwick to the Parliament this morning. Finally, the motion notes that the failure of Labor to invest in more police stands in stark contrast to the coalition's record of 1900 additional police and 950 protective services officers during its term in office.

As Mr O'Donohue rightly pointed out, there are challenges within our community that we as a community face and that certainly the police have to deal with each and every day — in fact they are dealing with these situations each minute. Ms Symes made reference to the ice scourge. She acknowledged the increase in ice addiction and the associated issues and problems that ice is causing. It is leading to dramatic violent activity by ice users and resulting in terrible crimes. There are stories of ice addicts going into our hospitals and abusing doctors, nurses, police officers and paramedics, so it is a real problem. Ice is a dreadful problem of the modern era. Other issues of the modern era that we are seeing too frequently are the threat of terrorism and family violence, which is an area of particular concern to me as the shadow Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence.

The police — that is, the men and women who do a terrific job in keeping our community safe — face those challenges each and every day in Victoria, and they need to be recognised and supported. Governments of any persuasion need to give police the capacity and powers to enforce the law. Once that breaks down, all hell breaks loose. If you have a weakened police force or do not give the police force appropriate levels of support in resourcing or other assistance, it can lead to many difficulties, as we know.

I was pleased to be part of a government that delivered an additional 1900 police. We said we would get 1700 police into the force, and we delivered 1900, as well as 950 protective services officers, as the motion states. They are additional policemen and policewomen who are protecting Victorians each and every day.

Lack of planning is becoming a bit of a theme with this government — with Labor governments all round, actually. They govern for today. We are seeing it just 11 months in, and you can tell by the comments. To digress slightly from the motion and talk about the issues of today, the Melbourne Metro rail tunnel has no business case and no money behind it. The government is going out — goodness knows what it is announcing tomorrow — and taking on large projects, when we know it does not have a tremendously strong record on delivering large and complex projects, and this is another example. To not have a business case and to have no funding behind it is extraordinary. I am not surprised by the lack of planning for our increasing population and the challenges that need to be met by police.

Returning to the area of family violence and looking at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Victoria Police protocol for family violence

referrals, the police have a huge number of challenges. We know the numbers have gone up in recent times, and they have done so for a number of reasons. People are more confident in reporting, and there is greater attention in the community with the likes of Rosie Batty and the campaign she is undertaking, bravely raising awareness right across the country. I commend her for her actions. We also have the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, which is allowing people to report their issues to police, so the police are experiencing an increase in demand, as one would expect.

If you look at the protocols, you see that the police have to go through a risk and threat assessment. The protocol states:

The Victoria Police code of practice for the investigation of family violence states that police will respond to and take action on any family violence incident reported to them. The action taken is based on an assessment of the risks and threats, regardless of whether the affected family member makes a verbal complaint or written statement.

The risk assessment tool used by police is compatible with the common risk assessment and risk management framework ... used by family violence services funded by DHHS.

If you go through the protocol further, you see that for these risk assessments and referrals there are flowcharts that show how the police assessments are done, the action or the contact and then the service response. They are complex and necessary responses and actions by the police in relation to the family violence incidents being reported to them. Those numbers are on the increase, as I said. Here in Victoria and across the country there is one incident every 8 minutes or so being reported to police, so there is huge demand on our police from that issue alone.

There is an expectation from the community and from women or whoever is reporting family violence; it does not matter whether it is a man, woman or child. Whoever is reporting incidents of family violence needs to be taken seriously, and the reports need to be acted upon. The police need to respond appropriately, get the services to those individuals and ensure that they are safe from harm's way. The police do a tremendous job, but they cannot do it if those numbers are increasing on top of all their other demands. Police stations are being closed and protocols, policies, legislation and other government demands are putting constraints on the police force.

To look at what is happening, I go to the crime statistics released in June. The June figures from the Victorian Crime Statistics Agency for the 12 months to March 2015 show that 69 442 family-related incidents were

recorded, an increase of 8.2 per cent. There were 1166.9 family-related incidents per 100 000 people, up 6.2 per cent. If there is a population increase of 100 000 people each year, you can expect those figures to go up, as is pretty evident. The total number of recorded offences rose from 452 209 to 458 027. Stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour offences rose from 10 686 to 11 936, an increase of 11.7 per cent. Theft offences declined, which was good news, as did robbery offences, but breaches of orders rose by 48.1 per cent. Those increases — for whatever reasons they are occurring — are significant in relation to the motion we are talking about, because they demonstrate that we need additional resources.

As I mentioned, the Labor government has put into place not one extra police officer, and I do not know what it expects the community to do. The government's recent stance on Ashburton police station is unbelievably hypocritical. As from 20 September the Ashburton police station is only open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., despite a campaign by a number of Labor Party members, including a former Assembly member for Burwood, Bob Stensholt, who lost that seat on this issue.

This was a huge issue in Ashburton in 2010. Hundreds and hundreds of people put their signatures to a petition calling for Ashburton police station to remain open, and Bob Stensholt lost his seat as a result. Now he is the chief of staff to the Minister for Police. He ran a campaign during the federal election with the Assembly member for Bendigo East, Wesa Chau and a couple of others to keep the police station open. That petition, despite everything that was being promised by the coalition government, was handed to the Assembly member for Burwood, Graham Watt, three days before the unveiling of the coalition's promise, which it delivered, to have Ashburton police station open seven days a week between 9.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m.

Now it has been cut to just two days a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays. As I said, the former member who ran that campaign and who is now the chief of staff to the police minister should know better. It is an absolute disgrace when we have family violence issues on the rise. Where do the people of Ashburton, Burwood and the surrounding areas go? They want to attend a police station to speak to someone so those very important family violence protocols can be followed.

In conclusion, although I could speak for a lot longer on this important motion, this is a very good motion put to the house today by Mr O'Donohue. Unfortunately I do not have the luxury of time, but I commend him for

moving this motion, and I commend the motion to the house.

**Mr RAMSAY** (Western Victoria) — It is a pleasure to be able to make a very small contribution to this debate in the little amount of time we have left today. I thank Ms Crozier for leaving me with 3 minutes to make a contribution to the debate on the very good motion moved by Ed O'Donohue. It was a delight to have Mr O'Donohue in Colac a couple of weeks ago with the Liberal candidate for the Assembly seat of Polwarth, Richard Riordan, who committed, if elected to Parliament, to a new 24-hour police station in Colac. The current police station is an essential piece of infrastructure that has aged and is now at the end of its useful life.

As Ms Crozier did, I acknowledge the importance of policing, particularly in the Colac region, given the escalation of the use of methamphetamines, or ice as we know it. I was really pleased to see the Liberal candidate for Polwarth, Richard Riordan, announce a new ice action plan for the Colac district if and when he is elected to the Legislative Assembly. That makes two important announcements in the Colac region over the last few weeks by this candidate and the shadow Minister for Police, Mr O'Donohue.

I will take this opportunity to briefly talk about policing in the Bellarine and Geelong districts. As we know, and as Ms Crozier and Mr O'Donohue both indicated, the incidence of crime and robbery on the Bellarine has increased significantly to levels not seen in the area's history. We suspect some of that might be taking place in the region's emerging satellite suburbs, like Armstrong Creek, which is testament to the fact that we need more police on the Bellarine and more police in the Geelong region. Superintendent Darryl Clifton indicated to us that there has been an escalation of serious crime in the Geelong region. He is able to allocate only the resources he is given by the government to cover the large section of western Victoria in the Geelong command district.

It is interesting to note that prior to the last election the member for Bellarine in the Legislative Assembly, Lisa Neville, committed to staffing three police stations on the Bellarine — Drysdale, Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff — with 16-hour police services. As we now know, she has not been able to deliver that commitment. In fact she is trying to wriggle her way out of fulfilling the promise she made to the Bellarine community and is starting to make noises about it being the responsibility of police command.

We know that police command is wanting to, as Ms Symes indicated, apply resources where they best meet purpose and certainly to patrols rather than leaving police stuck in police stations. In fact with the new two-man requirement, if Ms Neville were to be successful in having police resources tied up, we might end up with a situation in which two police persons would be staffing small police stations for 16 hours, which would in effect take police resources off patrol. To my mind if some of those police stations receive only one or two inquiries per day, that would tie up the resources of two police in those little country police stations, taking them away from patrols. This seems to me to be a ridiculous waste of resources. That was the commitment Lisa Neville made before the election, and I will be interested to see if she is able to stick to that promise down the track.

Ms Crozier indicated that the use of illicit drugs, particularly crystal meth, is a problem right across Victoria, and I concur.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn)** — Order! I am afraid that I must interrupt, as disappointed as I am to do so, to go to statements on reports and papers.

**Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.**

## STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

### Goulburn Valley Health: report 2014–15

**Ms LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) — I rise to speak on the Goulburn Valley Health annual report for 2014–15 entitled *Healthy Communities*. Normally we would say that it gives us pleasure to stand and speak on such a report, and while this is a very well put together report — Goulburn Valley Health has a fantastic board, or it did have a fantastic board until this government started to mess with it, along with a tremendous CEO — it is disappointing to read on page 5, alongside a picture of the gorgeous Aimee Howarth, who works in early childhood intervention services at the hospital, a section on hospital self-sufficiency. It reads:

The current level of self-sufficiency (the percentage of people from the hospital catchment area that receive services from the hospital) is low at 73 per cent.

That means that more than one in four people from the Goulburn Valley Health catchment area who present at the hospital need to access health services elsewhere. By elsewhere, the alternative could be hundreds of kilometres away — it could be in Melbourne or it could be in Bendigo — and 27 per cent of all people in the Goulburn Valley Health catchment area need to access

health services elsewhere. Goulburn Valley Health aims to grow its level of self-sufficiency to 86 per cent over the next 10 years, and the report says that 86 per cent is equivalent to self-sufficiency levels at other regional health services.

Self-sufficiency is very low at Goulburn Valley Health at the moment at 73 per cent, and that really does highlight the need for a redevelopment of its Shepparton campus hospital, but Goulburn Valley Health does not seem to have the attention of the government at the moment. The government announced in June, about 18 or 19 weeks ago, that it would set up a committee to give the community input into a redevelopment. It was only after I raised the fact that three months had passed that the government finally advertised for members. Applications for membership closed on 18 September, and five weeks later people still have not heard whether their applications have been received or whether they are to be interviewed or part of the advisory group.

People in Shepparton are not confident that this government will redevelop our hospital. Even the member for Shepparton in the Assembly has conceded that the government will not invest in our hospital. She has called on the coalition to commit to stage 1 of the hospital at the next election. The coalition committed to stage 1 at the last election, and our commitment is on the record to redevelop Goulburn Valley Health. The only people who do not have a commitment to that hospital are members of the current Labor government.

Getting back to the annual report and the low self-sufficiency at 73 per cent, when we look behind what constitutes that 73 per cent, we find an even more disappointing story. Only 41 per cent of locals can access general medicine services at the hospital; renal medicine is as low as 39 per cent; medical oncology, lower again at 38 per cent; interventional cardiology is at zero, we do not have cardiology services in Shepparton; general surgery, only 52 per cent; orthopaedics, as low as 34 per cent, so 66 per cent of people are having to access orthopaedic services outside Shepparton, maybe hundreds of kilometres away; and gynaecology, 31 per cent, so 69 per cent of women are having to go outside the area to get those services. This highlights the need for redevelopment. It also shows that the government is underinvesting in health services in Shepparton.

This week I have raised a number of issues around the failure to appoint members to the advisory committee and whether the government will get that up and going in time for them to have input. Certainly if the government were considering funding stage 1 in next

year's budget, the business case needs would need to be completed by December, and we are not going to see much input from a community advisory group that has not even been appointed yet.

I have also raised the need for publicly funded radiotherapy services in Shepparton. We are the only one of the top five regional cities in Victoria that does not have access to publicly funded radiography services within our own community. They are available at Wodonga, Bendigo, Geelong, Ballarat and Warrnambool — —

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn)** — Order! Ms Lovell's time has expired.

**Auditor-General: *Delivering Services to Citizens and Consumers via Devices of Personal Choice — Phase 2***

**Mr ELASMAR** (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report *Delivering Services to Citizens and Consumers via Devices of Personal Choice — Phase 2*. The digital age has not arrived yet, it would seem. While there appears to be a view that the citizenry of Melbourne is up for digital service delivery, it would appear that the Victorian public sector is not aligned with this goal. Maybe it is because of a lack of up-to-date software, hardware and technology, or that legal constraint — for instance, proof of identity requirements — insufficient information technology systems and inefficient back-office processes have stymied many government agencies from moving forward.

The logical conclusion would be to move towards a single identity card for all citizens. This is without doubt a hot political issue, as most of us in the chamber will remember the furore caused during the Keating Labor government's time in office when it was first proposed. The civil libertarians went berserk. However, some government agencies are up to the mark. For instance, if you asked the average person whether they would rather get in a line at VicRoads and wait their turn to access services or access those services online from the comfort of their own home or office, I am pretty certain the answer would be the latter. In fact VicRoads has a great digital service and most people are happy with it.

There are some other agencies which have embraced the delivery of digital services. Licensing of vehicles, public housing applications and working with children checks can all be accessed online, which is definitely more efficient.

The report states:

Not all departments and agencies had baseline digital service delivery performance targets. They also displayed different approaches and levels of maturity in implementing monitoring and reporting approaches to measure their digital service delivery performance.

On that basis we are not ready to fully automate our service delivery, but it would seem that a fair number of agencies are providing fast, efficient and cost-effective services to the people who know what they want and how to get it.

The Auditor-General has made some recommendations that talk about consultation and collaboration between departments and agencies with a view to identifying an integrated process of proof of identity verification. This should enable a clear strategy to be implemented for future digital service delivery programs. The recommendations from this report should apply across the board to all Victorian departments and agencies. The implementation of a statewide digital service delivery program will not happen without its imprimatur.

**Hesse Rural Health: report 2015**

**Mr RAMSAY** (Western Victoria) — It gives me great pleasure to speak on Hesse Rural Health service's annual report. I want to do so because this health service is very close to my heart and my home — in fact it covers health services to Rokewood, Beec, Winchelsea, Moriac and Bannockburn. Compared to other health services across Victoria, it is a small health service. The service is now 21 years old and is a community initiative to sustain health service delivery in the rural areas which I have identified, and it demonstrates with excellence how health care provided in the local community is essential to rural wellbeing.

My statement will focus on how a small health service can provide excellent health care to the areas that I have identified, within its budget, and how it prioritises different health services, including aged care and dementia in particular. Given the service's geography, it has quite a large aged-care population within its service delivery area, and it is pleasing to see that the quality of care that Hesse Rural Health Service is providing is second to none.

I congratulate the service's president, John Carr, and CEO, Peter Birkett, on a wonderful year, as indicated in the annual report. It is interesting to note that while many health services are struggling under budgetary constraints and pressures, Hesse healthcare service in 2011 was showing a deficit over \$500 000 in operating

costs, yet in 2015 its deficit had shrunk to \$63 000. Obviously there has been very tight fiscal management within the service itself as well as providing and expanding its health services, so what a credit to the service. The staff, the upper management and the volunteers all play a significant role in the service.

With the extension of natural gas to Winchelsea, the duplication of the highway and the growth corridor that that will provide in relation to population shift, the health service is able to expand next door. Having the hospital auxiliary close by adds significant support to the service. Members of the hospital auxiliary are very active in their volunteer work providing supplementary funding, a range of activities right across the service area and general support to the board and the staff at the Hesse health service. The service itself set up a consumer and community advisory committee which provides direct linkages from the community to the board. That has been very successful since its implementation.

The work the service has been doing in relation to its aged-care reforms has been recognised not only within the local health service area but also by the government and the department. A number of awards have been received by Hesse health service in relation to its work in aged care and the reforms it carried through.

I do not want to spend a lot of time on this report tonight, but I want to acknowledge the work that the service has done and acknowledge that the input from the local community has been part of the success and the significant reforms the service has made. Regarding accreditation the community care common standards are a national safety — —

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn)** — Order! The member's time has expired.

### **Ombudsman: investigation into allegations of improper conduct by officers of VicRoads**

**Mr EIDEH** (Western Metropolitan) — I would like to speak on the Victorian Ombudsman's investigation into allegations of improper conduct by officers of VicRoads, a report which identifies an embedded culture of the VicRoads transport safety services unit ignoring the legislation that we the public entrust them to enforce to uphold road safety. I thank the Ombudsman and her team for investigating this serious problem and bringing it to the Parliament's attention through this report.

This investigation came as a result of a protected disclosure complaint referred by IBAC to the

Ombudsman's office in 2014. The complaint alleged that it is 'normal practice' for VicRoads transport safety services staff caught speeding in VicRoads vehicles to avoid a fine by claiming unjustifiable exemptions — basically, that some VicRoads staff within the transport safety services team are breaking Victorian road rules with impunity.

The Victorian road rules that restrict speeding are in place to protect the safety of the Victorian public. They are not in place for rogue operators to ignore when they see fit. Road safety should be every single road user's priority. What is most disconcerting is that the investigation found that the allegation was substantiated. It found that enforcement officers routinely exceeded the set speed limit in VicRoads vehicles, not displaying lights or sirens, which is a special exemption under the road safety rules. Even more disconcerting is that the process for investigating infringements and approving exemptions for the offending officers has been highlighted as seriously deficient. When exemptions were granted, they were approved with minimal or no evidence or rationale.

I was shocked to read that those in charge of leading the team — senior staff — were not even aware of the road laws that clearly stipulate that sirens and lights are necessary. 'Worried' is not the right term. How can we expect those in the transport safety services team, which is responsible for ensuring that road users uphold the law, to perform their roles effectively if they are not aware of the rules they must themselves abide by?

I wish to highlight two points which are taken directly from the report:

... VicRoads enforcement officers bore no consequences despite committing offences for which any member of the public would get a ticket and points off their licence.

and:

VicRoads should be leading the way on road safety, and public servants should not forget that they lead by example.

I could not agree more. This 'normal practice' of exempting without adequate investigation VicRoads staff issued with infringements while driving VicRoads enforcement vehicles needs to end immediately. This culture of entitlement is putting the safety of Victorians at risk when on the roads. The Ombudsman has made four recommendations to VicRoads, and I hope these recommendations have been put in place. I am eager to see a follow-up report on this investigation. I commend the report to the house.

## Department of Treasury and Finance: budget papers 2015–16

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — I rise this evening to speak on the budget papers for this year. I think it is somewhat of a truism to say that Labor cannot handle money. We know that wherever Labor goes — whichever state, whether it be Victoria, the commonwealth or elsewhere — debt and economic calamity will follow. We just have to go back to the days of the Cain and Kirner governments here in Victoria when, if Victoria were a company, it would have gone into liquidation and members of the cabinet would have been locked up. To this day many people are of the view that they should have been. The governments of that time left Victoria in a state of economic ruin and budgetary disaster. That is something that Labor repeats over and over again. It is a pattern that we have to get used to, it seems. The Labor Party gets in and stuffs things up. The Liberal Party gets in and fixes them. Then Labor gets in and stuffs things up, and on it goes.

The Bracks and Brumby governments were well and truly on their way to a repeat performance of the Cain-Kirner years when they were turfed out in 2010. Now, after less than one year of the Andrews-Barber government, we have a situation where the government just seems to have no budgetary restraint or economic responsibility at all. Can one begin to imagine the impact on the budget of a \$1 billion hit for cancelling a project that is so desperately needed by so many people?

I ask members to consider for a moment those items in the budget that could have been boosted with that up to \$1 billion that was thrown away by the current government in an attempt to save a few seats in the inner city. It is just beyond comprehension how any government could be so irresponsible. You would not think even a Labor government could be that irresponsible. But sure enough, it most certainly is.

Just a few weeks ago I asked the Treasurer about another side of the impact of that decision — that is, the value to the Victorian economy of thousands of people sitting in traffic jams night and day. He got back to me yesterday with not even an attempt to answer the question. He rambled on about a number of potential projects that may or may not happen, but he made no attempt to put a value on the time of those tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Victorians who are stuck in traffic, as I have said, on a daily basis, morning and night.

It is time that this government got serious. It is time that members of the Andrews-Barber government came to the realisation that they are actually running the show — that they are actually responsible for much of what is going on in this state. They might like to deny it, but they in fact have a moral obligation to run this show in the best interests of Victorians — and they are not living up to that. That is something that every Victorian knows. Even the government's own people know. You can see by the internal ruminations of the ALP exactly how the true believers feel about a government that is so big on waste and that is so big on economic vandalism.

This is the most ideologically hardline left-wing government we have had in the history of Victoria. It makes Joan Kirner look like a softie. It is making a mess of the state, and I have absolutely no doubt that, the way things are going, by the time we get the opportunity to take over again in 2018, Victoria will be floating face down in the pool.

## Victoria Legal Aid: report 2014–15

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I rise this afternoon to speak on the annual report of Victoria Legal Aid entitled *Helping Victorians with their Legal Problems*. I have spoken on a number of occasions in this place on the Victoria Legal Aid organisation, as I take a particular interest in its progress and what it does, it being a very important aspect of our legal and justice system here in Victoria. Victoria Legal Aid is at the coalface of the justice system, and it is there supporting our most vulnerable citizens.

In the limited time that I have to speak on this report I would like to focus on family violence, an area where legal aid plays a crucial role. It is no secret that the organisation suffered financially as a result of the previous Liberal-Nationals government, and the impacts were very clear to see. It was a significant piece in the puzzle of what was failing in our justice system under the previous government.

Members in the chamber may recall and may have read — I know many on this side of the chamber have read it — the Auditor-General's report tabled in August last year entitled *Access to Legal Aid*. The report was on legal aid services in Victoria. At that time I spoke on that report, and it was a report that was very critical of the previous government's continued cuts to Victoria Legal Aid's budget, severely limiting its ability to provide crucial support in our communities, particularly in the area of family violence. Due to the severe cuts, there was an increasing number of family law matters in the courts where the participants were without legal

representation. On occasions when family violence issues were before the courts, the proceedings included victims of severe family violence being questioned by the perpetrator of that violence.

As stated on page 4 of the annual report, the organisation plays an important role in delivering information, advice and legal representation to women, men and children who are affected by family violence. To take money away from Legal Aid is to take money away from the fight against family violence.

During the reporting period, Victoria Legal Aid made a two-year multimillion-dollar commitment to provide more legal services to people affected by family violence. I congratulate it on this initiative. This is absolutely in line with this government's approach to tackling domestic violence. It goes without saying that legal aid is an important ally in fighting this stain on our society.

As further stated on page 4 of the report, Victoria Legal Aid also made a submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which includes 35 recommendations to improve the legal response to family violence. It is up to every single one of us to fight against the continued prevalence of family violence. In its submission Victoria Legal Aid points to a whole range of areas that need to be improved.

It is also the role of government to support the fight against family violence, and I am proud that this government is putting its money where its mouth is. It was only just last week that I had the great pleasure of announcing a grant of \$50 000 for Emma House Domestic Violence Services in the south-west, which is one of 28 recipients of the government's Community Legal Centre Assistance Fund. Emma House also received a second grant of over \$52 000 to provide for the part-time employment of a solicitor — three days per week — to address the increasing demand at the Portland and Hamilton courts.

Victoria Legal Aid and our community legal centres have a critical role to play in providing essential services to disadvantaged and vulnerable Victorians. The Andrews government knows this intimately and will continue to support legal aid in the way governments can and should. I commend the report to the house. But I wish to raise in the house tonight that there was a 19 per cent increase in the need for legal aid services in the area of child protection and family violence, and that is a very sore point indeed.

## Department of Health and Human Services: report 2014–15

**Ms CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) — This evening I would like to speak to the annual report for 2014–15 from the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services. It is a large and comprehensive report, and I will speak to elements of it. I note that the foreword states that the department was established as of 1 January, bringing together the staff and functions of the former Department of Human Services, Department of Health, and Sport and Recreation Victoria. While I can see some benefits to that, it nevertheless is a very large department. I have looked through a number of areas and I cannot see how many personnel are in the department as such, but I suppose over time we will see how the department will function with the new amalgamation.

Obviously the ongoing commitments of previous governments are contained within this report. The report states what the government's intentions are. The department's responsibilities include health, ambulance services, housing, disability, ageing, mental health, families and children, youth, sport and recreation.

There are a number of areas I want to comment on with regard to the past 12 months. One concerns something that is outlined in the annual report, and that is the expansion of the 'no jab, no play' commitment, the legislation for which we will be debating in the house again tomorrow. The annual report states that:

Legislation is to be introduced to change regulations around immunisations. It will require children to be fully vaccinated in order to attend child care and kindergarten.

This creates the perception that all children will be vaccinated. However, we know that a number of exemptions will apply, and therefore the statements that have been made by the government are not in line with the reality.

There are other issues in the report that I would like to point out, including the new ban on smoking outdoors. The previous Minister for Health, Mr Davis, is in the chamber. He led a lot of those reforms, and that antismoking bill had bipartisan support. Governments of all persuasions have tried to decrease smoking rates to protect the health of Victorians and in particular to dissuade young people from taking up smoking in an attempt to prevent many of the harmful and devastating effects of smoking.

Another issue discussed in the annual report that I would like to highlight is the 20th International AIDS Conference, which was held in Melbourne last July. I

believe this was the largest conference of its kind in the state.

**Mr Davis** — In Australia.

**Ms CROZIER** — In Australia — I thank Mr Davis for that correction. That is absolutely right. As Mr Davis and I recall, that was a very sad time because it coincided with the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17. Sadly some of the delegates coming to the conference were lost in the bringing down of that plane.

**Mr Davis** — Shooting down of the plane.

**Ms CROZIER** — Shooting down of that plane, exactly right. As we speak, we are finding out what happened.

That was an extraordinary conference. It brought together some terrific initiatives from around the world to look at the progress that has been made over time with regard to AIDS and HIV. It was very rewarding to be involved as the Parliamentary Secretary for Health.

I will probably have to speak further on this report at a later time because I have just noticed that I have only 40 seconds left. There are some figures in here that are pertinent to my shadow portfolio responsibilities in relation to child protection and family services. The figure for the average number of children in out-of-home care placements in 2014–15 was 8043, whereas for the year previous, 2013–14, it was 7283. There are many other figures with regard to child protection that I will be watching very closely. The government's investment and the strategies it has put in place to further protect children need to be undertaken — —

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn)** — Order! The member's time has expired.

### **Department of Treasury and Finance: budget papers 2015–16**

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise tonight in this statements on reports and papers section of the Council's proceedings to consider the state budget 2015–16 and in particular the section that deals with local government. I draw the Council's attention to the table in the budget papers that lays out state government payments to local councils across the state. The table shows that in this year's budget \$88 million less will be spent by the state government on supporting municipal councils across the state. An additional \$50 million will be spent on the 10 interface councils, but that still means there is a \$38 million

decrease in aggregate funding by state government of local councils across the state.

In that context the government tabled a bill in the Parliament today to set out its so-called rate capping approach. It is clear from a close reading of the bill and the second-reading speech that this is not rate capping of the type that was promised by the government at the last election. I will read from Labor's promise made on 5 May 2014:

Victorian Labor will force councils to cap their rates at consumer price index (CPI) and justify any further increases.

The CPI is a well-known figure. It is released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics from time to time. The last figure, for the period to 30 June this year, was a 1.1 per cent increase in the consumer price index in the Melbourne area from the year before. On average there has been a 3.8 per cent increase in council rate charges across Victoria. That is a breach of the government's promise to cap rates at the CPI at the first hurdle — in the first year. Make no mistake. The government already has the power under section 185 of the Local Government Act 1989 to cap rates as it sees fit. That is a power that has been used before, so we know it works, and it could have been used by the Minister for Local Government, Natalie Hutchins, in this financial year. Instead she breached the Labor Party's promise and allowed councils to increase rates beyond the CPI.

The Local Government Amendment (Fair Go Rates) Bill 2015, which has been introduced into the lower house, creates a whole new level of mischief. It is based on a decision to create a new index: an average rate cap, which is a new figure — not the CPI but a figure that is adjusted above or below the change forecast by the Department of Treasury and Finance. Flexibility regarding other matters, such as wage pressures, is to be taken into account where appropriate. This figure is derived from a forecast by the Department of Treasury and Finance — and I am quoting directly from the second-reading speech — 'plus or minus any adjustment specified by the minister'. Let us be quite clear what we are dealing with here: we are dealing with a new index, a new concoction, a new bogus index that is not the CPI, as was promised.

It is up to the minister what she declares. The minister gets material from the Essential Services Commission — and I will say more about it in a moment — but then she makes a decision on the basis of that concocted index which is not the CPI. The community knows what the CPI is. It is information put out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. There is only one CPI; there is not another bogus CPI that has been created under this legislation by the Andrews Labor

government in breach and direct defiance of its own election promise.

Let us go further on this and be quite clear about what we are dealing with here. The Essential Services Commission has brought forward a report. I suggest people read this long report, but it is clear that it is boffin-speak all the way through. This is an attempt to defy the government's election commitment to cap rates at the CPI. It is an attempt to create a bogus new index which is a way for the government to slide forward from its election commitment and not actually introduce what was promised. I have a lot of sympathy for councils. By and large they do a very good job, and it is very hard to keep their CPI-linked increases in place if they are having money torn out hand over fist by the state government. The Essential Services Commission chose not to focus on state government cuts. It was asked to. It did not have that in the terms of reference, but it was specifically drawn to its attention and it chose to cover up for the government's cuts — the country roads and bridges program, the cut overall in aggregate funding — —

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn)** — Order! The member's time has expired.

### **Regional Development Victoria: report 2014–15**

**Mr DRUM** (Northern Victoria) — My statement on reports deals with the Regional Development Victoria (RDV) annual report for 2014–15. This is quite a stark report, where we have the final five months of the coalition government mixed in with the first six months of the Labor government. Under highlights of the 2014–15 year it talks about what regional development is actually all about. It says:

Regional Development Victoria ... worked throughout the year to facilitate new investment, business growth and job creation, infrastructure development, and coordinate delivery of Victorian government regional development policy, planning and programs.

It goes on to talk about the highlights of what it has done. It says Regional Development Victoria used its expertise to develop the legislation, regulation and program design for the \$500 million Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund. So far it has got that fund organised but has not done anything about it. In the next highlight it talks about the launch of the program, so it has got the program organised, launched it but still has not done anything. It then collaborated with diverse regional stakeholders, including community groups and industry organisations, so it had a chat with all the stakeholders. Then it reviewed the effectiveness of the

current regional strategic planning model, so it has done some reviews.

In another highlight it states that it facilitated regional management forums led by departmental secretaries, so it conducted some more forums. It supported Rural Councils Victoria with networking. In another highlight it collaborated with Regional Cities Victoria on a framework, so, again, Labor has not done anything since it has been in government. RDV also interacted with regionally based businesses.

Then we come to some initiatives of the coalition that were in place. RDV continued to support structural adjustment and growth through place-based initiatives in the Goulburn Valley, the Latrobe Valley — both coalition programs — and Greater Geelong regions. Those industry adjustment programs were all begun under the coalition. Now we are getting to the crux of what RDV has been doing. It is still tagging on the back of coalition programs. It supported the intermodal freight terminal near Wodonga, which is another coalition program. It helped Luv-a-Duck at Nhill and Hardwick's in Kyneton, which are both coalition programs. It goes through a range of other coalition programs, where the RDV has actually done something. As for any initiative that actually might have helped some regional business, there is absolutely nothing in the annual report.

Towards the end of the highlights is the biggest doozy of all. As a highlight the report says RDV was able to attract over 10 000 visitors to the 2015 Regional Victoria Living Expo. Again, all this work was done, and all Regional Development Victoria had to do was turn up and welcome the people to:

... a three-day event at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre that showcased the benefits of living and investing in rural and regional Victoria.

The reason this is such a doozy is that the government has given regional and rural councils absolutely no assurance that the living expo is going to be held again in 2016 and beyond, without realising that with these delays the government is nearly condemning the expo to its death simply because councils are being given no time at all to be able to plan and block out the dates necessary for next year. If the government were serious about ensuring that the Regional Victoria Living Expo — a highlight in the 2015 annual report — is replicated in 2016 and beyond, it should effectively have already locked in the date and secured this expo for regional Victoria into the future.

The chief executive, in the foreword to the report, talks about how one of his substantial tasks was to establish

the legislation and policy basis for the new program. He then moves on to say how the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund is going to play a key part in this government's Back to Work strategy. The very first thing we know about the Back to Work strategy is that the government gave every Victorian two days off, but let us just talk about the grand final parade holiday. The government's first thing in relation to Back to Work was having a day off. The foreword then says that concurrent with establishing the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund RDV facilitated 124 projects that were up and running under the Regional Growth Fund, and it says how these programs — —

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn)** — Order! Regrettably, Mr Drum's time has expired.

## ADJOURNMENT

**Mr DALIDAKIS** (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### Warrnambool Base Hospital

**Ms WOOLDRIDGE** (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, Jill Hennessy, and the action I seek is that she go to Warrnambool and meet with the CEO of South West Healthcare. It is quite incredible that in the nearly 11 months this government has been in office the minister has not been down to Warrnambool. It is an important regional centre, and South West Healthcare plays an absolutely vital role in catering for about 110 000 people in south-western Victoria. It is the region's largest employer, with over 1300 staff, and it is the designated trauma centre for the whole of the south-west of Victoria.

It is important for the minister to meet with the CEO because not only is the coalition-funded south-west cancer centre about to be completed early next year but also there is a real need to progress the planning and for the organisation to receive funding for stage 2 of Warrnambool Base Hospital's capital redevelopment.

It was a great pleasure to be at Warrnambool Base Hospital just last week with Matthew Guy, the Leader of the Opposition in the other place, who was paying his second visit in a short period of time, and Roma Britnell, the Liberal candidate for South-West Coast — and what an excellent candidate she is. To her credit, Roma nursed at Warrnambool Base Hospital for about a decade. She said the emergency departments and theatres have not changed much since she was working there in the 1980s. That is exactly the point. Stage 2 of

the Warrnambool hospital redevelopment will build a new and expanded emergency department and operating theatre suite and refurbish the short-stay unit. Until you see it, you do not really understand the cramped conditions the doctors, nurses and other staff are working in. They do an exceptional job, but the conditions and the fabric of the emergency department and theatres are poor.

Roma, Matthew and I reaffirmed the former coalition government's commitment to fund stage 2 at a cost of about \$100 million, but it is important not to let the government sit by and do nothing in the interim period. The service plan and model of care report has been prepared, and now there needs to be master planning and a feasibility study review so that the planning for stage 2 can continue. This is a normal part of the process.

I ask the minister to visit the hospital, meet with the CEO, talk with the staff, see the building they are working in and support at least the ongoing planning to progress to a state so that stage 2 is ready for funding. The work has been done, the planning has been done and with the funding stage 2 of the Warrnambool hospital can be built. I request that the minister meet with the CEO and make a positive decision about the future of Warrnambool Base Hospital.

### Regional and rural roads

**Mr PURCELL** (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I do not think we have yet had enough discussion about roads in the south-west — even though we spent most of today on that topic — or even other issues in regard to the south-west. I thought I would take the opportunity to raise this matter, considering it may go off the boil after the by-election.

It has been a pleasure today to listen to the discussion of Mr Morris's motion in regard to roads in the south-west and hear the newborn love for the south-west and enthusiasm around some of our particular issues, including Tower Hill — and it is great to see that there is such a support for funding signage and even some new toilets.

Today we have heard coalition members condemn the government for neglecting the regional road network. They have identified Myamyn-Macarthur Road and Portland-Nelson Road as two of these major roads. I totally agree that the south-west's roads are horrible, but that condition is not limited to those two roads. I condemn both the government and the opposition for their lack of funding for the road network in the

south-west. Imagine the frustration in my region when you consider that we have the worst roads in the state — and that comes from VicRoads's own reports, which say \$220 million is needed to bring them up to the condition of the roads in the rest of the state. This is the case even though the electorate of South-West Coast was represented by former Premier Napthine and the neighbouring electorate of Polwarth was represented by Mr Mulder as the former roads minister.

The frustration continues. The Labor government in its wisdom has decided to ignore western Victoria and not even run a candidate in either Polwarth or South-West Coast, which is an insult to western Victoria. If my constituents and I were the least bit cynical, we might think the current concentration on our region is due to the upcoming by-elections.

I ask the minister to do what the opposition did not and provide more money to upgrade roads in western Victoria. I also invite the minister to visit the south-west and take a ride in a milk tanker to see firsthand the effect that these horrid roads have in our community.

### **St Andrews Primary School**

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, who I know to be particularly sensitive and responsive to the needs of small schools in rural and regional areas across our state. One such school is St Andrews Primary School, which refers to itself as a small school with a big heart. With 43 students, comprising 19 girls and 24 boys, the school thrives on its tight-knit community and rural environment. It is not uncommon for the kids to be greeted by a mob of kangaroos on the oval as they arrive at school in the morning, and they have an unofficial school mascot in the form of a blue-tongue lizard that has taken up residence in their vegetable patch.

Whilst students enjoy many benefits in attending a rural school and are also blessed with small class sizes and a wonderful natural environment, like all kids they need a suitable outdoor play area, and what they have at the moment is in desperate need of an upgrade. An upgraded outdoor play area would make a wonderful difference to the kids during school hours, but it would also be more widely used by the local community, for whom the school is a central hub and gathering place for many events and activities.

I know the minister understands just how central and significant local schools are for rural communities, and he will appreciate the benefits of providing this modest upgrade to St Andrews Primary School. I have listened

to the community of St Andrews, and on behalf of them I ask the minister to support an upgrade to the school's play equipment.

### **Portland Bay School**

**Mr MORRIS** (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Education. It relates to the Portland Bay School — a wonderful school in the south-west of Victoria, in my electorate of Western Victoria Region, and a school that is currently in limbo. The Minister for Education has committed to finding a new home for the Portland Bay School as its current site is nowhere near adequate for the number of children currently being educated at the facility.

I am very pleased that the shadow Minister for Education and member for Ferntree Gully in the Assembly, Nick Wakeling, has been to the Portland Bay School and understands the concerns that have arisen as a result of the confined space the school is located in. I am also very pleased that today Roma Britnell, the Liberal candidate for the Assembly seat of South-West Coast, ventured to the Portland Bay School to familiarise herself with the great concern about the future of the school as a result of its very confined space.

Eleven weeks ago the Minister for Education committed to a feasibility study into the future of the Portland Bay School and other schools in the city of Portland. He committed to this feasibility study taking 6 weeks, and we are now at 11 weeks. I am calling upon the Minister for Education to release the feasibility study on the future of the Portland Bay School to provide certainty to the school community.

### **Box Hill transport interchange**

**Mr LEANE** (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Public Transport, Jacinta Allan. It concerns a ministerial advisory group that has recently been set up to explore the potential of and some remedies for the Box Hill transit interchange. The interchange has its challenges, but there are some great opportunities there. The minister has invited a number of important stakeholders to be part of that group, and its first meeting was last week.

One of the first roles of the group was to identify whether any other stakeholders should be invited to give input into this process. It was identified that local schools should have representation, considering the amount of student travel activity at this interchange

between trams, buses and trains. The action I seek from the minister is that she invite onto that group representatives of local schools; for example, Box Hill High School and St Francis Xavier Primary School. If they want to attend and give their input, it would be great if the minister could invite them.

### Regional and rural roads

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) — My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Luke Donnellan. Today we heard in the debate on the motion moved by Mr Morris a great deal about the country roads and bridges program and the loss of this program. Councils within my electorate have been highly frustrated by the Andrews Labor government's decision to cut the \$160 million country roads and bridges program, which provided 40 councils with \$1 million each and every year to make their own decisions around important infrastructure upgrades for bridges and roads in their areas. In my electorate we have thousands of kilometres of council roads, far fewer ratepayers than metropolitan Melbourne and limited extra revenue-raising opportunities.

Regional councils have struggled to maintain the level of maintenance required to keep these roads in a viable state. South Gippsland Shire Council alone has around 2000 kilometres of road. Roads are the lifeblood of our transport system, allowing us to freight our dairy, meat, fruit and vegetable products as well as timber. Roads are a vital link for our economy to survive and prosper. The Andrews Labor government's decision to scrap this program is another slap in the face for regional Victorians. Its Stronger Country Bridges program will deliver one bridge in Gippsland, and that is just not good enough. Stronger Country Bridges is a misnomer indeed. We have — I think this is an underestimation — approximately 700 heavy traffic bridges in my area of Gippsland alone, so to fund only 1 is an appalling disaster for regional Victoria. Eastern Victoria's roads are also the lifeline of the tourism industry.

The action I seek is for Mr Donnellan to fund a proper program that provides rural and regional councils with autonomy and genuine resources to maintain our country roads and bridges. I ask him to, in effect, reinstate the country roads and bridges program.

### Youth policy

**Mr EIDEH** (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter today is for the Minister for Youth Affairs, Jenny Mikakos. In August the government launched an interactive survey through the Youth

Central website. This was a necessary first step in developing a new youth policy framework to improve the support and services available to young Victorians. The survey was designed to generate new ideas and receive valuable feedback directly from the people this policy is trying to target.

The feedback received through the survey will shape a vital part of how the government will target its future investment in youth services and programs. There will be a particular focus on engaging and connecting vulnerable and disadvantaged youth with the community and ensuring that they have access to important services and support. Following this the government launched the *What's Important to YOUth?* discussion paper, which is the next important step in completing the jigsaw puzzle of addressing the needs of Victoria's youth.

In my electorate some of the biggest issues confronting young people are disengagement, access to training and education, unemployment and mental health. YouthNow reports that 24 per cent of young people in the west are unemployed and only 13 per cent are looking for either full-time or part-time work. headspace indicates that 75 per cent of mental health disorders emerge before the age of 25; its program highlights how important it is to treat mental health issues early. A holistic approach, such as the service offered at headspace, greatly reduces the risk of young people developing more serious problems, including suicide.

The action I seek is that the minister advise what the government is doing to ensure that the voices of young people in the west are being considered in the development of the youth policy framework and the government's overall commitment in this space.

### City of Greater Geelong CCTV cameras

**Mr RAMSAY** (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Police. It concerns applications made by the City of Greater Geelong for CCTV funding for The Terrace, Ocean Grove; High Street, Drysdale; Rose Avenue, Norlane; Labuan Square, Norlane; High Street, Belmont; Hitchcock Avenue, Barwon Heads; and central Geelong. Strangely enough, all seven applications were rejected. I have done a number of listening posts on the Bellarine Peninsula over the last few months, and at one listening post at Drysdale I was approached by Ms Leanne Stratford, who was chairing the Neighbourhood Watch program. She asked me to support an application for CCTV in High Street, Drysdale, because of the increase in crime rates on the

Bellarine. I have indicated in previous contributions the lack of police resources under Geelong command, which provides police resources in Corio as well as on the Bellarine.

I am flabbergasted that not one of these seven applications by the City of Greater Geelong for CCTV funding was approved. Apart from my own support letter, Jan Farrell, the city's community safety portfolio holder, provided an application for support, as did Senior Sergeant Angelo Ferrara, who is in charge of the Bellarine policing network, and many others from the community.

The action I seek from the minister is that he provides me with a brief as to why not one of these seven applications for CCTV funding was successful. CCTV is seen as a significant aid to policing right across Victoria and as a significant tool in relation to identification. We know that police resources are stretched all over Victoria and specifically in the Geelong region, but the minister did not see fit to approve any of those applications.

### **Goulburn Valley Health**

**Ms LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health and it concerns the provision of radiotherapy services at Goulburn Valley Health's Shepparton campus. My request of the minister is that the minister commits to radiotherapy services being included in the redevelopment of Goulburn Valley Health so that residents in the hospital's catchment area will not have to travel hundreds of kilometres to other cities to access these services. Only last week the minister announced that residents of Wodonga would have access to free public radiotherapy. As the minister says in her media release, these regional patients 'will no longer need to travel hundreds of kilometres to access free, life-saving radiotherapy treatment'.

While I am extremely pleased that Wodonga residents will have direct and local access to public radiotherapy services, it appears that residents of the City of Greater Shepparton have once again been overlooked for the health services the community both needs and deserves. Greater Shepparton is one of the five largest regional cities in Victoria, along with the City of Greater Geelong, the City of Greater Bendigo, the City of Ballarat and the City of Latrobe, but it is the only one of those five cities not to have locally provided public radiotherapy services. Warrnambool and Wodonga, which are both much smaller cities than Greater Shepparton, already have commitments for radiotherapy services to commence soon. Greater

Shepparton is not only a larger city than Warrnambool and Wodonga, but it also has a greater number of patients diagnosed with malignant cancers. According to the Cancer Council of Victoria, Greater Shepparton has 319 malignant cancers diagnosed each year. The City of Wodonga has 172 cases and the City of Warrnambool has 190 cases diagnosed each year.

The residents of Greater Shepparton and the more than 250 000 residents in the catchment area of Goulburn Valley Health deserve to have access to these services close to home, both to prevent the need to travel hundreds of kilometres and so that they can be close to their family and friends during a difficult and stressful time. Supposedly, the minister is claiming in her release that her government is:

... working to increase access to radiotherapy across Victoria, to improve outcomes for patients and make it easier for them to receive treatment.

If this were true, the Andrews Labor government would be making some kind of tangible effort to provide radiotherapy services to the residents of Greater Shepparton and the wider catchment area of Goulburn Valley Health, starting with committing to the much-needed redevelopment of Goulburn Valley Health and promising that this redevelopment will include radiotherapy services.

My request of the minister is that the minister commits to radiotherapy services being included in the redevelopment of Goulburn Valley Health, so that residents in the hospital's catchment area will not have to travel hundreds of kilometres to other cities to access these services.

### **Multicultural affairs**

**Mrs PEULICH** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. It is in relation to matters that I have raised on a few occasions relating to the government's commitment to strengthen Victoria's social cohesion and build community resilience with funding of \$25 million over four years. Despite numerous questions and opportunities that I have had to raise the issue, there have been no programs to respond to the short-term and immediate needs our community has in relation to the radicalisation of young people.

I understand that the government has formulated a task force comprised of four ministers, and I guess they would occasionally have a cup of coffee together. They have also backed the establishment of a research institute. Those are medium and long-term measures, which are certainly worthy of consideration, but there is

an absence of any funding or any rolling out of grassroots programs in the short term. With so many communities concerned about the radicalisation of their young people, it is disappointing that money has not been made available to back programs such as, for example, the removal of online hate material or material on the internet which seeks to recruit and radicalise.

In a written response from the Special Minister of State to a question without notice, the minister conceded that the government is looking at rolling out programs based on evidence and community knowledge, something that was not considered before I pressed for this. He conceded that they are looking at some pilot projects in a number of locations, which will be community based and managed in partnership with parents and other community leaders. The problem is that the community does not really know about this new funding program. Indeed many would be very keen to take advantage of it.

I ask that the minister make it clear to our multicultural communities how applications can be made and what the criteria is for selection, and of course to make sure that this information is communicated to them promptly so they can take advantage of it and present their case in support of the programs they may put forward to respond to what is a fairly immediate and short-term need. It is a need that has been expressed to me by many Islamic communities that do not want their children to be radicalised and recruited to evil causes. They want to respond, yet they have received little support and little information as to what they might be able to do to move forward.

The problem is made worse by the fact that the minister has not yet reappointed Victorian multicultural affairs commissioners, including six whose terms expired at the end of August. Those appointments have still not been made, so there is a chasm between the multicultural communities and the minister's own department. I ask him to make sure that the information is available to them.

### Essendon Keilor College

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education this evening, and it is as a result of an email I received last week from a constituent. It reads as follows:

I am a mother of three boys with an ASD —  
autism spectrum disorder —

aged 16, 15 and 10. My 16-year-old son attends Western Autistic adolescence Baseroom and East Keilor college, Niddrie campus.

We were informed on 13 October 2015 that the Baseroom will be closed due to cost of program and lack of funding, at the end of 2015, and the Wattle program at Laverton campus will change the way it operates.

The adolescence Baseroom has been at EKC for the past 22 years, providing support for adolescents with Asperger's, assisting in the mainstream at EKC where the child is capable of learning and in the Baseroom itself for extra support in learning and other pathways when mainstream is not suitable.

My son, who has an IQ of 71, tried to engage in mainstream in year 7; however, he regressed and attended Baseroom full time since then. The staff in the Baseroom have supported him to keep him engaged, along with myself.

A review was conducted and presented to the Western Autistic School council to discuss what programs were viable et cetera. Parents of the Baseroom had no idea of this and were not given a voice to advocate for their children and future children who would benefit from this program.

My 10-year-old son is already struggling at a mainstream school; he is in year 4. What is his future going to be if ... suitable support is non-existent?

I have to wonder out loud, 'What future indeed?'. These parents of children with autism have a very difficult road ahead, and many of them are struggling. The last thing they need is a decision by the Department of Education and Training to make their lives even harder. The last thing they need is to have extra pressure brought upon their families by a decision of the education department which basically destroys the educational opportunities their children currently enjoy. This is, in my view, outrageous. Unfortunately it is just part of a trend, I suppose, of decisions we have seen from the education department over a long period of time. I ask the minister to personally intervene in this particular decision and reverse it to ensure that the adolescent Baseroom is retained at Essendon Keilor College so that these children are given a fair chance.

### Responses

**Mr DALIDAKIS** (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — I have an adjournment matter from Ms Wooldridge to the Minister for Health, Ms Hennessy, with regard to a visit to South West Healthcare.

I have a matter from Mr Purcell to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Mr Donnellan, with regard to south-west roads and a visit in an attempt to improve those roads for his constituents.

I have a matter from Ms Symes to the Minister for Education, Mr Merlino, with regard to an upgraded playground for a school in St Andrews.

I have a matter from Mr Morris to Mr Merlino with regard to releasing the feasibility study on the Portland Bay School.

I have a matter from Mr Leane to the Minister for Public Transport, Ms Allan, with regard to the Box Hill interchange stakeholder reference group and an invitation for representatives from the local schools.

I have a matter from Ms Bath to Minister Donnellan with regard to re-funding and reinstating the country roads and bridges program.

I have a matter from Mr Eideh to the Minister for Youth Affairs, Ms Mikakos, with regard to Victorian youth policy development.

I have a matter from Mr Ramsay to the Minister for Police, Mr Noonan, with regard to the unsuccessful CCTV funding in the Geelong area.

I have a matter from Ms Lovell to Minister Hennessy with regard to committing to radiotherapy services in the Goulburn Valley region.

I have a matter from Mrs Peulich to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Mr Scott, with regard to making clear what programs are available to do with antiradicalisation and how to access them.

I have a matter from Mr Finn to Minister Merlino in relation to appropriate support for Essendon Keilor College's autism Baseroom. That is it for today's adjournment debate.

I have written responses to adjournment debate matters raised by Ms Crozier and Ms Wooldridge.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! On that basis the house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 6.13 p.m.**

**WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

*Responses are incorporated in the form provided to Hansard*

**Child protection**

**Question asked by:** Ms Crozier  
**Directed to:** Minister for Families and Children  
**Asked on:** 20 October 2015

**RESPONSE:**

So far in 2015, there have been 139 Category one absent/missing person incident reports reported by the residential care program, which is consistent with the number of Category one absent/missing person incident reports reported by the residential care program for the same period in 2014 and 2013.

Unlike the previous Government, which did nothing to improve safety for young people in residential care, the Andrews Labor Government acted quickly to put in place the following measures:

- \$16 million for more staff in standard residential care units, including stand-up over night staff
- \$1.5 million for spot audits of residential care facilities
- \$43 million for Targeted Care Packages to provide tailored solutions to move children out of residential care and into home-based care, prioritising primary school age children and Aboriginal children currently in residential care

The absence of a child from residential care is a matter that is taken seriously by the department. Where there are concerns for their safety, immediate action is taken, which involves notifying Victoria Police.

While the long term aim is to reduce the number of critical incidents that occur, it is simultaneously important to encourage accurate and transparent incident reporting to learn from these issues.

The reporting and review of incidents allows the department to gain a clearer picture of the type of alleged incidents occurring. This in turn has enabled the department to take prompt corrective action to protect the wellbeing and safety of clients and better understand the underlying causes of incidents to prevent their recurrence, including updating policy and practice guidance and providing ongoing training.

