

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT**

**FIRST SESSION**

**Wednesday, 6 May 2015**

**(Extract from book 6)**

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### 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

**Economy and Infrastructure Legislation Committee** — Dr Carling-Jenkins, Mr Dalidakis, Mr Eideh, Mr Elasmarr, Mr Finn, Ms Hartland, Mr Morris and Mr Ondarchie.

**Economy and Infrastructure References Committee** — Dr Carling-Jenkins, Mr Dalidakis, Mr Eideh, Mr Elasmarr, Mr Finn, Ms Hartland, Mr Morris and Mr Ondarchie.

**Environment and Planning Legislation Committee** — Ms Bath, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr Davis, Ms Dunn, Mr Leane, Ms Shing, Ms Tierney and Mr Young.

**Environment and Planning References Committee** — Ms Bath, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr Davis, Ms Dunn, Mr Leane, Ms Shing, Ms Tierney and Mr Young.

**Legal and Social Issues Legislation Committee** — Ms Fitzherbert, Mr Melhem, Mr Mulino, Mr O'Donohue, Ms Patten, Mrs Peulich, Ms Springle and Ms Symes.

**Legal and Social Issues References Committee** — Ms Fitzherbert, Mr Melhem, Mr Mulino, Mr O'Donohue, Ms Patten, Mrs Peulich, Ms Springle and Ms Symes.

### Joint committees

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

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

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

**Electoral Matters Committee** — (*Council*): Mr Dalidakis and Ms Patten. (*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*): Mr Battin, Ms Halfpenny, Mr McCurdy, Mr Richardson 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 Kilkeny and Mr Pesutto.

### Heads of parliamentary departments

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

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

*Parliamentary Services* — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

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FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION**

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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
Elasmar, 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, 6 May 2015

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

### PAPERS

#### Laid on table by Acting Clerk:

Auditor-General's Reports on —

Occupational Violence Against Healthcare Workers, May 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

Tendering of Metropolitan Bus Contracts, May 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

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

Melbourne Planning Scheme — Amendment C212.

Moreland Planning Scheme — Amendment C153.

Victorian Planning Provisions — Amendment VC119.

Yarra Planning Scheme — Amendment C176.

Statutory Rule under the Architects Act 1991 — No. 28.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule No. 28.

Victorian Law Reform Commission — Report on Trading Trusts — Oppression Remedies, January 2015 (*Ordered to be published*).

### MINISTERS STATEMENTS

#### Budget

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Minister for Families and Children) — I rise to inform the house about how the Andrews Labor government's first budget has delivered for Victorian families, children and youth. We said we would put people first, and we have been true to our word. This budget recognises the importance of early intervention and prevention in supporting families and children. We have delivered new funding at every point in the service continuum.

The Andrews Labor government recognises that a quality early childhood education gives a child the best start to life. As part of a record education budget we have delivered on our election commitment of \$50 million to build new integrated children's centres as well as to build and upgrade kindergartens. A further \$9 million will assist children with disabilities or developmental delays before they start school. In addition, we have delivered a record budget in child protection and family services, with \$257 million in

new funding over four years. This is a 17 per cent increase on funding compared to last year's budget.

I am particularly proud of the fact that we are investing \$48.1 million in ChildFIRST and family services to target families before they reach crisis point. It is important that we aim to keep children from falling into the child protection system in the first place. We will invest \$65.4 million to employ an additional 110 child protection workers to keep children safe.

For the first time in over a decade, \$31.4 million has been provided to increase financial support for home-based carers and to simplify and streamline the current carer support system. Unlike the former government, which withheld funding for a bad news day, putting vulnerable children at risk, we are delivering the funding that is needed when it is needed most.

Funding of \$8 million is also being invested in ongoing and new strategies to enhance youth participation and engagement. Whilst there will be some continuity with existing programs, this will also start to refocus the youth affairs portfolio to ensure that we are supporting disadvantaged and disengaged youth so they have every opportunity in education, employment and civic engagement.

This is a true Labor budget and one that only a Labor government could deliver. I am very proud of our delivery for Victoria's families, children and young people.

#### Sichuan trade delegation

**Mr SOMYUREK** (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — Recently the Andrews government had the honour of hosting a large senior trade delegation from the Sichuan provincial government of the People's Republic of China. The visit was instigated by the Governor of Sichuan Province, Mr Wei Hong, and was led by Mr Li Xiangzhi, vice chairman of the Sichuan Provincial People's Congress. More than 100 delegates participated in the inaugural Sichuan Week titled 'Cultural China, Splendid Sichuan'. Delegates experienced firsthand the best that Victoria has to offer, and took part in a range of forums, networking events, business-matching activities and site visits.

Engagement with western China, specifically Sichuan Province, is a strategic priority of the Victorian government. It is my pleasure to inform the house that during the visit the Andrews government signed an important agreement with Sichuan Province, which guides the direction for future economic and cultural exchange between Victoria and Sichuan. The

memorandum of understanding identifies key sectors for future engagement, including food and fibre, medical technology and pharmaceuticals, professional services and new energy technology. It agrees that both parties will work together over the next 12 months to develop a comprehensive framework for continued engagement. The signing of this memorandum of understanding will further strengthen the partnership between Victoria and Sichuan, which is one of the fastest growing regions in western China.

## MEMBERS STATEMENTS

### Anzac centenary

**Ms LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) — Together with the President of the Legislative Council, I recently had the honour and privilege to represent Victoria as part of the delegation to take part in the Anzac Day and Anzac centenary commemorations in Villers-Bretonneux, a small town in France that played a significant role in World War I. Between 2014 and 2018 our country is commemorating the Anzac centenary, marking 100 years since Australia's involvement in World War I, and recognising the role and sacrifice of our servicemen and women in all wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations in which our nation has been involved.

In March 1918, almost three years after the Anzacs stormed the shores of Gallipoli, the Axis countries launched a major offensive to take the strategic French town of Amiens. In late April, while moving westward toward their goal, they captured a small village on the banks of the Somme — the seemingly insignificant Villers-Bretonneux. Allied commanders feared that, if Axis powers moved on and took control of Amiens, the war would be lost, so the job of retaking the pivotal village of Villers-Bretonneux fell to two Australian brigades. The Australians planned a surprise attack at night, and the diggers fought the enemy in a fierce frontline confrontation. It was a do-or-die, two-day assault, and the cost to Australia was huge — 1200 of our soldiers perished in the battle. But the Anzacs secured the town and established the new front line, marking the end of the Axis offensive on the Somme.

The French have never forgotten this, and our flag still flies over the town. An enduring link between our countries was forged in this place. A memorial plaque on the town's Victoria School reads:

May the memory of great sacrifices in a common cause keep  
France and Australia together forever in bonds of friendship  
and mutual esteem.

Lest we forget.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! Thank you, Ms Lovell. It was quite an extraordinary journey.

### Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships Forum

**Ms SPRINGLE** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — Last week I had the great privilege of attending the third Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships Forum held in Fiji. This is an annual forum that offers women parliamentarians across the Pacific region the opportunity for relationship building, information sharing and collaboration. This year elected representatives from 16 countries converged on Suva for an intensive two-day discussion on the topic of family violence and violence against women. According to the UN, Pacific countries have the highest rates of violence against women in the world, with statistics in some countries as high as 8 in 10 women experiencing violence. It estimates that at a minimum this is costing between 1.3 and 3 per cent of gross domestic product per annum, with Fiji at 5 or 6 per cent of gross domestic product.

Aside from the impacts on the human dignity of the person and the collective trauma associated with these levels of violence, the economic costs alone should be a prime motivator for action to curb what can only be described at this stage as an epidemic. I would like to express my profound admiration for the parliamentarians who attended this conference, some of whom are the only female representatives within their parliaments, and others who have committed their lives in this way for decades under the most adverse of circumstances. I will be submitting a report to the parliamentary library over the coming weeks.

### Anzac centenary

**Mr EIDEH** (Western Metropolitan) — I would like to make a members statement with regard to the Anzac centenary events. This year marks 100 years since the Anzac landing at Gallipoli. This centenary is one of the most significant commemorations to have taken place, and I was honoured to be a part of various Anzac Day events in my electorate.

On Sunday, 19 April, I attended Moonee Valley City Council's annual Anzac Day commemoration ceremony. This event was well attended, as it is every year, and it was conducted in a very respectful and dignified manner. I also attended an Anzac centenary commemorative planting on Tuesday, 21 April, hosted by Maribyrnong City Council. During this event 147 trees were planted to commemorate the avenue of honour on Geelong Road. The original avenue of

honour was planted in 1947 and is dedicated to all Australians who lost their lives fighting for our country, so this planting event was a fitting way to remember those who served and are currently serving.

I thank and commend the Essendon RSL and the Moonee Valley and Maribyrnong city councils for organising these very important ceremonies to remind us of the importance of the Anzac spirit and to reflect on the sacrifices and service of those who served our country.

I also wish to congratulate you, President, on your laying of a wreath at the commemoration service at Villers-Bretonneux in France on behalf of the Victorian Parliament. Lest we forget.

### Good Beer Week

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) — Recently I was invited to attend Craft Beer Meets Spring Street, hosted by the Craft Beer Industry Association in celebration of the upcoming Good Beer Week. No doubt this is not the first time Spring Street and beer have met. I was surprised, however, that I was one of only three MPs there, and we were all women.

As a member for Northern Metropolitan Region, I am very pleased to say that I learnt that I have the largest number of craft breweries in my region, so cheers to that. Usually I am more of a wine person, but I had the pleasure of sampling a number of delicious Victorian craft beers and learning about the wonderful people in this industry. Of the 90 craft brewing businesses in Victoria, most are in my region, and the rest can be found in rural areas creating jobs and drawing in thirsty tourists.

Nearly 400 Victorians are directly employed by these companies in brewing, sales, administrative and hospitality roles, and many more Victorians obviously enjoy and support these locally made goods. In celebration of the upcoming Good Beer Week, which runs from 16 to 24 May, I raise a glass to all the hardworking people involved in the festival, which has earned a reputation for being the best beer week in the world.

### Nepal earthquake

**Mrs PEULICH** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I too would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest sympathies and most sincere condolences to the Nepalese community and all who have suffered due to the earthquake disaster. Our prayers are with them. As shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs, I had the privilege of addressing a candlelight vigil on Saturday,

2 May, at Federation Square, where more than 4000 people turned out to mourn Nepal's earthquake victims. It is estimated that following the 25 April earthquake, which was of magnitude 7.8 on the Richter scale, 2.8 million Nepalese are displaced, 7000-plus are dead and 10 000 are injured.

As Victorians we need to stand together with the rest of the world and the Nepalese community to help rebuild a devastated Nepal and restore hope to the lives of thousands. Donations are encouraged and can be made to reputable low administrative cost, non-profit organisations, and I encourage the Parliament to see how this tragic event may also be commemorated in some way.

### Anzac Day

**Mrs PEULICH** — I thank all those who were involved in organising Anzac Day commemorative services, including the local RSLs, councils, schools and multicultural and community organisations. I had the privilege of attending services at the Cheltenham Moorabbin RSL, the Rotary Club of Dingley Village, the City of Glen Eira, Berwick RSL and Longbeach RSL, among many others. It was an important day, and I was absolutely enthralled to see such an overwhelming number of people turning out to remember those who died and others who made tragic sacrifices.

### Anzac centenary

**Ms PENNICUIK** (Southern Metropolitan) — On 25 April and surrounding days, communities around Australia and New Zealand commemorated the 100th anniversary of the landing of the Anzacs at Gallipoli. I attended local events, including the service hosted by the City of Glen Eira at Caulfield Park, at which a pine tree descended from a tree from Gallipoli was unveiled. I also had the honour of speaking at the Caulfield RSL and New Zealand sub-branch in memory of two members of the club — my grandfather, who served at Gallipoli and in France in World War I and who was a foundation member of the Caulfield RSL, and his son, my father, who served in World War II and who was also a member there. It was a great honour to be asked to lead the stand to and recite the ode.

I would like to congratulate the president of the Caulfield RSL, Bob Larkin, the general manager, Peter Frost, and all the RSL members, staff, sponsors and volunteers who put together the Back to Gallipoli exhibition, held in the car park at the back of the RSL. Back to Gallipoli featured larger than life size photos

from Gallipoli, a re-creation of the trenches and an honour roll of World War I club members. It received worldwide attention and thousands of visitors, including schoolchildren from all around Melbourne.

I see these events held around Australia as an opportunity to remember all those who have known the horrors of war and to hope we can avoid repeating them.

### United Nations Global Road Safety Week

**Mr LEANE** (Eastern Metropolitan) — This week marks the third annual United Nations Global Road Safety Week. I would like to compliment Road Trauma Support Services, which has organised a number of events to mark this week. Road Trauma Support Services is a non-government organisation that does some magnificent work with people who have been in severe accidents, helping them deal with the subsequent trauma, which as we know can sometimes last for years, if not longer. Road Trauma Support Services has organised for particular iconic buildings to be lit up in yellow for the week. People might have noticed last night that Parliament House has been lit up in yellow, and I would like to thank the President and the maintenance staff of the Parliament for allowing that to happen. It is a great way to mark the week. There are a number of other activities organised by Road Trauma Support Services, and it hopes to make this week bigger and better every year. It is important that road safety awareness is a part of our calendar.

### Anzac Day

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) — My members statement today concerns the Surrey Hills dawn service. I want to pay tribute to the Surrey Hills community; I think more than 1300 people attended on 25 April. The Surrey Hills Progress Association was the main organiser, Greg Buchanan and Lynette Giddings in particular, with support from Surrey Hills traders. There was a welcome from Damien Gardiner of the progress association. The hymn *Abide With Me* was sung a cappella by Matthew Todd, Tristan Webb, Sam Davies and Garry Todd. Lynette Giddings read the poem *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae. A tribute to our fallen soldiers followed, with Greg Buchanan delivering a brief introduction to speeches by a number of students from Chatham Primary School, Ashwood School and Surrey Hills Primary School.

There was also tribute paid through the laying of wreaths by a series of people, including a representative from Ashwood School. I was honoured to be among them. The ode was read by John Trevorrow, a

great-nephew of Sergeant William Walter Head. The last post was played by Matthew Todd. There was also a tribute to Frank Renehan, born in Surrey Hills in 1892, who was among the first to enlist in 1914. The Surrey Hills community can be very proud of the day in common with so many around Australia on the commemoration of 100 years since the landings at Gallipoli. We can all take great pride in the service of our war heroes and the more recent contribution of our local communities.

### Go Goldfields

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Minister for Families and Children) — Last week I was extremely pleased to join with representatives from the Shire of Central Goldfields, Maryborough District Health Service, Maryborough regional library and local parents and children to announce \$2 million in additional funding over three years for the Go Goldfields project, funded under the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund.

Go Goldfields is an alliance of community organisations that creates local strategies to tackle high unemployment rates and a range of poor health indicators such as high child protection notifications. Its strategies are community driven and are focused on prevention and early intervention. This funding will enable work to continue on improving the wellbeing and education of children, young people and families in Central Goldfields shire.

While I was there, I was also pleased to launch an innovative early literacy DVD titled *Learning Starts Early*. The DVD emphasises the importance of parents reading to young children, and I want to stress that it is important for parents to read to children no matter how young the children are. They should read even to babies. In this regard I want to commend Maree Stephenson from the Maryborough library, who is a very experienced librarian and has organised for a library card to go into all new parents' packs that are made available to parents through maternal and child health services. This is a terrific idea, and I hope other libraries around the state will follow this initiative.

The DVD that I launched, *Learning Starts Early*, will assist parents in the Central Goldfields shire to gain the practical assistance they need to develop their children's reading and writing skills. I take this opportunity to commend the Go Goldfields alliance.

## Anzac Day

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** (Western Metropolitan) — I rise today, as others have, to acknowledge all those Australians who over the last century have risked or even given their lives in the defence of this country and of our freedoms. During my time in Parliament, which has now been just over four months, I have had the privilege of attending a number of citizenship ceremonies. More recently I was involved in two Anzac Day ceremonies in Werribee and Sunshine which were occasions of both celebration and solemn reflection and where I enjoyed meeting many veterans and their families.

I take this opportunity to share a little of my own Anzac Day reflection. My great-uncles, whom I never had the privilege of meeting, committed their lives to the service of this nation and in defence of our freedoms. Thanks to their sacrifices, and those of many others, Australia is a place where we can all enjoy important freedoms which millions of people in other parts of the world are still living without. Listening to the many stories of veterans and their families at the Werribee RSL brought this to my attention once again.

I am committed to protecting these freedoms and to ensuring that all Australians are able to enjoy them. I see freedoms and their protection as both a privilege and a responsibility of all Australian citizens, in particular of all parliamentarians here in Victoria. This is what makes Anzac Day so important. It schedules into our nationwide calendar a time that allows us to take a moment's pause from our busy day-to-day lives to hopefully reflect upon our freedoms and to never forget those who made such freedoms possible. Lest we forget.

## Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria

**Mr MULINO** (Eastern Victoria) — In my members statement I rise to acknowledge and support the work of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, which recently completed a research and policy paper titled *Qualified but not Recognised*. The paper examines issues such as red tape and other barriers that make it more difficult for foreign-born Victorians to use their qualifications and work in areas that reflect their experience. According to the 2011 census, 47 per cent of Victorians were either born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas, which is an incredibly high proportion compared with almost any other country in the world.

Australia remains a migration magnet. In 2014 skilled migration comprised 68 per cent of all places in the

Australian migration program, constituting something in the order of 129 000 places. In Victoria international students make up an extremely large cohort of additional members of our community who bring skills from overseas. We need to do better at recognising the qualifications and experience of people born overseas in order that they might work in areas that better reflect their skills. We also need to do better at reducing unnecessary red tape in this area.

As somebody who was born overseas and has a parent who was also born overseas and who struggled with having his qualifications recognised, I have seen firsthand the difficulties this can cause. I congratulate the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria on its work and valuable contribution to a difficult and important policy debate.

## Anzac Day

**Ms FITZHERBERT** (Southern Metropolitan) — On the morning of Anzac Day thousands of people around the country got up in the darkness to attend dawn services. Our major cities have longstanding dawn services, but this year a number of smaller local services had increased numbers of attendees or were held for the first time, and I attended one of them. Bayside City Council held a fantastic dawn service at Green Point in my electorate. There is a very old cenotaph there, but no dawn service has been held at Green Point to commemorate Anzac Day in living memory, so this service was put together.

The service was set to start at 5.30 a.m. and at a quarter past 5 in the morning it was like peak hour. The council was hoping for 5000 people, but it estimates that some 15 000 people turned up. People were pouring down the footpaths and there was no parking to be had because the police had blocked off the road. The service was a magnificent tribute and proof indeed that we remember.

I want to acknowledge those who put together this sensational commemoration: Bayside City Council, and in particular the mayor, Felicity Frederico, Hampton RSL, Beaumaris RSL and the St Leonards College choir, whose members had the very difficult task of standing on the edge of a cliff from where they sang beautifully to the crowds who had arrived. I commend all involved on a fantastic effort.

## Sale Specialist School

**Ms SHING** (Eastern Victoria) — It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak today on the funding that was announced as part of this year's budget for the Sale

Specialist School. Since being elected to Parliament I have had the great privilege and honour of meeting on a number of occasions with parents, carers, supporters and staff of the school. Since my first visit in January, and following that in the course of numerous conversations over the phone and in person, it has become absolutely clear that this is a school supported with much love by many people, and yet it was found desperately wanting in terms of the funding necessary to provide the same educational opportunities for special needs children in Eastern Victoria Region as for any other child around the state.

This school was originally built for 15 students, but over the course of a number of years has expanded to three campuses with over 70 students. It is a school where the development of resources, facilities and space has been severely curtailed by a very small footprint. It is a school where children from a large catchment area regularly travel for more than an hour on a bus before being confined to a space which does not allow them to expend energy, express themselves, have safe and secure chill-out spaces or otherwise to spend quality and positive time with other children in a way that allows them to build upon social experience. The staff are to be absolutely commended on the work they have done to date in being able to make do with almost nothing. I pay tribute to them, and I pay tribute to everyone who has ever attended the school to provide physical therapy, music therapy and art therapy.

I was absolutely delighted that following a number of months of extremely intense and hard work to secure funding the Minister for Education, James Merlino, and I were able to attend the school to announce that funding of \$7.6 million will be given in this year's budget to build a new school which will combine the three campuses into one.

### International Guide Dog Day

**Ms PULFORD** (Minister for Agriculture) — Last Wednesday was International Guide Dog Day, and it was my pleasure to launch an education campaign to remind businesses that guide dogs and seeing eye dogs, as well as puppies in training, are legally able to enter any event, business or premises. Supported by Guide Dogs Victoria and Vision Australia Seeing Eye Dogs, the campaign aims to raise community awareness that guide dog and seeing eye dog puppies have the same access rights as their adult counterparts. I joined the member for Bentleigh in the Assembly, Nick Staikos, at Bentleigh restaurant Paseo Del Prado to launch the campaign. The campaign message is 'Welcome. Guide

dogs, seeing eye dogs and puppies in training can enter'.

To prepare puppies for futures as guide dogs and seeing eye dogs, volunteer carers must take them on public transport and to shops, cafes and restaurants so they can get used to what is ahead for them, so carers' access rights must be recognised. The dogs are specifically bred for their important role, and when in training they wear a yellow or blue identification jacket in public. The government will continue to work with Guide Dogs Victoria and Vision Australia Seeing Eye Dogs to ensure that volunteer carers and their puppies are not turned away from any premises. I join Nick Staikos in congratulating Paseo Del Prado for setting a great example by making guide dog users, trainers and carers welcome. This campaign will raise awareness within the Victorian community, and it is to be encouraged and supported across the state.

## PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

### References

**Ms WOOLDRIDGE** (Eastern Metropolitan) — I move:

That pursuant to section 33 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 this house requires the following matters to be referred to the joint investigatory committee specified —

- (1) to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee to inquire into, consider and report, no later than 31 March 2016, on the sustainability and operational challenges of Victoria's rural and regional councils, including but not limited to the following —
  - (a) local government funding and budgetary pressures;
  - (b) fairness, equity and adequacy of rating systems;
  - (c) impact of rate-capping policies;
  - (d) capacity for rural and regional councils to meet responsibilities for flood planning and preparation, and maintenance of flood mitigation infrastructure;
  - (e) maintenance of local road and bridge networks; and
  - (f) weed and pest animal control; and
- (2) to the Family and Community Development Committee to inquire into, consider and report, no later than 31 May 2016, on services for people with autism spectrum disorder in Victoria, including but not limited to —
  - (a) the prevalence of autism spectrum disorder in Victoria;
  - (b) the availability and adequacy of services provided by the commonwealth, state and local governments

across health, education, disability, housing, sport and employment services;

- (c) the adequacy of services to be provided under the national disability insurance scheme (NDIS);
- (d) evidence of the social and economic cost of failing to provide adequate services; and
- (e) the projected demand for services in Victoria.

It gives me great pleasure today to move this motion in relation to significant references to two joint parliamentary committees. Notwithstanding the outcomes of potential reports, in moving the motion what I anticipate are the opportunities, the discussion and the review that the two committees will undertake in considering the references. They are important issues for rural and regional Victoria broadly, for families and for Parliament so that we have some considered advice and input from the broad community. There will be capacity then for the government and Parliament to consider those recommendations and how issues are addressed and progressed.

The motion is in two parts, both equal in their importance. The first part of the motion relates to a reference to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee. This motion calls for the establishment of an inquiry into the sustainability and operational challenges of Victoria's rural and regional councils and for completion of a report by 31 March 2016. A number of items are listed for consideration but the reference is not limited to the issues outlined. The list includes things such as local government funding and budgetary pressures; the fairness, equity and adequacy of our rating systems; the impact of rate-capping policies; the capacity for rural and regional councils to meet responsibilities for emergency situations such as flood planning and flood mitigation infrastructure; local road and bridge networks; and weed and pest animal control. I am sure that if the committee is provided with this reference, it will come up with a range of other issues as well.

It is timely to be discussing this reference to the committee given what we saw yesterday in this Labor government's first budget, particularly the very dramatic cuts, including the 40 per cent cut to the budget of Regional Development Victoria which Mr Drum asked the Minister for Regional Development about yesterday, and cuts across agriculture and other areas that significantly affect rural and regional Victoria and the work councils are undertaking. This is an important reference for the joint committee to consider in the context of the announcement of decisions that have been made.

Rural and regional councils are facing probably the heaviest burdens ever imposed on them because of the cost-shifting policies implemented in the first six months of this Labor government. Many rural and regional councils are under very significant pressures to maintain sometimes even the most basic of expected services. If the chamber decides to give this reference to the joint committee, that will be the best avenue for councils to contribute, engage on the issues and provide input on the impact of the decisions of the Labor government on their capacity to deliver services.

We have already heard from some of the key peak groups about concerns that have been raised. They welcome the opportunity to look into the concerns in more detail. Recently the chief executive officer of the Municipal Association of Victoria, Rob Spence, said that council rates could increase if roadsides were not properly managed. For example, he said:

It is a crucial issue because the message to me loud and clear is that if roadsides are not properly managed, weed control, pest control on roadsides is not properly managed, it affects the economic viability of farms that are around them and that has local, state and national effects over time if it's not looked after properly.

Those issues about managing the impact of the services delivered by councils in the context of limited and decreasing funding are very critical. Likewise with the maintenance of local road and bridge networks we have seen a reduction in funding across government, announced yesterday in the budget, across what has been a very successful program, the local roads and bridges program, with \$75 million cut from that program. With that reduction in funding, we will see that either local government has to pick up the bill to repair or replace it or simply that funding will no longer be available, thereby significantly affecting the infrastructure in our rural and regional communities.

In this context rate capping as a policy is very prominent because of its implication for funding available for councils for the years into the future. There was an interesting article in the *Ararat Advertiser* headed 'Rate cap plan a "threat" to rural communities according to mayor' in which Cr Hooper, the Ararat Rural City Council mayor, is quoted as saying:

The effect on rural councils that don't have the luxury of a big rate base is to run down our roads, buildings and eventually services ...

The New South Wales experience shows the results of rate capping plainly, with road maintenance standards clearly dropping over time, and much less money available to be spent on built infrastructure ...

So issues have been raised about the policies of the government. Local communities are raising questions about the implications of the decisions that are being made. There is an opportunity, through this reference, to look at not only those issues but also a whole range of issues because we know that rural and regional communities are so vital to the prosperity of this state and that families are making positive choices about living in rural and regional Victoria. We want to make sure that the sustainability and the operations and services delivered by local councils can continue to be important for rural and regional families well into the future.

The second part of this motion is a reference in relation to the Family and Community Development Committee on the issue of autism spectrum disorder to report by 31 May 2016. As a former Minister for Disability Services and Reform, it was a real privilege to meet with many families, work on the issues in relation to their family members with autism, both individually and collectively, and seek to ensure that the policies and practices were in place to meet the needs of the individuals on the autism spectrum and their families and carers.

What this reference seeks to do is to have a detailed look into some of the facts around the prevalence of autism and the availability and adequacy of services, and look at commonwealth, state and local governments because there are services being delivered across the board, acknowledging the impact of services across health, education, disability housing, sport and employment for people with autism, and there will be other issues. All those aspects will have an impact on the capacity to address the issues in relation to autism and to intervene early. It will also ensure that people with autism have the greatest potential to maximise what they wish to contribute in terms of their involvement in the community and the state as a whole.

It is also an opportunity to look at the issues in relation to the national disability insurance scheme (NDIS) and autism services for people on the spectrum. Some issues have been raised about autism services in relation to the trials on capping the funding for support services available for people on the spectrum.

At this stage, the trial is still underway and there is a mechanism to have some input into the policies and practices of the national disability insurance scheme and the program it will deliver. This presents a good opportunity to look specifically at how people with autism spectrum disorder will relate to the provision of services and support under the NDIS, whether the

available funding is appropriate and whether the services meet with best practice principles.

Importantly, as I am sure many members know, early diagnosis of a child as being on the autism spectrum and being able to access those early intervention services as soon as possible can make a very significant difference for the individual and their family and to their prospects for many years to come. That goes to the heart of what the NDIS is all about — that is, how do we invest early to maximise the achievement of potential for an individual while minimising the cost borne by the state for the provision of services over a lifetime?

For people and children with autism, the NDIS and the insurance principles that underpin the scheme are a fundamental opportunity that needs to be realised through the structure and the design of the scheme. We also need to look at some of the social and economic costs into the future to ensure that funding for disability services continues to meet those needs. For example, as a minister in the former government I was pleased to provide funding of \$2.5 million to Autism Spectrum Australia, Aspect to deliver a new initiative around responding to concerning behaviours. Some initiatives are in place, and I am sure these will be looked at by the committee if it is in a position to undertake this reference.

This motion is a reasonably straightforward but important one for this chamber, for the Parliament and for Victorians and the communities in which we live. How do we make sure that our rural and regional council areas are vibrant and sustainable and able to deliver the infrastructure and the services that meet the needs of local communities? How do we make sure that we have effective services for people with autism spectrum disorder? How do we ensure that the NDIS, as a major reform that is underway, has the flexibility and capacity to respond effectively to people with autism spectrum disorder, and how do we make sure that people have the support to achieve their potential into the future?

I commend this motion to the house and seek its support. We believe these will be valuable references for both the Parliament and the Victorian community.

**Ms PENNICUIK** (Southern Metropolitan) — The Greens are pleased to support the motion put forward by Ms Wooldridge for two references to the joint committees. The first reference to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee, as outlined in Ms Wooldridge's motion, is to look at the sustainability and operational challenges

of the rural and regional councils, including local government funding and budgetary pressures; fairness, equity and the adequacy of rating systems; the impact of rate-capping policies; responsibilities for flood planning and preparation; and maintenance of local road and bridge networks; and weed and pest and animal control.

The motion goes to a lot of issues that impact on the everyday lives of people in regional and rural areas and covers a lot of important issues that need to be looked into and are of great public interest at the moment. The Greens are pleased to support this particular reference to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee. I understand there is no other reference currently heading towards that committee, so it will not come into conflict with any other reference.

The second reference put forward by Ms Wooldridge is to the Family and Community Development Committee to inquire into services for people with autism spectrum disorder, and their families, in Victoria. The reference requires the committee to undertake an inquiry into the prevalence of autism spectrum disorder; the availability and adequacy of services provided by all levels of government across health, education, disability, housing, sport and employment services, and any other relevant services; and the adequacy of those services.

This is a very important issue that deeply affects many families in Victoria. It also affects their communities, schools, health services et cetera. We understand that the government wishes to put another reference to the committee regarding disability services, but it will be up to the committee to organise itself in relation to the references it receives from either this or the other chamber. I suggest that those two references are complementary.

The structure and membership of both the joint committees and the Legislative Council committees were finalised and decided in the previous sitting week. We still have to decide on the chairing arrangements for the upper house committees and the references that will go to those committees. The consultations and discussions that have gone on between the two houses and the various parties in regard to references have been less than perfect.

We are now in a position where we are looking at the references on their merits. As I said, the Greens think both of these references have merit and go to issues that are important to different parts of the Victorian community, and therefore we are prepared and pleased to support them.

**Debate interrupted.**

## DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! I take this opportunity to advise members that we have in the gallery this morning, accompanying Mr Hong Lim, the member for Clarinda in another place, representatives of the Cambodia Chamber of Commerce. We welcome you to Melbourne and our Parliament, and we trust that the discussions you have are fruitful to both Cambodia and Australia, but particularly to Victoria.

## PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

### References

**Debate resumed.**

**Mr MELHEM** (Western Metropolitan) — The government welcomes the motion of Ms Wooldridge, including the reference for the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee to inquire into, consider and report no later than 31 March 2016 on the sustainability and operational challenges of Victoria's rural and regional councils. We are not opposed to that reference.

I would like to make a number of points. Since the election of the Andrews Labor government there has been a lot of focus on councils, council rates and rate capping. There is a reason for that, but certainly the intention was not to put unnecessary pressure on councils so that they not be able to deliver services. The intention was to ensure that councils do not go overboard and slug ratepayers with unnecessary charges, which has been the case in recent times, where rates have been far in excess of the CPI and the recommendations of other institutions.

We welcome this reference to look at what sort of pressure councils may be under and what type of efficiencies can be put in place to ensure that services to regional residents are not affected and can be improved. I understand some regional councils are suffering. A case in point is the Shire of Murrindindi, because it has not quite recovered from the Black Saturday bushfires.

As part of the Victorian budget 2015–16 there has been a significant investment in regional areas. A \$200 million Regional Jobs Fund has been released as part of the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund, and that will provide \$500 million over four years. There is a further \$250 million Regional Infrastructure Development Fund in relation to projects like the Ballarat rail station and the Harcourt mountain bike

trail. There are a number of projects under that fund. There is also some significant investment in agriculture, and it is very important that we invest in the agricultural industry.

In relation to transport, the government is going to be investing in a number of projects — for example, \$90 million for an initiative which will make a big difference and which will include intelligent transport system technology and upgrades to congested choke points in suburban and regional areas. There is \$86 million to resurface unsafe roads, \$286 million for 21 new V/Locity trains on the Geelong train line and \$76 million over three years to strengthen bridges on key freight routes across the state to reduce travel time for heavy vehicles, increase productivity and help reduce supply chain costs. There is \$50.5 million to improve safety on 52 regional level crossings, with \$2 million fast-tracked so that can start as soon as possible. Also \$30 million has already been fast-tracked to complete stage 1 of the Murray Basin rail project. As we know, this project costs between \$180 million and \$220 million in total.

There is a long list of education investments in upgrading existing schools. New schools will be opened, or construction will start on them — for example, on Sale Specialist School and Bannockburn 7–12. We are also starting the planning process in relation to the tech schools in Gippsland, Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong. TAFE will be another investment in regional areas in relation to education — for example, at Kangan Institute in Bendigo, in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, at Federation Training, South West TAFE, SuniTAFE and the Gordon Institute.

Health in rural and regional areas has also been given some attention. Key initiatives include \$40 million to upgrade ambulance stations, vehicles and equipment across the state. This will include a new ambulance station at Wendouree in Ballarat, and the list goes on.

There is further investment in police and emergency services in rural areas, like fire protection with the employment of 450 additional firefighters. There is also further community-based investment, so the list goes on and on. Based on that, we welcome that the committee should look at how things can be improved and make sure that residents in regional Victoria do not suffer. We provide the services they deserve. Mind you, a lot of the cuts made by the former government in the last few years do not get a mention. I am sure that will be looked at by the committee.

The government will also support the second part of Ms Wooldridge's motion, which I do not think anyone could oppose. I commend Ms Wooldridge on that reference, which says:

- (2) to the Family and Community Development Committee to inquire into, consider and report, no later than 31 May 2016, on services for people with autism spectrum disorder in Victoria, including but not limited to —

and the motion sets out subparagraphs (a), (b) and (c), which I will not go through. It is a good motion and the committee should be looking at that. I am sure it will be one of the references that will enjoy bipartisan support, because we all owe it to the kids who suffer from autism, as well as to their parents and carers. It is a serious issue, and we should give it the attention it deserves. I am sure that will be a bipartisan reference, and hopefully we can come up with a quality report that can then be put to the Parliament. I am sure the government will then give it serious consideration so that we can provide the first-class service these kids and their carers deserve. With those comments, I commend the motion to the house.

**Mr RAMSAY** (Western Victoria) — I also rise to speak to the motion by Ms Wooldridge, which says in part:

That pursuant to section 33 of the parliamentary Committees Act 2003 this house requires the following matters to be referred to the joint investigatory committee specified ...

I will particularly speak about paragraph (1) of this motion. I will let my learned colleague Mr Bernie Finn, who has been a strong advocate for investment into autism, speak in some detail on paragraph (2) of the motion. I am pleased that Ms Wooldridge has put a motion to this chamber in relation to a reference to a joint parliamentary committee to investigate a number of issues around local government funding. Despite what Ms Pennicuik said, the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee does have a current reference. It has been given the responsibility to investigate matters around Fiskville.

I am a member of that committee, and given the pace of that inquiry — I suspect the government wants it to go as slowly as possible — we most likely will be conducting that inquiry for the next 20 years. I hope the bipartisan support for this motion might hurry that inquiry up so we can start investigating some more important matters for regional Victoria.

The first part of this motion identifies local government funding and budgetary pressures; the fairness, equity and adequacy of rating systems; the impact of rate-capping policies; the capacity for rural and regional

councils to meet responsibilities for flood planning and preparation, and maintenance; maintenance for local road and bridge networks; and weed and pest animal control. They are all very important issues. They are issues I advocated for for many years in a previous role with the Victorian Farmers Federation. In fact I raised in this chamber on many occasions during the last Parliament the need for an investigation into local government rating per se, as well as the mechanisms and tools that local government presently has at its disposal to raise funds to provide the services that communities expect. I also propose that we look at the income streams that local government is able to access, whether they be federal or state or from other agencies.

There is no doubt that in Western Victoria Region — the electorate I represent — particularly the farming constituency feels it is paying an unfair burden of rates. In fact, as Ms Wooldridge discussed, in Ararat 20 per cent of the ratepayers — the farmers — are paying 80 per cent of total revenue. That is not equitable. Certainly in Ballan there have been many deputations to my office in relation to those farmers, particularly on the interface of development, who are finding that the valuations of their properties are not reflected in the profit of the business or the cash flow of the business. The capital improved value methodology currently used by councils is skewed against those who have high land values but limited cash flow. My hope is that this committee will have the opportunity to look in some detail at local government revenue and the way revenue is collected, as well as the equity across the ratepayer base in relation to that collection and the services provided.

As we know, local governments have been under significant pressure since the Labor government took office in November. It is interesting to note now that government members were very happy to hang their hats on a populist election commitment of capping rates but at the same time they forgot to consult with councils about what impact that might have on them. Almost in the same minute as that announcement was made they also said they would cut a number of programs that have been integral to regional councils providing services and infrastructure to their constituents.

I raise the issue of the country roads and bridges program — this has been mentioned many times in this chamber — and the fact that the Labor government has cut that \$160 million program, which was vital in providing local government with funding to catch up on the backlog of maintenance required on local roads and bridges. The Labor Party has cut the \$100 million allocated to the 40 disadvantaged rural councils that needed that money each year in order to catch up on

that backlog of maintenance and investment in road network and other assets.

The Labor Party has cut the intermodal rail subsidy; \$50 million has been taken away. It was a great initiative by the Napthine government to try to move containers off roads and onto rail. It is extraordinary that the Greens have not been jumping up and down and crying that this was a very important program to move more freight off road and onto rail. The Labor government should continue to support incentives such as this.

The \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund was providing local councils with the support necessary to do a whole range of community projects, to make investments and to piggyback onto other investments and other funding streams that came through local government. We have heard Ms Pulford give a very wishy-washy overview of her new rebadged fund. I think it was initially the Victorian Economic Development Corporation, going back to the Cain and Kirner governments. Then we had the Regional Development Infrastructure Fund under the previous Labor government, and then of course we had the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund established by the coalition government. Now we are reverting to a Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund — and something else and something else.

What concerns me with all these name changes and the movement of money out of what was designated for regional Victoria under the coalition is that vital funds will now be spread across metropolitan Melbourne as well. I will use a Victorian Farmers Federation press release in response to the budget, headed ‘Rural Victoria deserves greater share of budget, says VFF’, to illustrate this:

Rural Victoria has not got its fair share of this year’s state budget, says the Victorian Farmers Federation.

‘As you work through the budget it becomes clear metropolitan Melbourne has gained more than 90 per cent of the infrastructure spend ...

Another thing that is concerning me in relation to the murky new fund that has come under Ms Pulford’s portfolio is that there has been no descriptive direction about where the proceeds of the Rural Finance sale are to be directed. We know there has been a commitment — not a written, budgetary commitment, but a commitment nonetheless — that \$220 million will be provided for the Murray Basin rail project. However, we have seen only \$30 million of this. I might add that this was the previous government’s commitment in the current budget, so I ask: where is the other \$179 million? I guess we will have to wait and see.

I also wish to ask: where is the other \$200 million? I suspect that has fallen into one of these new regional funds which have been rebadged and are supposed to replace the \$1 billion Regional Growth Fund. There is no doubt that regional Victoria is being thoroughly duded by the name changes and the rebadging of some of the money that was specifically designated for regional Victoria under the coalition's Regional Growth Fund. I hope this committee can do a full investigation into exactly what the money trail is that Labor is using in relation to what was specific seed and capital funding under the previous government for infrastructure projects in regional Victoria.

I have indicated that the committee will hopefully be able to conduct a significant investigation into the funding streams for local road and bridge networks. In relation to weed, pest and animal control, the Municipal Association of Victoria has clearly demonstrated that with the responsibility for maintaining and controlling weeds and pests, particularly on roadsides — notwithstanding that there has been a small allocation put aside for local councils, which was initiated by the coalition government in the previous Parliament — now shifting to local councils, the problem escalates but the budgetary allocation does not. Once again councils will be at a disadvantage in having to take on more responsibility without the appropriate funding.

Rate capping is an interesting issue. The shadow Minister for Local Government, David Davis, has already foreshadowed the problems local councils will have in meeting their budget requirements because of the cap. As I understand it, if councils are seeking to exceed the current cap, they have to go to the Essential Services Commission and provide a case for additional funds. I also understand that there could be a problem for councils with the timing of all this in the preparation of council budgets, because an application to the Essential Services Commission and its response will extend the time period way past the budgetary process. Therefore many councils are now saying there is not sufficient time in that process to allow the approval or otherwise of their budget. Notwithstanding that, if the expectation is that they increase services but not have an increased revenue stream, they are going to have to borrow.

There is no doubt that the Labor government's new budget is made up of increasing the size of the public service — by 7.5 per cent, from the figures I have seen — which is typical of Labor. There will also be an annual increase in borrowings, which will blow out over time. For evidence of Labor policy, we need only look at the fact that the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water, Lisa Neville, has decided

to sack all the water authority board members, increase the public service bureaucracy within the water boards, strip the dividends out and increase the debt of those authorities. I will talk more about that this afternoon.

This motion provides a great opportunity for the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee to look into all the matters I have raised. I am pleased to see that there is a bipartisan approach to supporting this motion, and I congratulate Ms Wooldridge on bringing it to the chamber. I look forward to hearing — —

**Mr Barber** interjected.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Mr Barber, I have tried very hard not to talk about the Greens in relation to this motion because I am sure that if you go to the local governments, they will say that one of the biggest cost burdens associated with delivering services is the policies of the Greens in relation to native vegetation. I am happy to have a discussion around native vegetation, and in fact this committee is the perfect vehicle for that.

**Mr Barber** interjected.

**Mr RAMSAY** — The Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee. We can talk about Greens policies for many a moon as we deliberate over the possible reference to that committee, and I will delight in requesting local councils to present themselves at this potential inquiry to discuss the costs associated with some of the native vegetation policies the Greens are putting forward in their requirements now and possibly as we go forward.

I support this motion, and I look forward to Mr Finn's contribution to the debate particularly — keeping in mind his passion and advocacy — to paragraph (2) of the motion, which seeks that a referral be made to the Family and Community Development Committee for inquiry into, consideration of and report in relation to autism spectrum disorder.

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to commend the motion moved by Ms Wooldridge. I would particularly like to comment on the second paragraph of the motion, but first I will briefly comment on paragraph (1)(c), which seeks a referral to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee on the impact of rate-capping policies. This is a timely referral to that committee. I have not had any council representatives come to me — and I have had many come into my office — who are not concerned about this policy and

the impact it will have on their ability to deliver services.

Council representatives raised a wide range of concerns. One that stood out was of a council that explained that it is offering extra mental health services in its area and has been able to cut down waiting times for people in desperate need of referral services from a two-week waiting period to one day. If anyone knows anything about the mental health area, they will know that two weeks is a very long time to wait if you are in crisis. That reduction is really commendable. Such mental health services are essential, and this council is very afraid its services will be cut if rate capping is introduced. The referral suggested is very timely and would give us an opportunity to reflect on those kinds of issues that councils face. I am sure that many of them would want to respond to such an inquiry and share their point of view.

I definitely support the second paragraph of Ms Wooldridge's motion proposing a referral to the Family and Community Development Committee. As most members would know, I have had a 20-year career in the disability area and so this issue is very close to my heart. People with disabilities continue to experience disadvantage to unacceptable levels in Victoria and across Australia. We do not know enough about autism spectrum disorders, and we need to know more, so inquiring into the prevalence of autism spectrum disorder in Victoria, as stated in paragraph (2)(a), is a very good initiative. We have many questions in this area and the motion to consider this issue is very timely. The issue of diagnosis, for example, has been questioned and is different across different services. It is very important that this be examined more closely.

Early intervention is another area that needs consideration. A lot of children start primary school without a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, and that leaves not only them at a disadvantage but also the families who are caring for them and trying to provide them with the best possible start.

The second subparagraph — and again I commend Ms Wooldridge on her drafting of the motion — concerns the availability and adequacy of services provided by the commonwealth, state and local governments across health, education, disability, housing, sport and employment services. I would like to add recreation, because recreation is something that many of us take for granted but something that can be very difficult for people with disabilities to access, particularly people with autism spectrum disorder. Therefore we should be encouraging the social

inclusion of people in the community and their involvement in recreational pursuits, which should be their choice and of an adequate standard.

The next subparagraph concerns the adequacy of services to be provided under the national disability insurance scheme (NDIS). I have had some great reservations in the past around this scheme and its implementation, which I have documented well. We need to keep in mind that in Victoria services have to be maintained until the NDIS is implemented. At this point in time it is only a trial in one of our regions, which is the western region. Even then it is only in a small area of that region — Geelong and surrounds. It will be years before many people across the state are able to transition to this program, so the state government has a responsibility to ensure that it does not relax disability services, which has been my concern all along. We need to ensure that we provide adequate services under the NDIS, but also that we continue to provide adequate services for people with disabilities until they are able to transition to this program.

Subparagraph (d) states:

evidence of the social and economic cost of failing to provide adequate services ...

There is a lot of good academic work in this area, and people who have worked in the field have a great deal of anecdotal evidence of the social cost particularly of failing to provide adequate services to people with autism spectrum disorder and, by extension, to their families. I particularly highlight people with autism spectrum disorder who have a dual disability — for example, people who also have a mental illness or, something I dealt with in a previous workplace, people who have autism and dementia. These are the kinds of dual disabilities that do not fit well into current service provision. Some of them, such as autism and dementia, are quite a new phenomenon that we are just starting to explore, and we must explore these areas in more detail.

The state must take responsibility for providing adequate services in these dual disability areas so that people with disabilities are not siloed but are able to access both aged-care and disability services and both mental health and disability services, not one or the other, because that leads to further disadvantage.

The final subparagraph is around the projected demand for services in Victoria. That is a good point on which to end. We must be able to anticipate what kind of demand we will have for services. This will inform not only the transition to the NDIS but will continue to inform our education system — both our school system

and our higher education system — as people with autism spectrum disorder should be entitled to the best education possible. That is just one example. I commend the motion to the house.

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) — It gives me enormous pleasure to speak on the motion moved by Ms Wooldridge, and I commend her for her proactive nature in putting this matter forward. My friend and colleague Mr Ramsay has fulsomely discussed the first part of the motion — the reference to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee — and I commend him on the words and the work that he has put into these areas over a long time. I am sure that he will take a great deal of interest in this particular inquiry, if the motion is passed today.

I specifically want to speak to the proposed referral to the Family and Community Development Committee, which is to inquire into, consider and report on services for people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in Victoria. I stand here as the shadow parliamentary secretary for autism spectrum disorder, and I understand I am the first person to hold such a role, it being the first time any political party in this country has given autism its own portfolio area. I commend and congratulate Matthew Guy, the Leader of the Opposition in the other place — who some are suggesting is the Premier in waiting — on the foresight he has shown by giving autism its own portfolio area. It is well deserved. This area needs a great deal of emphasis because very few of us know much about it, and that fact needs to change.

I will go through the motion point by point. Firstly, we need to inquire into the prevalence of autism spectrum disorder in Victoria. We know that there has been a significant increase in ASD over recent years. There is a debate going on as to whether there is an increase in the prevalence of the disorder or whether we are able to diagnose it better today. There is a suggestion that ASD has always been with us in significant numbers in the population and that only now are we in a position to diagnose children — it is usually children — with ASD.

In years gone by many people may have been institutionalised — may have been banished from society, basically — because of ASD, and we did not know what it was. This is something we really have to have a very good, hard look at — whether ASD has always been with us at significant rates or indeed whether this is a new phenomenon. If it is a new phenomenon, we have to work out why. We hear some of the hysterical people talking about vaccinations causing autism; there is hysteria surrounding that. We

hear all sorts of interesting propositions as to why ASD is so prominent in modern life, but I think we have to work out if that is the case. If it is the case, yes, let us work out why it is happening, I believe this committee will be in a very good position to have a good, hard look at that particular issue.

Paragraph (2)(b) of the motion refers to the availability and adequacy of the services provided by the commonwealth, state and local governments across health, education, disability, housing, sport and employment services. That is an extraordinarily important part of the motion, because with regard to each and every one of those matters there is a great deal of confusion, particularly in the bureaucracy. Just speaking about education for a moment, I note that in the Victorian education department a lot of the bureaucrats have decided it is all just a bit too hard. They like to put people into boxes. They like to categorise people, using a one-size-fits-all approach. With autism, one size never fits all. The fact that we are talking about a spectrum means we have to be flexible: we have to be able to change and shift our views on each individual. We cannot continue with the attitude that one size fits all, and this inquiry will hopefully go some considerable way towards establishing that fact and perhaps even establishing which direction we will take on this and how we will deal with it.

A few moments ago Dr Carling-Jenkins mentioned that a number of people with autism have multiple disabilities. Being in that situation is a nightmare for parents, a nightmare for carers and often a nightmare for schools and healthcare providers as well. That is something that governments, the bureaucracy and politicians have not taken into account, and it is something they should and must take into account. It is something I believe and sincerely hope this committee will be able to take on with enthusiasm and vigour.

An area that has been largely and sadly ignored is employment. This is something that has just been swept under the carpet. We talk about early intervention, and of course that is very important — early intervention is probably the most important thing of all; if we get children with autism early enough, we can perform close to miracles with them — but one area that has been ignored is employment.

It concerns me that when a child with autism gets to 18 years of age they are just turfed into the street. There is no great desire to assist them. You have to remember that a lot of these people with autism — I would say most of them — are in their own way brilliant. They have so much to contribute to society. Again, I note we have this one-size-fits-all philosophy. In my view what

we must do — and I will certainly be saying this to the committee — is to find out what these people excel at and to make the most of that. We owe it to them, and we owe it to us. These people can make a real contribution, a strong contribution and in some cases a monumental contribution to society.

**Mr Drum** — Train them up.

**Mr FINN** — Train them up, but sometimes, Mr Drum, they do not even need training. Some of them are just so brilliant and so bright that they do not need training. You just need to put them on the right track, and they will do it all themselves. This is an issue, therefore, that I am very pleased will be addressed by this committee.

Paragraph (2)(c) of the motion refers to the national disability insurance scheme (NDIS), which is a big question mark, is it not? We know there is a desire on all sides for the NDIS to happen, but we also know it is a fair way off. We also know it is a very expensive exercise, and at the moment the commonwealth is in no position to spend the sort of funds that an NDIS, properly funded, would need. The point that Dr Carling-Jenkins made is a very good one. She said we need to provide services for people with autism until such time as the NDIS comes in. I reckon the NDIS will not come in for another couple of decades — that is my personal view — and we need to prepare for that time. We cannot be going into this saying, ‘The NDIS will look after that in a couple of years’, because it will not. I do not think that is a realistic time frame at all. That is something we really need to have a good, hard think about and a good, hard look at, and this committee will clearly be able to do that.

Paragraph (2)(d) of the motion refers to evidence of the social and economic cost of failing to provide adequate services. This is perhaps a hidden cost of autism that many do not think about. The impact on families in particular can be quite horrendous and horrific.

I know many families that have broken down because of a child or indeed children with autism. It is very difficult when autism dominates a family, and it is very easy to allow that to happen — in fact it is damn hard to stop it sometimes. It is such an all-conquering condition that it hits everybody surrounding it very hard. I am not just talking about the immediate family but also, for instance, grandparents, who may be in denial or who may blame their children as the parents of the child with autism for the condition. They may say, ‘In our family we would never have autism. There must be something wrong with you’. That is the way some people think and that is part of what has to be

addressed. The impact on families, as I say, can be quite horrendous, and I am very pleased that this motion proposes we take that into consideration by way of this referral.

The projected demand for services in Victoria is also very important. Whilst none of us has a crystal ball, there is a trend by which we can project what will be needed down the track and what we will have to provide in terms of a whole range of services for people with ASD and their families — particularly if we establish in the first instance that autism spectrum disorder is in fact on the rise rather than a historical thing that we are only now recognising.

I commend Ms Wooldridge for this motion. It is an opportunity we should not waste. It is an opportunity that I, as a member of the Family and Community Development Committee, relish — an opportunity that we should all embrace. I could be wrong, but it is my understanding that not too many parliaments have held investigations of this nature. If it is done properly, this is something we can lead the world on. I urge the house to take my few words into consideration. I ask members to support this motion, and I look forward to the opportunity to tackle this issue head on for the betterment of so many Victorians. If we can do that, we will have done our state and our country a great service.

**Mr MORRIS** (Western Victoria) — It is a great pleasure to stand to support Ms Wooldridge’s motion. I want to note in particular the reference being given to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee by this motion. The point it raises about local government funding and budgetary pressures is very pertinent and is critically important across rural and regional councils, as this motion recognises. What we have seen queried of late — which was well detailed in the Whelan report — is the sustainability of councils across regional and rural Victoria. It is becoming harder and harder for those councils to ensure that they are maintaining and balancing their budgets.

It is unfortunate that we have seen cuts to critical investments in roads and bridges in regional and rural Victoria of late. The \$160 million country roads and bridges funding offered under the previous government was a critical investment in key infrastructure across rural and regional Victoria. As I travel throughout my electorate the two main issues that are continually raised with me are jobs and the state of the roads in rural and regional Victoria. Without that \$160 million investment in the country roads and bridges, we are going to see councils that are unable to maintain their roads.

In my time on the Ballarat city council — which is a larger council with a greater capacity in many ways to ensure that infrastructure is maintained — we were faced many times with the decision of whether to maintain a bridge or allow it to fail, as a result of which there could be residents who would no longer have access to important road infrastructure. The funding was just not available at that time. The difficulty of ensuring that infrastructure is maintained to the standard a community expects, and indeed deserves, is only going to increase.

I also note that ‘fairness, equity and adequacy of rating systems’ is proposed to be looked into as part of this inquiry. Indeed it is important that this is taken into account.

**Mr Barber** interjected.

**Mr MORRIS** — Every councillor I know, certainly including Mr Barber during his time on a council, would have had ratepayers come to them to discuss some of their difficulties in paying their rates. I am not sure if Mr Barber on his council would have had the same number of farmers as came to me.

**Mr Barber** — At the City of Yarra? No.

**Mr MORRIS** — There are not too many farmers in the city of Yarra. But in my time on the Ballarat council many farmers came to me with very valid points about their capacity to pay the rates levied. Owners of commercial-rated properties would also have discussions with councils and councillors about what they see as a rating system based not on their capacity to pay but rather on the value of the property they have. It is important that we look into these areas because they are truly of concern.

However, it is also important to note that the committee reference includes the impact of rate-capping policies. I have great concerns with rate capping because of the restraint on the capacity of elected local councils to do the work their communities ask of them. We have many councils in many different situations. Rural and regional councils always work hard to try to be innovative in the work they do to ensure that they are meeting the needs of their communities. But if they do not have the capacity to raise or not raise their rates, whatever the case may be, their capacity to meet the demands of their community is made difficult. Similarly, if state governments had restraints imposed upon them, then I am sure there would be significant push back, because elected officials should have the capacity to respond to the needs of their community and

ensure that the infrastructure and investment the community expects and deserves is delivered.

We have seen references to the Essential Services Commission in relation to rate capping, because if councils wish to raise their rates above the current CPI figure, they will be required to make application to the commission. This is of concern. The application process will place a significant cost burden on councils, particularly those in rural and regional areas where the budgets are not the same size as those of the City of Yarra or the City of Ballarat, for example. Smaller councils, which are scrimping and saving to get by, will have imposed on them an additional cost burden by their having to make application to the Essential Services Commission. They have to pay for not only the application to the commission but also for the commission to review that work. I have grave concerns about what that will mean for the capacity of rural and regional councils to do their work.

It is exceptionally important that we look at the concerns being raised, because if we do not examine them, we will not truly understand what it is going to mean for those councils that are already scrimping and scraping to get by and doing the very best they can to deliver for their communities. It is important to note that our local councils, particularly our rural and regional councils, are close to the people they represent. Councillors make themselves available to residents and they hear the concerns of their ratepayers on a regular basis. It is those councillors who are in a good position to understand the needs of their community and what it is their community expects and asks from them. The reference to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee is an important one in investigating and understanding the impost on local government and in ensuring that they have the capacity to deliver for their communities as we move forward.

Another area to be considered in the discussion on budgetary pressures is the timing and delivery of and consultation on budgets. Local councils do a good job in ensuring that their local communities are consulted on their budgets as the process unfolds. The Local Government Act 1989 stipulates that consultation with the local community must occur before budgets are put in place. It is through this consultation process that councils and councillors hear about where their ratepayers have concerns or where they believe they are doing well with their budgets. It is through these processes that councils hear from their ratepayers and understand the concerns and needs of their local communities.

I turn now to the proposed reference to the Family and Community Development Committee to inquire into the services for people with autism spectrum disorder in Victoria. Prior to coming to this place, my place was in the world of education. In years gone by there was little understanding of what autism was or how we could ensure that children with autism were being adequately catered for in our education system. Of late we have seen a focus on autism spectrum disorder, and much more on the ability rather than the disability of people with autism spectrum disorder.

Mr Finn made the point in his contribution that people who are on the autism spectrum have many abilities. The issue is about our capacity to focus on the ability of those people rather than their disability and to ensure that people with autism are able to live full and fruitful lives. But it is not without work that we are going to get there, and we need to better understand the prevalence of autism. I suspect, and I make this point without any scientific basis, that autism has been prevalent within the community for a long time. However, it is only recently that we have come to understand what it is. Similarly, we often used to think that people choked on peanuts, but it is only in recent times that we have come to understand that perhaps it was more often due to anaphylaxis.

We have done a much better job in recent times of identifying autism, and it is through that identification that we have come to understand that it is something that can bring great skill to a person. Many of the children with autism that I have taught have had phenomenal skills and capacity, particularly with numbers and patterns and the like. At the same time we need to recognise and focus on their ability rather than their disability.

We often hear about people with high-functioning autism who are on that particular end of the spectrum, but it is also important that we focus on those who are on the lower functioning side of the spectrum. A constituent of mine has a son with autism who is quite low on the capacity spectrum, and she recently came into my office with grave concerns about what supports she could receive from the government. Her concern was that the early childhood interventions that were previously available to her were no longer available as a result of the age and stage of life of her child. We need to ensure that parents who have children on the lower functioning side of the autism spectrum receive the support that is required as their children move forward, because being a parent of a child with autism spectrum can be phenomenally demanding. We need to ensure that we as a society and we in this Parliament recognise that people who have children on the autism

spectrum deserve our support and that of the community.

The motion moved by Ms Wooldridge, with its inquiry references for the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee and the Family and Community Development Committee, is very important. I certainly have great pleasure in commending the motion to the house, and I look forward to seeing it supported in this place.

**Mr DRUM** (Northern Victoria) — It is with great pleasure that I take the opportunity to talk to this motion moved by Ms Wooldridge. A motion for a reference to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee for an inquiry into something as crucial as local government funding is one we should welcome. The second aspect of the motion deals with a reference to the Family and Community Development Committee to inquire into a range of issues in relation to autism and other disabilities.

The former Rural and Regional Committee has a rich history. When I entered Parliament one of the first jobs I had was to appear as a witness — even though I was a member of Parliament — at a committee hearing in Bendigo on an inquiry looking into country football and netball clubs and the value and worth they have for their respective communities. As the chairman of the Bendigo Football League at the time, I gave evidence to the best of my ability about how important country football and netball clubs are to their respective communities.

The upshot of that inquiry was that the Brumby government introduced a country football and netball program that had buy-in from the AFL, AFL Victoria, or the Victorian Country Football League as it was known in those days, and also from Netball Victoria. These funds were aggregated between the peak association of football, which was AFL Victoria, and Netball Victoria, and a large funding allocation came from the Victorian government. Money from the program was offered to various clubs on a matching dollar-for-dollar basis. Clubs that had the ability, desire and impetus to raise their own funds could access the money. The leveraging concept was quite outstanding. Local governments were urged to get on board, and they did. It was a fantastic program. As it turns out we now have a new Labor government, and eight years after the start of the program it is going to be axed.

During the 56th Parliament I had the opportunity to chair the Rural and Regional Committee even though we were in opposition. During that time the committee

held an inquiry into rural and regional tourism because so much of our tourism product and content in the state of Victoria is based in the regions. Everyone outside Australia wants to go and have a look at the road, the reef and the rock. We have the Great Ocean Road, and it drags a hell of a lot of people out of Melbourne, taking them down through Geelong, the Surf Coast area, into the Otways and possibly back through Ballarat. Everybody is a winner with that product.

Much of our tourism product is based in the regions. People want to go and see the fairy penguins, the great wineries that are in the region, the high country and the Murray River. Chairing that inquiry into the importance and critical nature of tourism in rural and regional Victoria was an enlightening opportunity, and it was great that rural and regional areas of Victoria had their own committee through which they could advocate for these various inquiries.

The Rural and Regional Committee also had an inquiry into the regional cities of the future that looked into where regional Victoria is going to be in 10, 20 or 30 years time. Committee members travelled to Europe, and we looked at some of the most sustainable cities in the world to see how those cities are planned and administered. We looked at their ability to connect with other regional cities and their capital city, as well as their use of IT, to make sure that our regional cities will be set up for the future.

The last inquiry of the Rural and Regional Committee was around the extent and nature of disadvantage in regional Victoria. After 11 years of a Labor government we had to identify all the additional costs incurred when people want to deliver services into the regions. We understand that it costs more to educate our people in the regions, including professional development for all the people who work for a state government authority or agency. We understand that it costs a hell of a lot more to send an athletics team from Mildura or Mallacoota to Melbourne to compete in state championships. There is a huge cost involved for people in the theatrical arts who want to perform on a state stage.

Committee members had to identify a whole range of expenses that are incurred continually by people who live in the regions. We did so understanding the lack of educational achievement and how that impacts on the ability of people in the regions to transition into further education. We did so understanding the connection between poor educational outcomes and income capacity and how that income capacity — the lack of earnings and wealth — throughout the regions impacts on health outcomes. All of a sudden we could see the

link between the expenses incurred by people in the regions and those people being less well educated, less wealthy and less healthy. When there was a specific committee for rural and regional Victoria those matters could be brought to the fore.

The new committee is a combination of two or three former committees. Members on this side are trying to bring into the public domain issues around local government funding and budgetary pressures, and the fairness, equity and adequacy of rating systems. We must acknowledge that local government is an instrument of state government. The government can continue to actively pursue a fair and equitable funding arrangement or it can let local government wither and die. If it chooses the latter, one way or another councils will fight for what they need to operate and deliver services to their people.

The government can be proactive or pretend there are no problems and just wait for those problems to fester and for councils to come back and fight. That is effectively what happened in 2010 when the 19 smallest rural councils got together and created what was called the Whelan group of councils. An esteemed gentleman, Mr Whelan, put together a report that highlighted all the woes and inadequacies associated with the funding model that was then at the forefront of so many of the problems for local government. Again, at that time the Labor Party chose to ignore the report of the Whelan group of councils that had had to come together to gain the strength they needed to take on the government of the day.

On looking at what happened in those days when local councils were not adequately funded, one can see that quite simply in those circumstances the only choice councils have is to run down their services and their assets. One council put in place a road maintenance program with a 300-year cycle. Because of the amount of money it had available to maintain its local council roads, it was in effect saying, 'We'll get back to that road in 300 years'. In some shires councils were choosing to grade bitumen roads back to gravel because they figured that in the long term that was cheaper than trying to maintain the roads as bitumen. They are the sorts of ridiculous situations that come up when a government chooses to turn its back on local governments in regional Victoria. As well as that, because councils had no potential to pay for the upgrades and maintenance that were needed, swimming pools in some of our smaller communities right around the state were shut down.

The ability for local governments to get themselves out of financial trouble by increasing rates is not something

that small rural councils can even entertain, because they simply do not have the rate base for that to be an instrument that they can use. If Towong Shire Council, for instance, raises rates by 1 per cent, it will get about \$40 000 extra in rates income. If rural councils are to be viable in their own right and able to deliver what might be called a base level of services that everybody in Victoria would expect any council to deliver to any of its people, it is incumbent upon the state government of the day to make sure that all those councils are able to operate in a financially viable manner. That was not evident in the 11 years of Labor government in this state prior to 2010, and in the first instance it seems that from 2014 onwards Labor is again not interested in it happening.

That can be seen by quite simply looking at some of the programs that the government is cutting from local government. For a start, \$100 million is being ripped out of the Local Government Infrastructure Fund. That was part of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, and it was put in place so that local government did not have to come cap in hand begging and begging the state government for every grant of \$355, \$2006 or whatever. Councils were given the equivalent of \$500 000 per annum, and they had the comfort of the knowledge that they were going to get that funding each year for four years.

All they had to do was identify the projects and inform the state as to how they were going to spend their Local Government Infrastructure Fund contribution of \$2 million over four years. All they had to do was say, 'These are the types of projects we are going to build with this money'. That takes away an awful amount of red tape. It takes away an awful amount of work for staff at the local government end because they do not have to keep applying for grants, they do not have to keep filling out paperwork, they do not have to justify how each of the little grants has been spent and they do not have to fill out all the other paperwork at the end of the project to talk about the success or failure of the project. It was simply an as-of-right contribution to allow the 48 smaller councils to spend their \$2 million over four years. It was a \$100 million investment, a \$100 million injection into regional Victoria which this government has seen fit to just wipe, point blank.

The results will be borne out in a small council simply not having the money to build a toilet block. The results will be borne out in a small council not having the money to turn some marshy swamp into a beautiful wetland and create a walking track for its people. Those are the sorts of projects that were funded. Now councils will not be able to renovate and rejuvenate local town halls. Those are the sorts of projects that were done

under the Local Government Infrastructure Fund. They were small council projects that were only ever part of the council's funding, but they were getting a bit of a kick along and some support from a state government that understood that it is a greater help for smaller councils to be given an opportunity to plan and have an understanding that there is an income stream coming through from the state government to plan for projects and which they can rely upon as of right.

That was \$100 million over four years across the state. Coupled with that was the Putting Locals First Fund. Under the leadership of the former Leader of The Nationals, Peter Ryan, and former Premiers Ted Baillieu and Denis Naphthine, the member for South-West Coast in the Assembly, the former government saw the need for some larger scale projects that had a sense of regionality about them. Councils were able to apply for funding in the vicinity of about \$2 million over the course of four years. Those applications had to have a regional aspect to them. But the money had to be matched by council spending and preferably also have some serious buy-in from the local community and community stakeholders who would be the beneficiaries of those projects.

Nevertheless, there was an opportunity for councils to bite off some of the bigger projects that had been annoying them for a number of years. There was an opportunity for them to partner up with the state government and put in applications, understanding that a whole range of those projects would qualify under the criteria associated with the Putting Locals First Fund. It was a brilliant program.

Some of the smaller councils were struggling to qualify under the criteria for projects based around regionality. However, with support and assistance it was amazing how innovative some of those councils were with projects that enabled them to share in the wealth that was handed down by the state government, in conjunction with local government, community groups and community stakeholders. I make special mention of the community branches of the Bendigo Bank, because it is amazing how many times we came across smaller communities that did not have the capacity to raise those funds on their own but a community contribution to the funding stream by way of the Bendigo Bank community branches meant the community then got its share of the funding that it needed.

There was the Local Government Infrastructure Fund, which was \$100 million as of right for small councils. There was another \$100 million going into councils as they put in applications for projects of significant regional importance. Then there was something that

Labor has walked away from totally. After 11 years in government it said, 'We cannot possibly get any more towns connected to natural gas. We have done all the ones that can be done. We have done them'.

We made promises around 13 more towns and communities that we believed we could get natural gas to. We were able to get natural gas to seven of those towns by the traditional method of running pipes for fully reticulated gas mains to those towns and reticulated the towns in the conventional method. We identified another six towns where we could offer reticulated natural gas but unfortunately it was cost prohibitive to have those towns connected by the traditional methods using a gas mains pipeline, so we introduced the method of putting a mother station on the outskirts of town and having the gas delivered by road so that the mums and dads and community members in those towns were able to turn on reticulated gas at extremely competitive rates with a fully reticulated streetscape. We were able to do that for the remaining priority towns.

Then we were able to couple up that method with a contribution from the federal government that enabled us to include places like Robinvale, Swan Hill, Kerang and Nathalia — places which had never been considered to be viable to get natural gas. All we have heard from the current Minister for Regional Development is that this is a fraud. Somehow or another the previous Minister for Regional and Rural Development, Jacinta Allan, now the Minister for Public Transport, called this project a fraud on the communities. What we will see in the future is that these towns will have natural gas connected.

**Ms Pulford** interjected.

**Mr DRUM** — What we are hearing from government members is that they are walking away from the concept of delivering natural gas to certain communities in Victoria. The previous government showed that we can now take natural gas to any community in Victoria because it can be transported by road. You can deposit the natural gas on the outskirts of any town anywhere in the state. For example, Mallacoota is 2 hours away from any other significant town, but it should now be coming into the thinking of any serious state government because we now know there is a system available — a system which has been operating in Mount Buller for the last 20 years. That system allows the gas to be delivered to the edge of a community by road, deposited into a mother station and then delivered to the respective residents by the normal reticulated methods.

Instead of the government looking at this new way of delivering natural gas and getting on board to see what other communities can get natural gas, it has taken the exact opposite approach. Government members have said the existing program is a scam and a fraud. They are going to run a mile from any future program that might see communities, which are a bit less fortunate than others simply because of distance, connected to natural gas. They do not show the slightest interest in seeing if other communities can be connected to natural gas.

The Local Government Infrastructure Fund is helping out councils to the tune of \$100 million. The \$100 million Putting Locals First Fund is helping out local councils and communities. There was \$100 million to take natural gas to communities that the previous Labor government ran a mile from. Now we are talking about the local roads and bridges program, which has also been cut.

**Mr Ramsay** interjected.

**Mr DRUM** — The \$160 million which was delivered to our 40 smallest councils, some of which are our poorest councils, has been cut. As I said earlier, left to a Labor Party, these councils will get to the stage where they will have a 300-year rolling maintenance program on their local roads. Under Labor they will get to the stage where they will have to start grading their bitumen roads back to gravel. They will get to the stage where they will have to start working down their assets to the extent where their swimming pools will have to close. Councils will have no other option than to run down every major asset they maintain.

If we talk about those four programs on their own, we are talking about a withdrawal of \$460 million over the term of this government. It is quite shocking. It is incredibly abrasive. In its very first budget the government is reeling away from regional Victorian communities at a staggering rate. You have to witness it and understand what it is doing to believe it.

The second aspect of this motion relates to an inquiry into the prevalence of autism spectrum disorder in Victoria. It is an interesting concept. We have heard Dr Carling-Jenkins and Mr Finn talk about their experiences of dealing firsthand with autism and disabilities, and we know how important this reference is going to be. Any member of this chamber who is doing their job as a local member — and I am sure this applies to members of the other chamber — would spend an inordinate amount of their time talking to families with children with disabilities — and some of

those children might well be 60 years old. You are sometimes talking to 85-year-old parents.

From day one of my 12 years in this place, my experience has been that this group is the most prominent in terms of being unable to get the support and services needed. They have been unable to get the resources they need to give their children the best start in life or to give their children the opportunity to live a comfortable life when their elderly parents pass on from this world. These people are guilt ridden because they feel they are going to leave behind a son or daughter who they know cannot look after themselves.

The concept of an inquiry looking into the availability and adequacy of services and support provided by commonwealth, state and local governments is very timely. We understand that Australians as a collective are 100 per cent behind the national disability insurance scheme (NDIS). As a nation we have identified that this is a particular aspect that we have previously got wrong in relation to what we do and do not cater for in our community.

I draw the comparison to another group of people in our community who also need help — that is, aged people. When people get to a certain age and can no longer look after themselves, Australia looks after them. They move into an aged-care facility, and that is something we take for granted. Yet when it comes to this other cohort in our community — people who are suffering from disabilities — we just leave it to the individual families to look after them in a manner that should make us hang our heads and be quite ashamed. Therefore we have all got behind the concept of the NDIS. We look forward to the program getting started down in Geelong and hope it works well.

We also have to be aware that as yet no-one has worked out how we are going to pay for it. If we were to do some back-of-the-envelope costings, we would soon realise that the increase to the Medicare levy made two years ago by the federal government is not going to be anywhere near enough. It might not even be half of what the anticipated need will be. If we are truly going to give these families the support and resources they need, the steps that have been taken so far will probably be just over half the amount of money that will be needed.

State governments are saying that they do not have the capacity to find the extra funds required and the federal government is saying that the budget deficit is ballooning out beyond all control. Here we have something that everyone supports, but nobody has any idea how we are going to pay for it. There is a real risk

that the NDIS, under whatever government is in control, could effectively be wound back to the extent that the services we thought were going to be provided as an as-of-right type of support would be cut back significantly, which would make us better off than we are now, but not significantly better off.

I want to pick up on a point made by Bernie Finn in his contribution about whether we are doing all we can to get people with disabilities into the mainstream workforce. He said that many people with disabilities already have the skills they need to join the mainstream workforce. I have also seen the work my partner does in a training group to train up people with disabilities to help them become job ready. These are the sorts of things we should be doing.

There is one booming business in this state at the moment — the business of making cups of coffee. I do not want to take away from the skill of making a cup of coffee, but you cannot tell me that people with disabilities would not make excellent baristas on an everyday basis. Under supervision, and with support provided, we could have thousands of people with disabilities employed in mainstream cafes making coffees left, right and centre and getting paid money they had previously never dreamt of earning. If we start thinking laterally, we will see that there are hundreds of professions people with special needs or slight disabilities could slip into, and they could make an absolute success of those opportunities. I do not think we are working hard enough as a community to find those opportunities, and I want to pick up on what Mr Finn is suggesting.

These two references have been well thought out and well prepared. I am in full support of the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee looking into the adequacy of local government funding, and of the Family and Community Development Committee looking into the prevalence, availability and adequacy of services for people with autism and other disabilities. Hopefully we can have a good look at the NDIS to see how the funding models are scoping at the moment and to see the projections for the future so that we can determine whether we will be in a situation in which we can offer these families the services that everybody in Australia thinks we are going to be able to offer them.

**Motion agreed to.**

**MURRAY BASIN RAIL PROJECT****Mr DRUM** (Northern Victoria) — I move:

That this house:

- (1) urges the Andrews Labor government to comprehensively support the Murray Basin rail project which provides for an investment of at least \$220 million to build a better system from the state's north-west to the coast, including —
  - (a) Maryborough to Ararat line refurbishment;
  - (b) Yelta to Gheringhap (Geelong) standardisation;
  - (c) Sea Lake to Korong Vale standardisation;
  - (d) Manangatang to Dunolly standardisation; and
  - (e) Murrayville to Ouyen; and
- (2) notes that —
  - (a) under the previous coalition government's project plan, and included in the 2014–15 state budget, funding was provided from the \$400 million realised by the sale of the Rural Finance Corporation; and
  - (b) although the Andrews Labor government has made public comments it would build the Murray Basin rail project, it has so far refused to commit to funding levels or the improvements, upgrades or time lines required for the vital project.

This is an incredibly vital project for the north-west of the state. Certain aspects of this project have been talked about since the time prior to the 1999 election, going way back to a Labor government that made a fully-fledged plan to standardise the line to Mildura.

That Labor promise was then broken. Four years later Labor went to the next election and decided to freeze a promise. It did not actually break the promise, but Labor thought it might freeze it. I have never heard that terminology used before or since. 'We're not going to go ahead and fulfil the promise; we're not going to break the promise, but we are going to freeze it'. Unfortunately it is pretty hot in the Mallee, and that frozen promise melted. It was not long before Labor then had to turn around and break the promise altogether.

A guy named Russell Savage, a former member for Mildura in the Assembly, came into this place with the idea of bringing back the rail line to Mildura.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE****Government contracts**

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the minister representing the Premier in this house, Mr Jennings, the Special Minister of State, and it concerns the manner in which the government undertakes contracts. We have all witnessed the issue of the east–west link, with contracts signed before an election, hurried side letters and withheld business plans that have been nothing short of controversial and expensive. All opinions aside over whether the project should have gone ahead or not, along with a multitude of Victorians I am concerned about this kind of approach ever being taken on government contracts. What will this government do to ensure that the issues surrounding the east–west link contracts do not recur in the future?

**Mr JENNINGS** (Special Minister of State) — I thank Dr Carling-Jenkins for a very good question and the dispassionate way in which she raised the question, because this is a matter of good governance in relation to the decision-making of governments and the way in which the interests of the public can be best protected now and into the future. Whilst the member may be aware that my colleagues the Premier and the Treasurer both have referred to the government's intention to introduce legislation to prevent from occurring again circumstances where large-scale contracts may be rushed through and entered into in the dying days of a government's term of office, she has not fallen foul of the requirement that a question cannot call for legislation.

I know she has not couched her question in that form, but it certainly is the intention of the government to find a way in which it can provide greater certainty for the Victorian community that contracts will not be entered into in the concluding period of a term of office, certainly not contracts that may have a dubious mandate from the people at an election and certainly not those that compromise the ongoing financial position of the state and the options the electorate may choose to exercise as to whether it supports the project or not.

In terms of the lesson that should be learnt from the experience of the east–west link contract, it is this government's intention to learn and apply that lesson by having legislation that provides guidance to the Victorian community, the government and the Parliament about the way in which executive power should be exercised in the future. It is the government's

intention to introduce that piece of legislation during this term.

*Supplementary question*

**Dr CARLING-JENKINS** (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his response. I would just like a little bit more information about the exact steps this government will take to ensure that compensation clauses in future public works contracts are transparent in negotiation and available for public scrutiny and that all commercial contracting processes comply with best practice in business ethics?

**Mr JENNINGS** (Special Minister of State) — I thank the member for her question, because the incoming Andrews government was subjected to the results of the expectations of the opposition that the contract would be released, and indeed the contract and the business case have been released. At the time the extraordinary proposition that the opposition put to us was that the contract, which fully complied with Partnerships Victoria guidelines, was a part of the motion that was put to the chamber. Whether that contract complied with the community's expectations in terms of its construct, its probity, its transparency and its reliability in protecting the state's interests was absent in the contract. It would be this government's intention to make sure that it is very clear about that in the future.

**Renewable energy**

**Mr PURCELL** (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture representing the Minister for Industry, who is also the Minister for Energy and Resources. Western Victoria has the potential to become the renewable energy hub of Australia, but the lack of action by all levels of government is wrecking the industry. Hundreds of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in investment have been lost in my electorate alone due to the lack of support for renewable energy. Eight organisations this week have come out together to urge the federal government and opposition to reach an agreement on the renewable energy target before further damage is done. I commend the state government for its revised wind farm planning laws, but I ask: will it create a more secure future for the industry through the establishment of a Victorian renewable energy target?

**Ms PULFORD** (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank Mr Purcell for his question, and I could not agree more about the potential for renewable energy industries in our electorate of Western Victoria Region. The substantive question on a Victorian renewable

energy target I will take on notice and ask my colleague, Lily D'Ambrosio, the Minister for Industry, to provide the member with a full response to it.

I take the opportunity to indicate that the government's new \$200 million Future Industries Fund is about supporting the six sectors of the Victorian economy that we believe have the greatest capacity to boom and grow, and in which we are ready to lead the world. New energy technology is one of those, and I believe, if we get this right, there will be great opportunities for this in western Victoria.

I also inform Mr Purcell and the house that Ms D'Ambrosio has written to the federal government encouraging it to end the uncertainty that has been afflicting the industry for so many years now.

I advise the house that the government has indicated that it will be developing a Victorian renewable energy action plan, which is about driving jobs and growth in the sector. Obviously some certainty in the national settings is very important to that end. It is our intention to conclude that work by the end of the year. In developing that work there will be extensive stakeholder consultation.

*Supplementary question*

**Mr PURCELL** (Western Victoria) — I thank the minister for that very good explanation, and I look forward to that report. I ask: what plans, if any, does the government have to support businesses such as Keppel Prince in Portland, which laid off 100 workers late last year due to the uncertainty surrounding the renewable energy targets?

**Ms PULFORD** (Minister for Agriculture) — Again, I will refer the question to Ms D'Ambrosio. I understand that the uncertainty has created enormous difficulties for Keppel Prince over a number of years and that the loss of those jobs late last year was devastating for the families involved and for other businesses in the area that support the work that Keppel Prince does. We will work towards a much more secure environment for investment in renewable energy, and that can only be a good thing for a company like Keppel Prince, which has a wonderful future ahead of it if we can just get the policies right.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Mr Davis** — On a point of order, President, Mr Dalidakis reflected directly on Mr Ramsay. I am not sure if Mr Ramsay heard that clearly across the chamber, but I am closer and I heard what he said. I

would ask that he withdraw it. I am not going to repeat what he said.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! On the point of order, I did not hear what he said. I was listening intently to everybody. I was most bemused by the various interjections across the chamber; I did not understand their relevance to question time. I was actually quite keen to move on with the next question. I will not require a withdrawal because I did not hear it and I do not believe Hansard did either. Mr Dalidakis does need to be cautious about the remarks that he makes, but indeed there was some provocation.

### Health system performance

**Ms HARTLAND** (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Special Minister of State. The recently released Victorian Auditor-General's report titled *Emergency Service Response Times* revealed the significant limitations of the performance measures. He found that the measures were outdated, not based on evidence and there were problems with calculation methods. Also, there have been many other important measures of performance that are not reported, like outcomes, service quality, efficiency and cost effectiveness. There are also huge inconsistencies between agencies in what is reported. He found these limitations were preventing the public from holding these government agencies fully to account. My question for the minister is: will the government commission an independent review into how meaningful, consistent and transparent performance measures can be established and published across our emergency and health services?

**Mr JENNINGS** (Special Minister of State) — I thank Ms Hartland for her question, which is one in a series of questions to me, and her urging the government to introduce at the earliest opportunity our legislative proposal to deal with transparency and accountability in a number of areas like the health sector and emergency services. I take this opportunity to congratulate the member on her rigour in pursuing that issue and to confirm that it is my determination to make sure that the government does introduce that piece of legislation during the course of this year.

The issues that Ms Hartland has outlined by way of reference to the Auditor-General's report are a measure of the problems that we have inherited and the problems that have to be addressed. There is an inconsistent approach across not only different types of agencies, from health agencies to emergency services, but there are also inconsistencies within those sectors themselves about compliance and the ability to generate

information that is reliable. I can assure the member that that is proving to be a very vexing issue, not only for the consideration of the Auditor-General but a vexing issue in terms of trying to do something about it to make sure that by the time the government introduces a piece of legislation which sets very clear time lines and expectations around the delivery of information, we are able to comply with the piece of legislation that we introduce. That is the degree of complexity in that, I can assure the member of that fact. It is something that we are very determined to resolve.

I would have thought that the scrutiny the Auditor-General has applied is some degree of independent assessment in its own measure and an independent validation of the concern and the need to take action. I am not sure whether the member wants me to take this as an opportunity to have an additional consultancy into the viability of data collection or methods by which it may contract out from the government responsibility of doing it. I do not think that that is what she is saying.

I would be reluctant to retest the soil that we know is already quite contaminated and needs us to work on it. We actually have some guidelines to work on it; we are determined to work on it. If the member wants to recommend any method by which she thinks we can take best practice and apply that learning in real time, I am very happy to hear that advice, either in the chamber or at any time. Certainly the agencies that we are working with will be happy to take that advice, because they know they are on notice for us to collectively improve our reporting capability in Victoria so the Victorian community has a greater confidence than it does today.

### *Supplementary question*

**Ms HARTLAND** (Western Metropolitan) — It is very heartening to hear the minister acknowledging the problems that have been identified. I am not here to advise the government on exactly how it should do it; that is why I think an independent review of these matters would actually come up with a system of how it should be done. I suppose my question is: can the minister give me a time line on how this will progress, because obviously it is a serious problem that needs to be addressed, as the minister has already acknowledged?

**Mr JENNINGS** (Special Minister of State) — I thank Ms Hartland for her question. She has put me on notice in relation to a time line on a couple of occasions. I have indicated that during the course of this year it is our intention to have that legislation

implemented. That continues to be a commitment we believe we will be able to comply with, so recommissioning an independent piece of work at this point in time may slow us up in being able to deliver. We will be very happy to be measured by the effectiveness of the legislation we introduce and the systems we introduce, and if that over time warrants further scrutiny, then we will be open to that issue. But I would be keen for us to get on and deliver on what we have promised at the earliest opportunity, and I still maintain my commitment to this year being the time frame in which we will deliver it.

### Infrastructure budget

**Ms WOOLDRIDGE** (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government, Mr Jennings. Will the minister explain why the government has slashed infrastructure spending by \$6.4 billion, as outlined in the budget handed down yesterday?

**Mr JENNINGS** (Special Minister of State) — I thank Ms Wooldridge for her question. The interesting construction she has put on the budget paper is inconsistent with the outstanding range of infrastructure proposals that have been funded within the budget. If you have a look at the forward estimates period in relation to the infrastructure program profile, which averages about \$5.2 billion over the forward estimates, it can be seen that that is beyond the 10-year outgoing average of infrastructure spending in the state of Victoria. The proposition is that there is a massive slash whereas in fact the infrastructure program, on average over the forward estimates, provides for a total of \$22 billion worth of investment in major projects that the government is extremely proud of, whether that be the range of level crossing removals — —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! The member has posed a question that I think would be of great interest to all members in the house, and the minister is addressing that question. He deserves to be heard with the courtesy of the house.

**Mr JENNINGS** — I thank the President for the support he has provided because I am 100 per cent answering the question. I am 100 per cent explaining the investment profile of the infrastructure program outlined in the budget, whether it be the schools program, whether it be the removal of level crossings or whether it be the \$1.5 billion that has been committed in the forward estimates in relation to the Metro rail project. There are significant projects, one after

another — 100 trains, 100 trams — with the rollout of that rolling stock and all of that program. There is \$22 billion, \$5.2 billion on average over the forward estimates period each and every year, which is higher than what the outgoing 10-year average profile for infrastructure spending has been in the state of Victoria. I would have thought that it would be an extraordinary proposition to portray that as a slash. For anybody to outline it as a slash in terms of the infrastructure pipeline in Victoria is quite an extraordinary proposition.

The reason there is a difference in the profile of the budget settings established by the current government compared to the former government is that it had one project. It had many, many eggs in one basket, and that basket was the failed east–west project which totally compromised the structure of the Victorian budget. It totally compromised the investment profile in the years going forward. This government removed that project from the ledger and replaced it with the removal of 50 level crossings. It replaced it with the bringing forward of investment in the Metro rail project. It brought forward the rolling stock strategy. It brought forward a series of commitments in relation to road funding. To be very clear, the job creation and the level of infrastructure creation over the next four years will be as high as it has been during any period of time under any government in the history of Victoria. It will on average be higher than the profile this government inherited.

### *Supplementary question*

**Ms WOOLDRIDGE** (Eastern Metropolitan) — I do not believe the Leader of the Government addressed the issue of why infrastructure spending has been cut. He just sought to define a separate period of time by which to measure it, rather than answering the question. Will the minister confirm that the cut in infrastructure spending is one of the reasons the government is now forecasting lower economic growth and higher unemployment, compared to the pre-election budget update?

**Mr JENNINGS** (Special Minister of State) — The member has made the same mistake she made yesterday by indicating to the chamber in the structure of her question that it is the expectation that the unemployment rate will go up during the life of this government as distinct from what was in the forward estimates, where it will go down. During the course of the next four years the budget paper — —

**Ms Wooldridge** — On a point of order, President, I know the minister has only had a few seconds to

answer, but we only have a short period of time for these supplementary questions. The question was very clear. The minister is not responding to the question about these figures being compared to the pre-election update, because they make it very clear that there is a lower economic growth forecast and a higher unemployment rate than was outlined in the document that was provided to the Victorian community in November.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! Again, the member has used her point of order to try to re-prosecute the question rather than to suggest that there was an error in process. I take it that the member, by way of her point of order, was suggesting that the minister's answer was not relevant to the question. It is my view that the minister has just started his answer and I am not in a position to direct him on exactly how to answer it. There was some commentary as part of the supplementary question and the minister is therefore responding within that framework.

**Mr JENNINGS** — Despite the way in which the opposition may choose to read the economic circumstances and choose to read the budget, the budget paper is very clear. The incoming government inherited an unemployment rate of 6.8 per cent in the state of Victoria. That was the position we inherited on coming to government. When the previous government came to office the unemployment rate was 4.9 per cent; it has increased to 6.8 per cent. That is what we inherited. Under this government the projection in yesterday's budget is that 5.75 per cent will be the unemployment rate at the end of its term.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! For what it is worth, my view of unemployment is that it is 12 per cent.

### **Victorian Managed Insurance Authority**

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Training and Skills. I refer to budget paper 5, which points to the new and unprecedented \$420 million dividend to be taken from the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA). Can the minister assure the house that no Victorian educational institution will pay for this tax on their insurance premiums?

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — It is a funny question to be asking me as training minister. It is a strange question to be asking me. I understand that in terms of the dividends there are normal processes. Governments of all political persuasions set a dividend that is affordable and in line with basic normal practices in terms of dividends to

government from these sorts of agencies. As the Special Minister of State said yesterday, we do not anticipate any adverse impact on any public sector organisation.

### *Supplementary question*

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) — It is not normal that the VMIA pays a dividend. It has not paid a dividend, but it will from now on under this government, and I therefore ask, in response to the minister's response: how much is paid to the VMIA each year by Victorian TAFE institutes, and how much of this payment will be used to pay the government's new VMIA tax?

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — I am happy for that to be a question on notice, or I am happy to answer that question during the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing on 14 May, if the member would like to bring it forward, but of course I do not have that detail at hand.

### **Regional connectivity program**

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade. I refer to the regional connectivity program which in last year's budget received \$39.7 million of funding over four years, including \$8.5 million in capital. Can the minister assure the house that that funding over the forward estimates period remains committed to the regional connectivity program?

**Mr SOMYUREK** (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — Yes.

### *Supplementary question*

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his response, but given that the \$8.5 million in capital has been delayed by 12 months in yesterday's budget, can he explain which priority mobile black spot areas, particularly fire-prone areas, will miss out as a consequence of that delay?

**Mr SOMYUREK** (Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade) — The Victorian government signed a memorandum of understanding with Telstra on 15 April. We are currently bidding for money with the commonwealth government, and until the finalisation of that bid we cannot release those details.

### Government-subsidised training

**Mrs PEULICH** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Training and Skills. Recently the minister said that 443 687 students in government-subsidised training represented ‘a failure of our training system’. Why then has the minister now adopted this exact number of students as his own target?

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — I said there were 440 recently, did I? Maybe the member could allude to when that comment was made.

**Mrs Peulich** — I will repeat the question. Recently the minister said that 443 687 students in government-subsidised training represented ‘a failure of our training system’. Why then has the minister now adopted this exact number of students as his own target?

**Mr HERBERT** — I thank the member for her question. In terms of training numbers in 2014, the issue is that the market monitoring report which I released showed a substantial decline in activity. That decline in activity was a direct result of the previous government’s failed policies on TAFE, on training and the constant changes to market settings that had an impact on both the confidence of industry and the confidence of registered training organisations. There was a 14 per cent drop in trainee numbers across the sector. The member will note in the budget papers that the declining numbers in 2014 are quite different to the projections made by the previous government.

To the member’s question: why have we adopted similar numbers — —

**Mrs Peulich** — The same numbers.

**Mr HERBERT** — Why have we got the same numbers — the same declining numbers? The issue is this. Whilst we are putting substantially more funding into TAFE and into the training system, the truth is that whilst numbers are one thing, quality and relevance are another.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Mr HERBERT** — It is a very simple and straightforward question, and I need to be clear on this. We have an agenda to clean up the mess in terms of wasted training money going to poor quality training, and to assist people who are getting training in jobs that are never there. To the point on the numbers, currently we have withdrawn 3600 dodgy training certificates.

We are withholding \$22 million in payments because of poor quality. We have 13 providers on case management and we have 11 providers who will not be enabled to do new enrolments because of quality issues, and I put a freeze on new third parties. That is a quality issue.

In regard to the relevance of those numbers, let us look at early childhood teaching. In early childhood teaching there are 8200 people employed. It is estimated there are less than 500 new jobs in Victoria in that sector. Last year under the previous government there were 16 000 students enrolled for those 500 courses. In answer to the member’s question, I would be delighted if those numbers increased, but I would only like those numbers to increase if they are quality, if they meet industry’s needs and they produce real job outcomes. That is the system we are heading to improve and we are determined to achieve.

*Supplementary question*

**Mrs PEULICH** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — Notwithstanding that this is acceptance that this target will represent a failure of our training system, I ask: why is the government making it harder for young Victorians to get the skills they need by now cutting 75 000 government-subsidised training numbers specifically for young people, those aged 15 to 24, next year?

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — That is just not the case. I think the member is going from the targets of the previous government. The actuals, the targets, are exactly the same as last year, and I would hope very much that they will be exceeded, quite frankly. The \$50 million Back to Work Fund we have instigated, which is linking the funding of training to those unemployed young people, should achieve quite substantial increases.

**Mrs Peulich** — On a point of order, President, given the minister’s failure to answer the supplementary question, I ask that he provide a written response within 24 hours.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! I will think about it.

### Regional Victoria Living Expo

**Mr DRUM** (Northern Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Regional Development. Forty-eight regional and rural councils and thousands of Victorians took part in the fourth regional living expo at the weekend, which was a stunning success. Given that success, I ask why Labor decided to scrap the important

and successful regional living expo in yesterday's budget?

**Ms PULFORD** (Minister for Regional Development) — I thank the member for his question. I would be interested to know upon what he bases his claim that it was a stunning success, given the evaluation is yet to be undertaken. I attended the expo. As of 6 o'clock Saturday night the attendance numbers were much the same as they had been the previous year — around 5000 Melburnians wandering through the exhibition and talking to representatives of local councils, most typically from economic development units of our local councils about the benefits of a move to regional Victoria. This is a program that the former government had funded. It is a lapsing program. I will consider — —

**Mr Davis** — It is a cut; that is what you're doing. You're cutting it.

**Ms PULFORD** — No, that is not true. I intend to wait to receive that evaluation and to consider whether it is the best possible use of our funds for driving population growth in regional communities. It is a weekend event in Melbourne for a lot of people. The reports I have received — not the evaluation but the one-on-one discussions I have had with members of the rural councils group and of the regional cities group — I have to say are a little patchy. That said, I am open-minded about it. If it is creating jobs in regional Victoria, we will continue it. If there is a better way to achieve that outcome, we will do that instead.

*Supplementary question*

**Mr DRUM** (Northern Victoria) — In the minister's time in opposition did she ever ask for an indicator or an evaluation of the previous three years? The minister obviously made the decision not to fund this event prior to the budget being released yesterday. The minister had therefore made her decision prior to this year's event, so what indicators did she use to sack the funding for this event before this year's event was even held?

**An honourable member** — A very good question.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! I note that somebody thinks it is a very good question, but I do not. I do not because the information sought from the minister refers to a time period when she did not have jurisdiction and when she was in fact not the minister and not therefore in a position to make that particular decision. I will give the member a chance to rephrase his supplementary question.

**Mr DRUM** — What are the indicators the minister is going to use that will let her determine whether or not this program continues or does not continue?

**Ms PULFORD** (Minister for Regional Development) — I thank Mr Drum for his supplementary question. An evaluation is to be conducted of this year's expo, which was held last weekend, and I will consider it. There is capacity in the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund to continue this event if this is the best use of that money. I have to say, however, that I have received patchy reports from the many local councils that I speak to on a regular basis about the effectiveness of this expo in assisting people to relocate from Melbourne to regional Victoria. I spoke to one council that said that over four years they had one dentist move to their community. I had another that said, 'Not really'. Some are wildly enthusiastic about it, I agree, but there are mixed views about whether this is the most effective tool for government to support a campaign of encouraging people who live in Melbourne to move to regional Victoria.

**Melbourne Metro rail project**

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) — My question is to the Leader of the Government, and I ask: will the Andrews government rule out any increases to the cost of train and tram fares, CBD parking, rating on properties, road toll premiums or other taxes, charges or fees to pay for the missing \$9.5 billion Melbourne Metro rail tunnel budget black hole?

**Mr JENNINGS** (Special Minister of State) — I thank Mr Finn for his question. He is putting a variation on an outdated business case story that was generated in the media earlier this week. It related to a project that, at that time — in 2011 — had very lacklustre support from the government of the day with respect to its viability, its construction profile and even its alignment. There was a whole variety of types of ambivalence towards it and in fact a whole proliferation of financial impediments and budgetary matters, which may have been very unpalatable to the Victorian community, were embedded in that business case.

Flipping that over, today we have a government that is very committed to the project, very committed to its delivery, which has identified \$1.5 billion in the forward estimates to get the project underway. Construction will commence by the end of this term in a very tangible way. After a lot of preparatory planning and appraisal of the conditions of the alignment, the whole way in which the project will proceed will be fast-tracked during this term. In fact this government, as

I indicated, has already allocated \$1.5 billion to the project.

We have also indicated, through the resolution of the vexed east–west link contractual arrangements, that the private debt facility that is now assumed by the state of Victoria is being re-purposed to make a contribution to the metro rail program.

In fact we are looking at ways by which, on book, through the Victorian budget and mechanisms such as that, through increased expectation and through pressure we can apply to the current federal government — and perhaps future federal governments — there may be a partnership and a way in which this project can be funded adequately into the future.

We are, by design, not intending that there be an onerous impost upon Victorian citizens or businesses in relation to funding this project. We want to make sure that this project happens. I am not in a position to rule out any funding mechanisms. Mr Finn in his supplementary question may have another 30 items that he wants to put on this list for me to rule out. I am not ruling things out, but I am saying to Mr Finn and to the Victorian community that this government is not ambivalent about the project. We are determined to make this project happen. We are determined to make sure that its funding is built into this budget and future budgets. We are determined to extract private and federal funding for this project, and we are certainly determined to reduce the impost upon Victorian citizens, taxpayers and businesses to achieve that outcome.

*Supplementary question*

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer, and I hear what he has to say. I also heard the Premier on Monday rule out increases to any of these charges, while at the same time I heard the Treasurer say on 3AW radio that they would all be considered. Who is correct, the Premier or the Treasurer?

**Mr JENNINGS** (Special Minister of State) — I would have thought the best answer the member could hear is the answer he has just heard, which in fact balances the contribution of the Premier and the contribution of the Treasurer and is the answer that I will stand by, and now I will sit down.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! I indicate that in respect of both Mr Purcell’s substantive and supplementary questions Minister Pulford has undertaken to get some information in terms of the

target from her colleague in another place, Ms D’Ambrosio, the Minister for Industry.

In regard to Mr Davis’s supplementary question to Mr Herbert, I note that Mr Herbert indicated he was happy to answer that question at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC). I do not regard that as satisfactory. If the information is to be available at PAEC, then the information ought to be available to the house now. I ask the minister to obtain that information for us, as it is all within his portfolio, by tomorrow.

**Mr Herbert** — On a point of order, President, I am happy to do that, but given the legislative changes with regard to TAFE, I surmise that my department will have to try to extract those figures for insurance from each TAFE institute. Hopefully I can make that available.

**Mr Somyurek** — Further on the point of order, President, there is a distinction between question time here and PAEC. The departmental secretaries are also at PAEC hearings. Mr Herbert has just made the point that he might need the departmental secretaries. They may be needed for further information. My point is that there is a distinction between question time and PAEC proceedings.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! I appreciate that in cases where information might need to be extracted from more than one source there could be some difficulty. As Chair, I would offer some support to ministers in pursuing those answers. But whilst I note Mr Somyurek’s point that there is a difference in the process, the fact is that the question was in order, and the minister did not dispute that the question was in order. In fact I think his substantive answer to that question was more than adequate. The supplementary, which sought more specific information, was a fair question, and hopefully by tomorrow the minister will provide a satisfactory answer to that question. If not, the minister might have a word with me about what would be feasible.

In regard to the question Mrs Peulich put to Mr Herbert and her supplementary question about a cut to the number of students, it is my view that that is a matter of conjecture rather than necessarily a matter of fact. The minister in his answer indicated that while he was hopeful it would be exceeded, that was a baseline figure. I think that answer was satisfactory to discharge the matter.

Sometimes in answers to questions a minister does not provide the exact response a member may require. The politician in me would suggest that that answer is

sometimes better than the desired answer. Members might consider that responses can be used in different ways.

**Mrs Peulich** — On a point of order, President, and further to your ruling, I accept your advice in relation to the substantive answer. That was not what I was calling for further information on. It was the supplementary question that the minister failed to answer; indeed he did not even attempt to do so. I think it is in order that he be given additional time to answer that supplementary question.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! No, I have already made my ruling. From my point of view, the minister's answer did address the matter. Mrs Peulich has put forward the proposition that there are 75 000 students and they represent a cut to the system. She is right in saying that the minister did not acknowledge that there was such a cut. The minister said, 'Look, we've got a baseline target and we expect to exceed it'. I cannot direct him on how to answer the question. The 75 000 students is a matter of conjecture. Basically the fact that the minister has not acknowledged the figure of 75 000 means that Mrs Peulich can run off with her press releases on what he did not say and he can run off with his press releases based on what he has said. My view is that it was sufficient on this occasion.

**Mr Ondarchie** — On a point of order, President — and that was a useful segue to my point of order on the usefulness of responses — I draw your attention to your directive to the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, Mr Somyurek, to provide a written response to me today in relation to my question yesterday about the costs associated with the 2015 Easter Sunday public holiday. I note in his response that he talks about the fact that the funding associated with that is a matter for the Treasurer and each individual minister. However, in his response he says:

I am responsible for the implementation of the Easter Sunday public holiday on behalf of the government.

I put to you, President, that his response has not been fulsome, and I ask that you direct him to provide a more fulsome answer.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! The minister and I had a discussion about this yesterday following question time. I have had a little bit of time to reflect on this matter, and I have seen the minister's response this morning. The minister is relying on the fact that each minister in their own department provides the finance for the cost of wages and so on. Therefore in their budgeting they take into account the additional costs that may well be incurred by public holidays. The

minister's response is, 'Well, I'm not responsible for each of those departments. I am only responsible for my own department'. I note that on a previous occasion Mr Jennings was asked a question across government which related to codes of conduct. It was a question posed by Mrs Peulich. The minister was able to furnish the house with a response on behalf of all ministers.

There is a distinction between the jurisdiction or the responsibilities of the Special Minister of State and a portfolio minister such as Mr Somyurek, who is the minister responsible for small business. Nonetheless, I have the view that, as the minister has said in his answer and Mr Ondarchie has pointed out, the minister indicates that he is responsible for the Easter Sunday trading legislation. I am mindful that on previous occasions there has been published or reported the costs of particular events or activities within government, including the cost of public holidays.

I am of a mind that it would be possible to provide a fairly reliable estimate of what the cost has been, given that we are now past the time and the costs are a known quantity. The minister ought to be in a position to provide a figure to the house in respect of this question, but I recognise that a number of ministers might need to be consulted on the matter. Therefore I indicate that it will be 48 hours, not tomorrow, before he responds as there are other ministers involved. I ask that a further answer be provided in respect of that matter. I thank the minister for the discussions we have had on this aspect as well.

## QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

### Answers

**Mr JENNINGS** (Special Minister of State) — I have an answer to the following question on notice: 489.

## CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

### South Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Mrs PEULICH** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. It is in relation to the money that was set aside for the investigation into and purchase of land surrounding the renamed Mordialloc bypass, previously known as the Mornington Peninsula Freeway extension, and I ask: given that there is no mention of this project in the budget, what has happened to the \$11.5 million that was set aside for it, and what is the future of that project, given its significance to addressing the issue of congestion throughout the

south-east, and in particular the seats of Mordialloc, Carrum and Frankston?

### Western Victoria Region

**Ms TIERNEY** (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Education and it is in relation to the Warrnambool Special Developmental School. In yesterday's state budget the Andrews government fulfilled its election commitment to allocate \$5 million towards this school. That funding is much needed. The current school is located on the side of a hill, making it physically difficult to undertake a number of activities. Enrolments have increased significantly in recent times, and my question is one that is asked by many constituents, particularly those who have a direct link to the school. I ask: what process and what time line will be adopted by the department and the school in securing land that is needed to develop the new school?

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! I will take this opportunity to inform members, because I have just remembered, that it is Ms Patten's birthday. Happy birthday, Ms Patten.

### Western Metropolitan Region

**Ms HARTLAND** (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The intersection of Buckley and Victoria streets, Seddon, is dangerous. There have been countless near misses due to the poor signalling at the intersection. This intersection is about 20 metres from my office, so I use it on most days.

The signals allow city-bound vehicles to turn left from Victoria Street into Buckley Street for perhaps a minute before allowing pedestrians to cross, so cars are mid-stream when the green pedestrian light goes on. It is a steep, narrow road such that you cannot see the pedestrian lights or pedestrians clearly until you are almost on top of the intersection. Therefore many cars following the one in front fail to see the green pedestrian light and stop. Some pedestrians step out before they realise the cars are not stopping. This is very risky, and it is a serious accident waiting to happen. We have seen a number of near misses. My question for the minister is: will the government upgrade the signals to improve pedestrian safety?

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Ms CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Public Transport, and it relates to car parking around

Southland railway station. A number of constituents within the Bentleigh lower house electorate have raised with me concerns about the government's inability to address car parking requirements at Southland station and the possibility of Sir William Fry Reserve being turned into a car park. I note that page 111 of budget paper 3 states that:

VicTrack is currently in the process of identifying appropriate sites for the expansion of car parking capacity at train stations.

I also refer to recent comments in my local *Leader* newspaper where the government states that the reserve is 'not currently' being considered for car parking. In view of the concerns raised by local residents that Sir William Fry Reserve will be turned into a car park, could the minister review those comments and guarantee that Sir William Fry Reserve nor any part of the reserve will not be turned into a car park?

### Western Metropolitan Region

**Mr MELHEM** (Western Metropolitan) — My constituency question is addressed to the Minister for Families and Children. I refer the minister to yesterday's announcement by the government on page 47 of budget paper 3 which relates to early childhood development and \$50 million allocated over the next four years to build and upgrade kindergartens and early childhood intervention services. My question is: can the minister advise me when local councils and kindergartens in my electorate of Western Metropolitan Region can start applying for funds for either the upgrading of existing kindergartens or the building of new ones?

### Western Victoria Region

**Mr RAMSAY** (Western Victoria) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it relates to the construction of freeway ramps at Halletts Way in Bacchus Marsh. Freeway ramps at Halletts Way were part of the Bacchus Marsh traffic improvements package, which was approved and announced by the coalition government in March 2014, and I am pleased that the first stage of these works has been completed. The Halletts Way ramps form the second stage of this project, and the estimated cost of construction was \$14 million. Expressions of interest for the design and construction of the freeway ramps were called for in October 2014.

I note that the minister responded to an adjournment matter on this project from my colleague Mr Morris, and he essentially said that the government is awaiting the results of a traffic study. Unfortunately the

community is still in the dark as to whether this project will proceed, and the 2015–16 state budget does not shed any light on the matter. Constituents want answers, and indeed the Moorabool Shire Council had to prepare its budget without confirmation of a commencement date for the construction of the freeway ramps. I therefore ask: will the freeway ramps at Halletts Way be constructed this year?

### Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Ms DUNN** (Eastern Metropolitan) — My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety When will the restriction on truck movements between the hours of 10.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m. be implemented on Greensborough Highway and Rosanna Road? This was a policy taken to the 2014 state election by Anthony Carbines, the member for Ivanhoe in the other place, and it does not require legislative change, only regulatory change.

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Mr O'DONOHUE** (Eastern Victoria) — We are seeing an increasing number of residents from the West Gippsland area accessing jobs and services in greater Melbourne, in Dandenong and through that corridor. Many choose to do so by rail, which is a good thing. With that understanding, my colleague Gary Blackwood, the member for Narracan in the other place, advocated for and secured a commitment from the then government to duplicate the rail line between Bunyip and Longwarry, where it is much needed. I note that that project is not mentioned in the budget at all. My constituency question to the Minister for Public Transport is: what plans does the government have to provide this vital piece of infrastructure?

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) — My matter today is for the Minister for Health, and it concerns the announcement on page 28 of budget paper 5, note 3(b), of the dividends that will be taken from the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA).

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! Is this a constituency question?

**Mr DAVIS** — Yes, and I am just about to talk about specific institutions in my electorate. Those takings — more than \$400 million statewide — from the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority will impact directly on health services. I note that page 60 of the VMIA annual report of last year shows that 49.1 per cent of gross premium earned came from health providers. Alfred

Health, Monash Health and Eastern Health are major providers of health services to my electorate, and I seek from the minister the figures as to their premiums and the impact on those services of this VMIA tax take.

### Western Metropolitan Region

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) — I wish to ask a constituency question of the Minister for Public Transport. The traffic gridlock outside Tullamarine airport grows worse every day. Caught up in the freeway mayhem are airport employees, passing locals, the Melbourne SkyBus and an array of taxis and hire vehicles carrying thousands of Melbourne visitors as they try to enter the airport. It is an embarrassment to Melbourne and a major black mark against the reputation of our international airport. A rail link would clearly ease the problem. Will the minister reconsider the government's decision not to build an airport rail link to Tullamarine?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Mr DRUM** (Northern Victoria) — My constituency question is to the Minister for Sport, and it has to do with *Labor's Financial Statement 2014*, where Labor took \$18 million out of the Strategic Sporting Infrastructure program to a reprioritisation and deferral category within its financial statement. This money was set aside for the Kangaroo Flat aquatic centre and also the Bendigo Bank Tennis Complex upgrade. This morning on the radio Jacinta Allan effectively said that if we want to fund the Kangaroo Flat aquatic centre, we would be able to take the money out of the new \$100 million community facilities program. I would like the sports minister to tell the people of Kangaroo Flat and Bendigo whether that is correct, and that if the state government is going to put the money back into funding for the pool, that money will come out of the \$100 million community facilities program.

**Sitting suspended 1.04 p.m. until 2.10 p.m.**

## MURRAY BASIN RAIL PROJECT

**Debate resumed.**

**Mr DRUM** (Northern Victoria) — As I was saying earlier, it is fantastic that we have been able to move and debate this motion before the house. This project is very important for a whole range of industries in the north-west and the west of the state, and it will have amazing consequences for industries in our regional sector.

This is a critical project for our international competitiveness. At the moment we are handicapped

because our major regional grain growing areas, the mineral sands industry and our major horticultural industry are squarred away within a grid of railway systems that can only be accessed by broad-gauge rail. That has been dogging this state for 100 years, so this project is well and truly overdue. We will get enormous satisfaction from being able to take action on this issue and providing support for these industries.

This basin is a leading food production and mineral sands industry region. The region generates over \$3 billion worth of food production and mineral resources per year. Our ability to take existing broad gauge tracks and convert them to standard gauge will help us deliver the modern rail infrastructure that our freight network has been yearning for, and it will enable us to meet the increasing demands for freight services in this state. It has been estimated that there will be an instant 15 per cent increase in productivity just by being able to increase the load limits on trains and increase travel times, which these improvements and upgrades will make possible.

One of the other amazing benefits of the Murray Basin rail project is that it will open up other ports. It will not just open up the Melbourne and Geelong ports but will open up Portland, and in the future it could open up Hastings. Having access to all these ports will create another level of competitiveness between the ports themselves, which will return dividends to our farming and mining industries.

Another issue relating to ports is that currently, because of the cost of doing business in some Melbourne ports and the time it takes to get to them from the Mildura region, trucking companies from Mildura have been offering access to the Adelaide ports as a viable alternative to any of the Geelong ports. This change to rail gauge will bring three Geelong ports in line and make them supercompetitive in relation to the port of Adelaide.

This change is a critical component of the business case of the industries involved, and for a long time they have had to factor it out. They have had no options but to go by rail or choose road, which is much more expensive and in effect adds a whole extra level of cost to our primary producers and/or adds additional time lines, tying the hands of those industries.

When the former Leader of The Nationals, Peter Ryan, announced this project, it was hoped that whilst we were looking to increase time lines and improve timeliness in getting produce to the ports, increased axle loadings would also be part of the discussion. We understand these improvements will see axle loadings

bring the tonnage up to 21 tonnes per axle loading. That is a significant increase on what we currently have — and at reasonable speeds as well.

However, not too far into the future we also need to do a business case that will factor in what additional moneys are going to be needed to take axle loadings up to 23 tonnes, because this would provide even greater increases in productivity. This further increase in axle loadings has been mooted as being able to produce a 32 per cent increase in productivity, so whilst the original project has incredible merit, the sky is effectively the limit as to how good a job we want to be able to do with it in the future.

When I heard that the Premier, Daniel Andrews, went to Mildura along with the Minister for Agriculture, who is also the Minister for Regional Development, to make an announcement about this project, my ears pricked up. The only information contained in the announcement was that Labor was not going to scrap the project. Funding for the project was announced in last year's budget. We were able to sell our holdings in and profit share of Rural Finance; we were able to hypothecate that money for infrastructure development in regional Victoria. As yet the Labor government has not matched that promise. Right now Labor refuses to confirm whether the proceeds of Rural Finance will be spent on infrastructure projects in regional Victoria. At least we can be grateful that as yet it has not scrapped the project. However, it has also not allocated any additional moneys.

I was very interested to see what Labor had to say on the day it made its announcement. As soon as I heard about the announcement I went online to see what it was all about. The Murray Basin rail project has its own web page as part of the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure's website. The web page mentions that the business case was still being determined for the final cost and the alignment of the project. On the morning of 18 February the website stated that the project involved converting the current broad-gauge Mildura freight line to a standard gauge, upgrading the line to 21-tonne axle load and providing the associated standard gauge connections across Victoria's north-western rail network. As a result of the Murray Basin rail project, Victoria's international export freight would be delivered to ports efficiently and cost competitively.

On the morning of the day that the Premier went to Mildura to make an announcement that Labor was not going to scrap the project, the web page said stage 1 of the project was underway and involved an initial \$40 million investment to upgrade the Mildura and

Hopetoun lines. The upgrades were to include the replacement of approximately one in four sleepers to restore the operating standard of these lines, and work on this stage of the project should have been expected to be completed in 2014.

If we turn to the announcement made by the Premier, we can see it was made in the afternoon because, once the announcement was made, the website was pulled down and totally revamped. It then said stage 1 would be completed in mid-2015. We have a government that is pretending that work has not started on this project. The webpage claims that the state government is going to invest \$30 million in maintenance works on the Mildura freight line, yet in the morning it had said that work had been done.

The rest of the project reads the same, except that, as I said, in the morning the project was going full steam ahead and by the afternoon the government of the day was saying that nothing was happening and that it would be spending \$30 million, starting from mid-2015, on stage 1, which was to be completed in mid-2016.

It is quite worrying to see a government that is so concerned about who owns a particular project that it is prepared to pull websites down, revamp them and rewrite history about a particular project. This project needs to be well and truly supported by all sides of Parliament. This area in the west of the state brings in 45 per cent to 50 per cent of the grain movements in the state. It is a huge grain area, and this is something that is going to be absolutely critical for those industries in the future. As I said, this will have a huge benefit in relation to the speed of the trains. In some of these areas travel speeds are down to 20 kilometres per hour, which is absolutely laughable. It is critically important that we can get this produce to the ports efficiently and that we have the various ports chasing this produce with a fervour to create the competitiveness we are looking for.

There are some other benefits associated with doing the standardisation work, such as the ability to bring in additional carriages from other industries in bumper years. We have this little pocket in Victoria that is operating on broad gauge, and in the event of a bumper harvest we do not have the ability to bring in any additional carriages; we simply have to store the produce and dispose of it. It sometimes takes between 18 months and two years to move our grain and produce on. Conversely, in poor years when things are very lean, there will be the opportunity to move some of these carriages off their standard platforms and get them working hard in other parts of the country where

they can put that rolling stock to good use and make these supporting industries much more competitive and much more efficient.

There will also be the opportunity in the future, once we have a standard system throughout the north-west of the state right up to Mildura, for us to put in place the Menindee leg, which would see the continuation of the standard line all the way through to Menindee, and that would then link up with the Sydney–Perth transcontinental line as well. That would give our exporters the opportunity to look at Adelaide, Perth, Darwin and a whole range of alternative destinations. A whole range of logistical flexibility will be created if we get about making this project work.

The motion stipulates that the option we are most interested in is option 5 based on the GHD report. That is the best of the five options and certainly is the most complete, enabling the line from Maryborough to Ararat to be refurbished and also allowing the line from Gheringhap, all the way down at Geelong, to be standardised right through to Sea Lake and then to Korong Vale. The Manangatang line can also be standardised, and the Murrayville–Ouyen line can be standardised as well, rendering that whole region a standard gauge network, something that is going to be absolutely critical.

As I said earlier, this is something for which the money has been accounted. The money has been hypothecated for this project and for other projects for regional Victoria. There are very few things you can do in government — and Mr Ramsay would be acutely aware of this — to provide farmgate dollar increases to your producers. You can assist, you can encourage, you can help and you can put in place policy that should assist. You can do a range of peripheral actions as a government to help our producers. However, this project alone will add anywhere from \$5 to \$10 — in fact more likely \$10 to \$15 — per tonne just on grain. Those types of increases would be going back to the primary producer. That would make an incredible difference in some of our leaner years, and this is something we see as being of incredible benefit to our primary producers even in our moderate years.

The other aspects of this project I would like to touch on have to do with the GHD report that was conducted into the feasibility of the project. The report says:

Increased rail mode share through accelerated gauge standardisation and axle load uplift would alleviate the adverse impacts on the road network and reduce port receipt costs.

Again, you only have to talk to some of the people in our road freight industry to hear their concerns about the local road networks. While they are sometimes seen to be the culprits in chopping up the roads, it is their livelihoods we are dealing with. We are all in agreement that the more of this heavy freight we can get off the roads and onto rail, the better. That is something we need to be able to encourage. The GHD report goes on to say:

The creation of a standard gauge rail freight network with more clearly aligned road connections will boost export opportunities and feed further sustainable regional job growth due to increased land transport efficiency.

It is not just a better network, and it is not just the economies of getting the grain to port; it is also very much about the regional jobs profile being supported as well. Obviously grain is a very strong element in this area. Mineral sands and other mining are very rich in that area as well. There is general freight in relation to food, wine and vegetables. There are regional, interstate and overseas containers as well.

**Mr Barber** interjected.

**Mr DRUM** — I will skip a few paragraphs, Mr Barber, but effectively this project will set the scene for passenger rail returning if it is viable.

**Mr Barber** — Is that what the report says?

**Mr DRUM** — No, but it is common sense. If there is a network of the same gauge leaving Melbourne, leaving Geelong and leaving Ballarat that can go all the way through to Mildura, it certainly has to help the viability of the process of bringing passenger rail back to Mildura — if that push continues. It must be said that predominantly the vast majority of people we talk to in Mildura are quite happy to catch the less than 1-hour flight down from Mildura to Melbourne. It is a straight up and down piece of common sense that once the whole network is in place, the benefits could easily extend to a passenger service heading back that way.

Whilst we are predominantly here to talk about a project that sees axle loadings going into the 21-tonne sphere, we think it is prudent for the government of the day to keep the considerations open. Further business cases should be taken into account to see what is necessary and what it will cost for there to be a higher axle load of 23 tonnes into the future.

Over recent years productivity has remained almost static in this area and has not kept in line with road transport improvements and road transport services. The rail network has been maintained with little focus on the industries it serves or the benefits that could be

conveyed once these important improvements are brought to bear.

It is an incredibly important project. We are delighted that we have been able to bring the project into the mainstream and create the funding to make sure that the project works. We have effectively hand delivered the project to what is now a new government. All we are asking is that the government of the day does not scrap it but builds it to the best available option. That best available option is option 5. We would be absolutely delighted to see a further business case developed to determine what it will take to increase axle loadings.

This is an incredibly important piece of infrastructure. It is 100 years overdue. It will reflect well on both sides of the political sphere when the project is finished. The project will well and truly support the grain, fruit, horticulture, mineral sands and wine industries of the north-west, as well as a whole range of other areas. With those few words, I say that I hope members of the other side will also see the benefits of the project and will not scrap it. I hope the government will bring it through and make sure it builds the very best project that is there to be built and not do some secondary project that will forever leave the area under-utilised, less competitive and less efficient than it otherwise could be.

**Mr BARBER** (Northern Metropolitan) — I am aware that there are some people back home in Mr Drum's electorate who are listening intently to this debate. Like me, they were waiting for him to use the 'P' word — passenger rail. It received scant mention in the report by GHD commissioned by the government of which Mr Drum was a member. In fact when it talked about it at all it was more or less in terms of an impediment to freight movements. I was at least gratified at the end to hear Mr Drum say that he believes option 4 of the GHD report is the best option.

**Mr Drum** — Five.

**Mr BARBER** — I am looking at the report in front of me and I see only options 1 to 4.

**Mr Drum** — Option 5 is a hybrid of options 3 and 4.

**Mr BARBER** — What we need here is a longer term vision for where this project might go and what it could deliver for the region. That is certainly not cutting out of the loop a number of important townships along the way that would like to see not only freight but also passenger rail as an option for their communities, and not with goods and people flowing in the direction of just Melbourne but cross-country and to other ports and

destinations, for both generators and users of freight as well as destinations for visitors.

People make jokes about Maryborough railway station. They sometimes quote Mark Twain, saying that Maryborough is 'a railway station with a town attached'. I have even heard an urban myth that Maryborough was thought to be Maryborough in Queensland when the railway station was designed. But telescope out a little bit and you will see that at the time it was built Maryborough was in fact the crossroads for a number of very important communities. That is the vision we need to reinstate.

It has been a long time coming. Mr Drum referred to \$30 million in maintenance funding that was allocated for that line. That is simply back pay; it is simply the result of massive neglect of our country rail system by a succession of governments, Labor and Liberal, going right back to the time of privatisation. At least it was good to hear the former Premier, Dr Napthine, in his time admit that perhaps breaking up and selling off V/Line freight had been a mistake. You can well and truly see that when you look at the system today.

As you travel through the region you crisscross a number of unused or under-utilised freight lines. For that matter, if you look at it on a map, you will see exactly what I am talking about. People need to be able to travel from Hamilton to Ararat, or Ararat to Maryborough, or Maryborough to Bendigo, or Mildura to Ballarat. They are the sorts of trips you need to make in country Victoria if you want to open up your opportunities to get a job or to study at a place of your choice or just have the capacity to go to your next major centre for a doctor's appointment and maybe even get back in the same day without it turning into an overnight stay. It is about not simply moving bulk commodities to the nearest port but over time starting to get containerised freight moving across the landscape.

Mr Drum otherwise said a lot of things that I agree with.

**Mr Drum** — Thank you.

**Mr BARBER** — You're welcome. The report lays it out in pretty stark terms. There is a continuous and ongoing increase in the so-called productivity of road freight — trucks getting bigger, travel getting faster, new overdimensional and high-capacity routes being opened up — and even talk of reducing matters such as loading and unloading times at destinations. All these things are continuously improving the productivity of road freight.

Poor old rail freight, in the meantime, is languishing where it was pretty much at the time of privatisation. Those in the industry can barely put up a wish list of small projects that might make an immediate impact in terms of addressing their needs. At the moment there is no vision, there is no plan to have a vision, and there is no body that could bring forward that vision.

If you read the *Switchpoint* report, which was put together by a former federal leader of The Nationals, Tim Fischer, you will see that one of the lesser known recommendations in the report is that there should be a body created to take on the responsibility of planning the freight task. Yes, the report talks about a number of priorities for upgrades to lines, but most importantly it recommends that we bring back what we once had — that is, a body that coordinates the entire freight task and plans for its future.

A few years back we ended up in the ridiculous situation of having a bumper grain harvest after a long drought but not being able to get enough rail wagons — let alone drivers, who had gone off to the mines — to move it. Some of the rail wagons were found on an abandoned siding in north-central Victoria by our good friends at Pacific National. Pacific National went to Lynne Kosky and said, 'There you go; you can have them'. The government was even on the blower to railway historical preservation societies to see if they had any wagons that could still be moved. There will be booms and busts in the freight task, particularly in relation to grain. That is why there should be a body that also takes care of at least some of the leasing of the wagons so they are available in those peak years. It may not be a viable proposition for a private entity to do that, but we do not want to end up in a situation where we have a bumper year but cannot move crops by rail so the roads start getting hammered.

As this report shows, and as Mr Drum and almost everybody else understands, a real, direct and immediate cost is falling to country councils as a result of the increasing amount and proportion of the grain task that is being carried by truck. We simply need to put in place measures that start to equalise the cost between the two modes. The mode shift incentive scheme — which I think Mr Ramsay referred to, although he was actually talking on another motion — was one such measure under the previous government. It was only a small measure, but I understand from the budget papers and earlier media releases that it is on hold with money not being spent on it this year. We need an investigation into why it is on hold, because that could be one excellent method of equalising the costs between road and rail and making sure that the

full costs of moving a tonne of commodity are being paid by those who are creating those costs.

Mr Drum is well aware of the interest this subject attracts in his electorate. His government ticked off GHD to write a report about supply and demand in regard to various types of commodities — grain, mineral sands, general freight, regional containers and even possibly interstate containers coming through the tri-state area from across the country — but passenger rail received scant mention in the report. This is despite the huge level of interest in Mr Drum's electorate, including in the crossroads of Maryborough, which falls smack in the middle of the highly marginal Assembly seat of Ripon, which gets a bit of political attention from time to time. There is good news if you are from this area, because you will certainly get that sort of attention.

However, in typical style, on the morning of the announcement that the Murray Basin rail project would receive funding both the Liberal Party and The Nationals wanted to announce it, so they came up with separate press conferences at either end of the district with their respective, competing candidates for the marginal seat of Ripon. When the member for South-West Coast in the Assembly and then Premier, Dr Napthine, was asked whether the project included passenger freight he said, 'I dunno'. When Mr Ryan was asked whether it facilitated passenger freight, he said, 'You betcha it does!'. I got to read about it in two different local newspapers a few days later.

Mr Drum's community are just as confused now as they were then, but I am sure they will be pleased to hear him now, from the position of opposition, saying that he will back the network option, which does not cut off options for expansion — including for passenger rail — does not cut important townships out of the loop when the money is finally spent on standardisation and creates future options for more and different types of freight and passenger movements cross-country.

A group of councils in south-west Victoria is pushing for passenger freight services to be reinstated on the freight line from Horsham to Hamilton via Ararat. That freight line is not frequently used, so that could certainly be accommodated and it would provide great value. Whenever Victoria invests in passenger rail we have seen a take-up that is massively more than anybody could have predicted. I have taken it upon myself to advocate for that group of councils, which is seeking what is really a small amount of money to investigate that possibility. So far what the government has told them is essentially, 'We are doing a strategy — we are doing a network development plan for regional

Victorian rail — and we will take a look at it then'. We will want to see those results sooner rather than later. We also want to see the communities participate in that process, because they did not really participate in the metropolitan passenger rail development strategy. It was developed in secret, and we all found out about it on the day it was launched.

Mr Drum will be gratified to know that yet again he has found another area of common ground between The Nationals and the Greens. He will be thrilled by that — especially after watching, as he has been, the rise of the green vote in regional Victoria.

**Mr Drum** — You would have to look carefully to see that.

**Mr BARBER** — No. In fact the front page of the *Weekly Times* covered that story very well the week after the election. It noted that wherever the coal seam gas issue had arisen in the Victorian election there had been a surge in the green vote.

**Mr Drum** — It was the worst debate Australia has ever had.

**Mr BARBER** — I am not going to go on to talk about what has happened in New South Wales. That is probably a bit outside the scope of this debate. Mr Drum does not want me to talk about that, and we were finding common ground.

I compliment Mr Drum and his former government for at least releasing the GHD report, because for some of the other major infrastructure programs you would be lucky to get a scrap of paper that told you what was being contemplated, what the costs and benefits were and what the implications were for different options. For most other projects, some of which were up in the realms of billions of dollars in cost, you would be lucky to get a government press release and a YouTube animation showing something coming in and out of the tunnel. Here we at least have a document that discusses the costs, benefits, risks and different options and what they mean, which can form the basis of a debate — and that is what we have had here today. I know there are many members in northern, central and north-western Victoria watching this one very closely. For that reason, the Greens are quite happy to support this motion.

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria) — I welcome Mr Drum's motion and the debate. I listened intently to Mr Drum's speech. He is very across the detail, and I thank him for his thorough contribution. I was also interested in Mr Barber's words and his passion for passenger rail and the interests of the constituents of the Assembly seat of Ripon — and I note Mr Drum's

pronunciation of Ripon. We might ask the constituents of Ripon which pronunciation they like.

It is great that we have a motion put up by The Nationals that is supported by the Greens, and they are both on common ground with the Labor government. We are in full support and completely agree with the motion with respect to the Murray Basin rail project. It is with great pride that I reiterate the Andrews Labor government's commitment to deliver this project for regional Victoria. It is evidenced on page 99 of budget paper 4, which was released yesterday.

It is Labor that rural and regional communities are now looking to because they know that this is the party that governs for all Victorians in all places and that their interests are at the heart of a Labor government's decision-making. It was the policies that Labor took to the last election that the electorate placed its faith in. The voice in regional Victoria was loud. They experienced four years of neglect and disregard by the Liberals and The Nationals, which meant The Nationals lost a lot of their supporter base. The failure to deliver on big projects for the regions during the coalition's four years in office is testament to how little the Liberals care for country voters and how ineffectual The Nationals have been in advocating from their side of the coalition.

It was a Labor government that saved the rail freight network from privatisation back in the 1990s when another coalition government was ready and willing to turn its back on regional Victoria, and so it will be that the Murray Basin rail project will be championed and funded by Labor, with \$30 million fast-tracked in February for stage 1. The business case for the full project is currently being finalised, and it will provide options within weeks on how to best progress to the next stage. Yesterday's budget contained a commitment of \$220 million to complete the project. We will standardise rail freight services, increase efficiency and improve access to ports so that our export industries can stay competitive and our farming families can get the support they need.

Mr Drum raised the question of whether this project is owned by the government or by the opposition. My view is that this project will be owned by the people of western Victoria. What is important to them is who delivers it; what they will remember is who delivers it. Labor understands the needs of our regional communities and agricultural producers. We appreciate and recognise how important it is that we deliver increased capacity for rail services in the region. I have spoken to producers and heard firsthand of the vital importance they place on effectively moving their

wares for their future prosperity and continued businesses growth. I have also heard their frustrations that this project was not delivered under the former government, which twiddled its thumbs for three years before scrambling to put all of its eggs in the one basket — or, one might say, a basket case — and committing to a project that was yet again for the city.

If The Nationals were serious about the Murray Basin rail project, they should have delivered it during their four years in government. Instead they waited around until the final year of the failing coalition to announce funding. Funding promises do not make a project, and regional voters were not going to be taken for fools. Playing politics now with this critical project of regional significance is little more than an insult to those same voters.

The Victorian Farmers Federation Grains Group president, Brett Hosking, was quoted in yesterday's *Weekly Times* as saying:

We've seen past governments make big commitments to rail standardisation that have never come to fruition.

The VFF's plea is do it once and do it right.

Upon coming to government it was discovered, despite the former government's claims, that not all the necessary preparation work for this project had been done. Under the Labor government the business case is close to completion. It will provide us with the critical information needed to plan for and deliver the next stages effectively and efficiently. I assure Mr Hosking that Labor will build this much-needed piece of infrastructure. As I said, money has been fast-tracked to keep the project moving. The Murray Basin rail freight project will be delivered by our Labor government because we are passionate about growing our regions, committed to enhancing capacity across rural Victoria and dedicated to delivering better outcomes and services for country communities.

**Mr RAMSAY** (Western Victoria) — I am pleased to speak on Mr Drum's motion, and I commend Mr Drum for bringing this motion to the chamber for debate. I am pleased to contribute not only as a member for Western Victoria Region but also as shadow parliamentary secretary for rural and regional transport. I almost choked when I heard Mr Barber suggest that he will be a leading advocate for discussion in western Victoria in relation to rail services. I assure Mr Barber that I will be active in western Victoria in making sure that the community is engaged in discussion about what they see as their future needs for both passenger and freight rail across western Victoria. We will not have

the Greens dictate that they will provide leadership in that field.

Mr Drum went into some detail, and I do not want to repeat the comments he made, but it is important to note a couple of statements made by Mr Barber and Ms Symes. It is interesting to note that Ms Symes gilded the lily just a tad by suggesting that Labor has in the past been a strong advocate for improving and upgrading rail freight lines, because, as I will soon indicate to the chamber, it was Steve Bracks who could not and did not deliver any significant upgrades to freight lines.

There are 1480 kilometres of freight-only rail lines in regional Victoria, of which 1290 kilometres are broad gauge and 190 kilometres are standard gauge. Standardising the freight rail network will benefit the entire logistics chain, as Mr Drum indicated. It will benefit producers, and those benefits will flow on to the Victorian economy as a whole. Furthermore, with a growing population and growing markets in Asia, the freight task continues to grow and grow strongly. As Mr Ryan, the former Minister for Regional and Rural Development, said at the announcement of the Murray Basin rail project, there is \$3 billion worth of food products and mineral resources in the Murray Basin that will rely on an improved and upgraded freight network.

I give credit to the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) because I know, as I was part of that organisation and am still a member, that for many years it has strongly advocated to all governments the need for increases in both speed and axle loadings for freight trains. As Mr Drum indicated, an axle loading increase from 19 to 23 tonnes is seen as a priority, as is increasing speeds of freight trains to improve the productivity, efficiency and financial viability of using the freight network. For that to happen we have to improve the rail track, and part of that improvement is the standardisation from broad gauge to standard gauge. Mr Drum indicated the importance of standardisation of the lines to the ports not only in Melbourne and Geelong but also in Portland, which is almost running at full capacity.

The Murray Basin rail project was an initiative of the coalition government and was funded in the 2014–15 budget. Proceeds from the sale of the Rural Finance Corporation of around \$440 million were designated specifically for investment in regional Victoria, and I will hold Ms Pulford to account in relation to where the rest of that money goes. It is not appropriated to the Murray Basin rail project. As indicated by previous speakers, \$220 million from the proceeds of that sale had been allocated to this project.

The coalition allocated \$11 million in the 2014–15 budget as the first instalment of funding for standardisation, with \$35 million allocated in 2015–16, so for Labor to take ownership of those instalments is a nonsense because the coalition had already allocated those funds to start the standardisation process. The scope of the project included immediate upgrades on the Mildura to Maryborough line and the Murtoa to Hopetoun line and the standardisation of rail from Mildura to Geelong. The business case for rail standardisation was due to be completed by the end of 2014, and I note that Ms Pulford commented yesterday that the Labor Party is still in discussion on the business case. I hope that with the support of this motion the business case will clearly indicate support for option 5, with the inclusion of the Maryborough to Ararat line refurbishment. I get the feeling this motion will be supported by all sides of the chamber, which means the Labor government can allocate the full \$220 million to the project and quickly start the upgrade and standardisation process.

However, we and others in the community are rightly sceptical about what Labor says about this project. We all know Labor has form on rail standardisation. It is a pity Ms Symes is not in the chamber, because I could give her a history lesson in relation to her government's track record on upgrading the rail network. I draw her attention to 1999, when Steve Bracks promised to standardise Victoria's rail network, yet Labor crab walked away from the promise, like many others. It never delivered.

**Ms Crozier** interjected.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Eleven years, Ms Crozier. Labor had the perfect opportunity. Steve Bracks stood up in 1999, after being elected, and said Labor would standardise Victoria's rail network. We know what happened to that promise.

We are right to question Labor's commitment to regional rail freight. As I have previously highlighted in this house — and I think Mr Drum or even Mr Barber referred to it — Labor has threatened to cut \$15 million from the successful mode shift incentive scheme. I have raised this in the Parliament as an adjournment matter and have still not received a satisfactory response as to whether the Labor government will continue that important incentive payment for freight to be taken off road and put on rail. I was in Horsham the other day looking at the intermodal facility, and the operator indicated to me the importance of continuing that incentive scheme so it can maximise the use of its investment at the intermodal centre, which is shipping a

lot of containers to the port of Melbourne. It is preferable to have them on rail rather than road.

Ms Symes was selective in quoting the VFF in relation to comments made by both the president, Peter Tuohey, and the grains president, Brett Hosking. I would also like to make observations in relation to comments of the president, Peter Tuohey, who said:

The government has given us no detail on which lines will be upgraded and when as part of the overall \$220 million project.

He also said:

The government have promised to spend \$174 million more, but when and on what lines?

Brett Hosking, president of the VFF grains group, said it is right to question whether the government is simply upgrading and standardising the Mildura spine line.

What we need to see is detail, time lines and evidence that works will actually be undertaken this term to complete the Murray Basin rail project. All we know is that the government plans to do maintenance work on the Mildura line between Yelta and Maryborough by the end of 2016. It has given no other commitments. The government needs to answer the following questions: when will the Yelta to Gheringhap section — that is the Geelong end — be standardised; when will the Sea Lake to Korong Vale section be standardised; when will the Manangatang to Dunolly section be standardised; when will the Murrayville to Ouyen section be standardised; and does the government remain committed to complete this project by 30 June 2018? Regional Victoria deserves answers to these questions.

I also refer to the budget, which is vague in itself. Allocations show a total estimated investment of \$220 million and estimated expenditure to 30 June 2016 of \$16 million. Estimated expenditure to 2015–16 is \$30 million, and the government has a remaining expenditure of \$174 million. We know, however, that is not an allocated budget expense, and we know the government of the day is still to identify which lines it is looking at upgrading and standardising.

It is timely that Mr Drum has brought this motion to the chamber, because we can confront the questions to which the coalition is seeking answers. Also seeking answers are companies that use the freight lines and the Victorian Farmers Federation, which is a large stakeholder that represents its members who use the freight lines. They seek to have the government of the day confirm exactly which option it will implement as part of its business case for the Murray Basin rail

project. We would assume, based on bipartisan support of Mr Drum's motion, that option 5 will be the one the government will support with the inclusion of the Maryborough to Ararat refurbishment line.

It is on that basis that I commend this motion to the house. I look forward to bilateral support of this motion so it is very clear to all those concerned community members who are not clear about the government's intentions in relation to committing the \$220-plus million to standardisation of those lines indicated in option 5 in Mr Drum's motion.

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) — In May 2014 I had the pleasure of attending our national state conference in Benalla where the then Deputy Premier and Leader of The Nationals, Peter Ryan, announced to conference attendees that the Victorian coalition government had, through the sale of the Rural Finance Corporation for the value of \$400 million, the funds available and the commitment to a vital infrastructure project in regional Victoria — namely, the Murray Basin rail project. In the room at that time there was a feeling of relief and a sense of elation felt by constituents in the north-western area that finally something was going to be done. This was a long overdue project. Wheat growers, fruit growers and passengers, I am sure, would take the opportunity to use this upgraded rail system.

This project, if implemented, will revolutionise the movement of freight across the state and unlock the economic potential of regional and rural Victoria. In his address in May 2014 Mr Ryan stated that the Murray Basin was one of the nation's leading food production regions, exporting in excess of \$3 billion worth of food products and mineral resources per year.

The Murray Basin is the heart of the grain growing country in Victoria. Wheat is the most important cereal grain commercial product in the world. North-western Victoria is the centre of wheat production in this state. The Mallee and Wimmera regions together account for approximately 75 per cent of total production. Barley is another important dry crop grown in significant proportions in this area. The Mildura region has beautiful fertile soils, and the Sunraysia district produces a significant amount of Australian fruit, vegetables and nuts, including 90 per cent of all dried fruit, 74 per cent of table grapes and 24 per cent of all citrus fruit.

From Mildura the citrus industry in particular has great potential to use this upgraded rail transport system to move its products to the city markets and the ports of Portland and Geelong to meet export markets. At present mineral sands mined at Ouyen are trucked from

Ouyen to Hopetoun and then freighted to the ports for export markets. By converting the existing broad-gauge tracks to standard gauge, the Murray Basin rail project will deliver modern rail infrastructure and transform Victoria's freight network to meet the increasing demand for freight services.

The coalition's 2014 proposal includes upgrades and improvements through increased ballasts and the laying of additional sleepers over the railway lines. The coalition supports a comprehensive upgraded system, including — and this would be option 5 — refurbishment of the Maryborough to Ararat line, standardisation of the Mildura to Geelong line, standardisation of the Sea Lake to Korong Vale line, standardisation of the Manangatang to Dunolly line and standardisation of the Murrayville to Ouyen line. These upgrades will improve transport consistency and efficiency and enhance access to Portland and Geelong for Victorian exports.

At present freight durations from Mildura to the port of Geelong are approximately 14 hours one way. Trains regularly slow to 40 kilometres an hour — and even to 20 kilometres an hour — due to poor track conditions and frequent crossings. With the transformation of the Murray Basin rail project we can anticipate that the round trip from Mildura to Geelong will take less than 24 hours.

Efficient transportation of our grains, horticulture and mineral sands to our ports is vital for regional economies and our export markets. Most importantly it supports rural and regional communities that rely on a vibrant agriculture and mineral mining sector. This project involves building and upgrading freight lines to 21-tonne axle loading. This can provide an immediate 15 per cent productivity improvement that will increase train loads by between 300 and 400 tonnes. There is potential to increase axle loading to 23 tonnes, which would provide a potential productivity gain of up to 32 per cent.

A modern and efficient rail freight network is critical to Victoria's overall productivity. The money is available as a result of the sale of Rural Finance Corporation. There is \$400 million sitting there ready to be utilised to support regional growth and infrastructure. The coalition set aside approximately \$220 million from that \$400 million for the Murray Basin rail project in the 2014–15 budget.

The Melbourne Labor government has in the 2015–16 budget allocated only \$30 million towards maintenance of the existing track. This money was already budgeted last year. What will be done with our \$220 million

project? The fear for people in the north-west of Victoria — grain growers, fruitgrowers, agribusiness and commuters — is, what will Labor use this money for? Will it be used for a vital infrastructure program? Will it unlock economic potential for rural and regional Victorians? Or will it be directed to the city, for the city and around the city to be used in the city? I commend this motion wholeheartedly, and I thank my colleague, Mr Drum, for moving it.

**Mr DRUM** (Northern Victoria) — It was great for Ms Bath to clean up the motion in the way she did. Get that: bath, clean up? I thank the speakers who have taken the time today to speak on this motion. It is a project that is out of the way in the west of the state and such projects can sometimes be out of people's thoughts, but it is great to be able to bring it to the Parliament and have members from all around the state understand how critical this project is. I thank Mr Barber, Ms Symes, Mr Ramsay and Ms Bath for helping me out with this motion. I thank members for their intended support, because everyone has spoken positively about the motion and the fact that the motion actively supports and promotes option 5. We are especially delighted that Labor has supported this position as well. I thank everybody for their contributions.

**Motion agreed to.**

## GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

**Mrs PEULICH** (South Eastern Metropolitan) — It is my dubious pleasure to move this motion. I move:

That this house notes the Andrews Labor government's term of office has been characterised by lies, confusion, excuses and spin.

I was half right. Initially the government claimed that it had not wasted a single minute in getting on with the job of delivering on its commitments, and my response was that the government had wasted all of the minutes of its first 100 days and there was no indication that it was getting on with delivering some of the key things it had promised. Basically the promise was that it had shovel-ready projects that were fully funded and it was not going to raise taxes and charges. There were a range of other subsidiary commitments involving services, such as fixing up the TAFE mess. We all know the history of that. Labor, in deregulating the TAFE sector, had opened it up to competition. I said at the time that the Labor Party was spinning and confused.

However, behind the scenes it was busy at work. It said there was no compensation to be paid for the cancelled east–west link contract, but we now know that at least

\$640 million is to be paid. That is on top of the \$540 million that was paid for the break-up of the duopoly of Tabcorp and Tattersall's when the now Premier was the Minister for Gaming in the previous Labor government. That government guaranteed Victorians that it was a safe thing to do and that there would be no compensation payable. With these two actions the Premier has earned the dubious title of the \$1 billion man, because he has lost \$1.2 billion with two appalling decisions. All that that money could have funded has been lost to Victorian taxpayers.

The Premier said that the funds from the east–west link would be used to improve public transport. Since then we have seen a number of those commitments exposed. Certainly there is nothing in the budget which advances the delivery of better public transport, with the exception of the establishment of a new authority that the government has committed \$100 million to. That authority will manage things like the grade separation program and do all the foot slogging, all the detailed work, which the government guaranteed had been done. It said all these projects were shovel ready, but clearly they are not. We are not surprised to see so many commitments right around the state not being delivered.

We have seen the expose by the *Herald Sun* of the shortcomings of the Metro rail project, which is a big project the government went to the election with. We now know not only that no funding has been secured but also that there are a range of issues that the public would not have been aware of. I am sure that had the public been aware of these matters in time, they would not have been as convinced that the project as promoted by the Labor Party was the best outcome. We know that something like 59 properties will need to be acquired for the delivery of the project and that some sensitive natural reserves will need to be dug up. We know the impact the project will have on CBD businesses, with loss of revenue and, probably, many businesses going to the wall as a result. A number of train services will also not stop at inner city stations. This was a big lie, big spin, and it worked because it won the Labor Party half a dozen seats by which it won government on very slender margins. I am sure that if the public had known the full details of this project, they would have had second thoughts.

In perusing the budget papers we note that many of the government's commitments have received either no funding or minimal funding, and I will come to that in a moment. The government had been spruiking the West Gate distributor, but it has now ditched that for the Transurban option. The impact of that option will be the extension of tolls for 15 years, which will heavily impact those who do not use that road, and those are the

people in the south-eastern suburbs. My constituents will be paying tolls for 15 more years with this option.

These are just some of the lies and the spin that enabled Labor, along with its union mates, under the direction of Luke Hilakari, to sneak over the line by probably 2000 or 3000 votes statewide in some key seats in order to snatch the election. Of course the heat is on now, and we are gradually coming to understand the nature of the lies and the fact that the government has no plans. The most common response I have heard to the budget that has been delivered is that there is no vision — there is nothing inspiring about it. There is no detailed economic plan to create jobs, unemployment will be higher for longer and infrastructure spending, which of course was the big trump card for the Labor Party and the Premier, will be down \$6.4 billion.

Surpluses are just an illusion, a mirage, because the government has kept the east–west link money in the budget. On today's revelations we understand that the surplus is phony. I quote from a press release issued by the shadow Treasurer and member for Malvern in the Assembly, Michael O'Brien, who said:

Buried away in budget paper 5 on page 21 is the revelation that the full commonwealth funding for the east–west link is being used to prop up Labor's budget and to disguise the fact Labor has driven Victoria's budget into an effective deficit.

That is yet another lie which has been exposed, and as time moves on more and more of those things will be exposed and Victorians will understand that they have been duped by a bunch of people who say they put people first, but the only people they put first are their people. We know that behind the scenes the government has been beavering away at fixing the game with some sort of cultural revolution to look after itself, its political interests and its mates.

For example, the sessional orders for this Parliament, both in this chamber and in the other chamber, have been tweaked with innovations such as ministers statements. The orders have been manipulated to give Labor a free kick. Longstanding standing orders that have served this Parliament and other parliaments well have been trashed. It is patently obvious to anyone who watches such things that Labor wants a free kick and protection. The government said it was going to abolish Dorothy Dixers in both chambers. Now we have ministers with the ability to make 2-minute statements when supposedly new initiatives, projects and achievements can be explained or announced, but time and again we have seen that abused.

Prolonged time has been taken to establish committees. The Public Accounts and Estimates

Committee, which has recently been set up, has only had the opportunity to have three meetings before it has to undertake very important scrutiny of the first budget of the government. The committee typically generates a survey that goes to the departments, which respond to it. All that information goes to the committee for consideration, but it will not have time to do that. The government is using every trick in the book to buy itself more time to figure out what the hell it is going to do, and the most it can do is set up various authorities and change the system. It does not have a clue what to do.

The government has claimed that it is going to become accountable and transparent. I have received hundreds of answers to questions on notice which are basically carbon copies of one another, showing a high degree of coordination and complicity between ministerial offices. The wording of the answers is virtually the same. It makes a mockery of the government's claim that it will be accountable and transparent.

We have moved to another level with the sacking of various boards, forcing highly reputable people out of their positions. The government wants to stick in its own mates rather than have people who will perform their jobs with integrity. We have seen the unilateral sacking of water board members irrespective of their capacity. If the government had simply changed the board chairs, it might have been more palatable. But I find it extraordinary that as part of the process the government would sack 50 highly capable local women — and I am just as impressed with the qualifications of many of the men on those boards — in addition to 20 people from multicultural backgrounds. The government claims that it wants greater diversity on boards, and it seems a little ironic that it should espouse greater diversity but take actions that are contrary to that.

They say that people can reapply. How many times do people want their reputations trashed? The reality is if that happened to me, I would not reapply. I would not give them a second go at trashing my reputation. It is deplorable, and Premier Andrews should apologise. We can see why Labor did that. We can see the dividends it is dragging out of the water authorities as part of the 2015–16 budget. If Labor had an independent board in place, the board might have something to say. It was very good pre-emptive political action. Daniel Andrews and his Labor mates are all about looking after themselves and their political interests and paying back those who helped get them over the line, rather than serving the Victorian people and putting people first, which is what they claimed they were doing.

We also saw Daniel Andrews rip out 42 new hospital beds from the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, stating that every inch of the centre had to be reserved for public use, even though that means losing \$20 million in philanthropic funding. It has also led to the resignation of its chairperson, Ms Wendy Harris. It seems obvious to blind Freddy that if you have some facilities that people have the capacity to pay for, then you can open up more facilities for public patients. It seems counterintuitive, and as a former health minister he should know better than most not to go down that track.

Then we have had the forced resignation of the very well-respected chair of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, Chin Tan, who has served this state well and who is lauded whenever I go to multicultural functions — and I attend a lot of multicultural functions around the state. We can anticipate why this has been done, and I expect that what they will do is to leave the commission with a very narrow range of responsibilities and take away some of its most important responsibilities, such as the allocation of community grants. Labor Party members want to control that. They want to have their political fingers all over determining who is going to get community grants and public funds when they process these applications. An independent board or commission may be too independent for their liking, so it is much more convenient to push the well-respected Chin Tan out of his position.

We also saw the board of Ambulance Victoria sacked. All that corporate memory has now been lost to Ambulance Victoria, and there has been no commitment to improving response times within a set time frame. Obviously that sacking was part of a supposedly comprehensive plan to save minutes that save lives. There are lots of things that can be done to save minutes that save lives, and sacking an entire board is probably not one of them.

Until recently I had expressed concerns in this chamber about the direction of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. That was in response to hearing the minister responsible talking about how she wants a root-and-branch examination of all the factors that contribute to family violence. Through my work and understanding of multicultural communities, I was concerned that because of people's differing backgrounds and cultures and the countries from which they may have migrated, there may be an embedded level of violence or practices that do not stack up to our standards of human rights and dignity, and that many of the people who are affected — whether they be women or children — would have liked an opportunity to

speak, but may not have the skills to put submissions together, including written submissions. Some may have missed out on education altogether because they may have spent their time in refugee camps.

I note that a number of forums have been put together to cover off something that had not been given sufficient emphasis. I hope it is not just about throwing \$500 million or \$750 million at a system, but that we seek to understand the drivers of family violence so we use this golden opportunity to reduce the incidence of violence rather than just patching people up or trying to stitch their lives back together after violence.

A lot more is going to be said about the government's various deals with the unions. We know what a significant role the unions played in parading at electorate booths and at pre-poll voting centres during the recent election campaign and campaigning in attire that was no doubt stitched together by Trades Hall, because under legislation they are not allowed to wear the real McCoy — the real uniforms or real insignias. Many of them claimed they were emergency services workers when in fact many were not. As far as I am concerned, no-one, especially on the booths, should be entitled to hand out how-to-vote cards except for a political candidate in that election. That would get rid of this scam that was played on the Victorian people where many of those who claimed to be genuine were not genuine. The practice of graffitiing ambulances as part of a union campaign was deplorable, and it should be condemned. I believe a law should be passed to prevent that sort of abuse of public property in such a political way.

We have also seen Daniel Andrews, who is a member of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), pandering to the CFMEU — especially Victoria's construction division headed by secretary John Setka, who I understand most recently gave Labor a \$139 350 donation. On top of this, the national office of the CFMEU gave Labor a \$195 000 donation. The CFMEU random drug testing on building sites was scrapped on Labor coming to power. If testing for alcohol is going to be on the agenda for MPs, it should be expanded and include drugs. If it is important to test MPs, it is certainly important to have the same regime apply to building sites, so let us test them for drugs and alcohol. We do not want anybody's lives endangered as a result of the use of drugs or alcohol. Let us see how that pans out.

Now the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union has come out in support of drugs and alcohol testing, the government is sort of nodding its head. The government has abolished the Victorian Construction

Code Compliance Unit, no doubt kowtowing to John Setka and the CFMEU.

Firefighters are demanding a pay rise worth in excess of \$30 million over the next three years. If the government gives in, that will cost taxpayers close to \$1.5 billion, and we have already seen in this budget an increase of 7.1 per cent in salaries and costs to the state, excluding the factoring in of enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations. This is not just about frontline workers but about workers behind the scenes, so it is really about Daniel Andrews playing to the public sector unions and paying off debts incurred and favours asked for during the state election. Paramedics have been given a 6 per cent pay rise from 1 January 2015, a 3 per cent pay rise from July 2015 and a 3 per cent pay rise from July 2016 as well as an immediate \$3000 sign-on bonus.

In terms of the public holidays and Easter penalty rates, what an absolute farce. Two new public holidays impose a huge cost on Victorian small businesses and on services provided by the public sector, including local government. The City of Casey found out that the grand final public holiday alone is going to have a \$300 000 impact on the council's bottom line. On the one hand the government hits the council with a \$300 000 bill for just one extra public holiday, but on the other it expects the council to cap its rates at CPI, a measure that does not reflect the cost of doing business in local government.

I support local government becoming more efficient. I do not believe that local governments have done that, although I do believe that rural and regional councils may have had it tougher. Nevertheless, some larger metropolitan councils could reform the way they do business to improve their effectiveness and efficiency, but I do not believe that capping rates at CPI is going to be the way, the reason being that we will see massive hits to the infrastructure investment of local government or attempts to raise additional revenue through increased fines and charges. At the end of the day, if Daniel Andrews says that he is not going to increase taxes and charges, then I expect the same standard to apply to the local government sector, but all we have seen is another lie in the budget that has been delivered.

The Labor government failed to cost the 2015 Easter Sunday holiday in its financial statement. We have seen question after question being asked of the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade, and government members say there is a regulatory impact statement underway which will not be available until September. That will be a little bit late for 2015, and from anecdotal feedback I know that many small businesses were

either forced to close on Easter Sunday or used family members because they could not afford to open their doors in any other way. The Easter Sunday holiday was left out of the budget update tabled in December 2014 as well. For small businesses the reports are that across my region businesses will be forced to reduce their services to keep the cost of paying higher wages to a minimum on the two additional public holidays. Taxpayers will help fund the extra public holidays through higher wages for government employees such as nurses, police and firefighters, whose work on that day is essential. This government has done no homework, it is totally unprepared, and indeed all of these lies are being exposed with each passing day.

The big stunt of this government was the Back to Work Bill 2014, the very first bill that it passed. The bill was just a shell — that is, promises were made but there was no concrete plan to meet the promises, and ambiguous guidelines provided little detail. The very first action of this government was to rip up the east–west link contract, which was promising to deliver 3700 additional jobs, and more jobs have been lost since then. The bill promises to create an extra 100 000 full-time jobs over two years through a once-off payment of what is currently an indeterminate amount, and the Treasurer has failed to provide details of the scheme.

In education we have just seen this budget, and I have got a lot of very angry schools calling me up saying, ‘We were promised this, this and that, and we have got a pittance’. In some instances government members have promised schools small amounts, and those people do not know where the rest of the money will come from or if they will get it at all. In addition to schools promised money, separate funding was matched through 11 other schools and Labor offered only \$4.4 million more to five other schools. The coalition committed \$36.1 million more to 13 schools. Indeed this government also made a number of promises in relation to TAFE.

What have we seen since then? Information has filtered through in a question on notice response from Jacinta Allan, the Minister for Public Transport, in relation to the promise to remove 50 level crossings. That promise was obviously very appealing to the public. It was the coalition government that put that project on the agenda first, and I have been working very hard for a long time to have some of those matters addressed, including the impact on congestion across the south-east, in particular at the Clayton level crossing. Since his election in 1992 or whenever it was, Hong Lim, the member for Clarinda in the Assembly, has never uttered a word about or mentioned that level crossing in Parliament. I

have been campaigning for it for a long period of time, and now this government has come to the party.

This is one of those things. The Clayton level crossing is in a safe Labor-held seat, so it was never going to get the attention of the Labor Party. That level crossing is only a few hundred metres away from a major hospital. I have heard many reports about that level crossing, including one from the chief executive officer of HealthSMART. A specialist heart surgeon, he is called out to emergencies all the time and he is sick and tired of waiting for 20 minutes at boom gates while emergency patients wait for him. The government needs to get on with some of these projects.

That said, today I have received an answer from Ms Allan about plans for the removal of the level crossing, information about compulsory acquisitions of property and an undertaking to notify all those who are affected, including households, businesses and stakeholders such as local government. People are concerned because they do not want to end up having overpasses ruining the amenity of their suburbs. They are concerned about the acquisition of homes surrounding these level crossings, especially where there is little room, as is the case in the south-eastern suburbs. From geotechnical advice that I have received, I know that undergrounding some of the level crossings on the Frankston line is going to be a problem because of the water table. In responding to my request for some of this information, the minister states:

To facilitate the level crossing removals, the government has brought forward funding of \$100 million to establish the Level Crossing Removal Authority.

The only funding that has been provided is for the removal authority. Her letter goes on to say:

The authority is developing a strategic plan for the efficient removal of 50 level crossings, including optimal planning, procurement and construction methods and best practice community and stakeholder engagement.

These projects were indeed not shovel ready. The hard work is yet to be done, and whether some of these eventuate is yet to be seen. I suggest that the challenges for many of these level crossing removals in my region will be substantial.

Similarly, to again show how unready Labor was to take government, I am looking at a press release issued by Multicultural Arts Victoria in relation to an initiative of the government and the Minister for Creative Industries, Martin Foley, in 2015–16 state budget about the establishment of a house of world cultures. It says in the first paragraph:

The Andrews Labor government has honoured their pre-election commitment of 150 K for the organisation to undertake a business case to develop ...

this particular concept. Yet again, very little work is being done by the government to claim that it has these shovel-ready projects.

In my shadow portfolio of multicultural affairs I note that government members say that they support and embrace multicultural communities. I know that Hong Lim has huge fundraisers that raise a lot of money for elections and that Labor underspent by \$3.3 million in the 2014–15 year. I assume that is because Labor has not announced its latest round of grants. It would be interesting to see whether Labor members allow the Victorian Multicultural Commission to do its work, or whether they will do what everyone suspects they will do — that is, sideline the commission, bypass it and take direct ministerial and departmental control of this process, which means that they could again politicise a process that should be above politics.

In addition to that, the Labor Party has failed multicultural Victoria. Not only does it appear to have cut \$3.3 million from funding for the 2014–15 year but it also admits in the budget papers that there will be fewer community events and festivals and less support for multicultural communities. This is yet another lie and more spin. Community events and programs that assist our newly arrived migrants from culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities are absolutely essential at this time for social cohesion, inclusiveness and civic pride. This is not a time to start playing party politics.

The legacy of embracing our multicultural communities will be undermined if the government goes down this track. A deputy chair has been appointed for three months, which is the period allowable under the act, and I know he will do a very good job. However, the minister will need to make a decision — and I urge him to make the right decision — to make sure that the Victorian Multicultural Commission stays at arm's length from government and that the multicultural community grants program stays at arm's length from government. Otherwise all the good bipartisan or tripartisan work in this field may well be undermined.

In terms of my region, we have seen some spin. We saw Ms Graley, the member for Narre Warren South in the Assembly, taking out cinema advertising over a long period outside her electorate, as well as advertising on billboards and using parliamentary resources to put out political pamphlets. Jude Perera, the member for Cranbourne in the Assembly, also used publicity to promote a number of issues, including the Hallam Road

level crossing, the duplication of Thompsons Road and the rebuilding of Casey Hospital. What do we have in 2015–16? We have virtually zilch — \$20 million out of \$175 million for the Thompsons Road duplication. That was the cheap version, as opposed to the version that we committed to, which was \$340 million. That \$20 million is just planning money, with no surety or certainty of funding coming online to duplicate this much-needed road in a growth area where there is a burgeoning population.

Fifty-two new families move to the city of Casey every week, the country roads there carry city volumes of traffic, and all the government has found is \$20 million out of a \$175 million project, with no guarantee that the rest will be made available. The city of Casey communities are bitterly disappointed, especially given all the brouhaha and the jumping up and down by Ms Graley and her colleagues about how important they felt Thompsons Road was. It was just more spin and lies, and we can see their actions have fallen short.

What do we have out of the Labor Party's commitment to rebuild Casey Hospital? We have \$400 000 out of a promised \$106 million. Let me say, that is absolutely paltry. Labor has let down the Casey community. The people at Casey Hospital do a fantastic job. In the lead-up to the election campaign I met the ladies auxiliary, which was busily fundraising for a TV for the children's ward. Lo and behold, I had won a TV at a raffle, so I was able to make their day a happy one by donating it. It seems to me that \$400 000 from a government that is in command of such a huge budget is equivalent to me giving away a TV. It is paltry, and members of that government ought to hang their heads in shame. I was pleased to be able to make that small gesture for a worthwhile cause.

The government has proven that it has no shovel-ready projects, that its surplus is a phony and a fake and that it has not secured funding, which rests on the government being able to lease the port of Melbourne. It has scrapped the plans for the port of Hastings, which will be a long-term project. It is trying to jack up rates for port users, and it is taking that to a federal level. All that has occurred with the removal of level crossings is the establishment of an authority. All the promises have amounted to nought.

Whilst on the one hand, in terms of delivering for the people, the government has lied and spun, in terms of playing politics behind the scenes it has been very active. This is true Labor. It is in Labor's DNA. Labor governs for Labor; Labor does not govern for Victoria or Victorians. That is why I thought it important to bring this motion to the table. I wanted to hear firsthand

from others around the state how this government and this Premier have lied and cheated their way into office, and how Victorians and Victorian communities are being short-changed. It is my pleasure to move this motion on behalf of the coalition.

**Mr LEANE** (Eastern Metropolitan) — On behalf of the government, I intend to give Mrs Peulich's motion and her contribution as much attention, energy and time that we believe it merits.

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) — I said yesterday in my members statement to this house that this government is Monty Pythonesque. If anybody were to doubt that, they need look no further than the gentleman sitting on the front bench by himself, Mr Leane, who has just put in one of the more arrogant and, let us say, John Cleese-like performances — something straight out of *Fawlty Towers*. If ever the Electrical Trades Union decided Mr Leane was no longer worthy of being in this house, he would go well in a British sitcom. He is already in an Australian sitcom, and he is proving himself very worthy of that. What we just saw then was the sort of arrogance that we have come to expect from this government —

**Mr Rich-Phillips** — Acting President, I draw your attention to the state of the house and the lack of a minister in the chamber.

#### **Quorum formed.**

**Mr FINN** — It is my very great pleasure to speak on this motion. As I said before I was brought back into line, we are very pleased to put this motion forward not because we feel any joy about what is happening to this state but because it is our opportunity — and I think an opportunity for many members of this Parliament — to speak for our constituents and for many other Victorians across the state who are looking to what is going on in Spring Street and saying, 'What is going on up there?'. They are asking themselves, 'What is going on up there?'. They are looking at our Premier and our Treasurer and they are saying, 'Do they actually speak, I wonder? Do they actually sit down at any time and share any intelligence?'. Intelligence — probably not. It might be a stretch to use the word 'intelligence' in the same sentence as 'the Premier and the Treasurer'. But people across Victoria are asking, 'Do these people, the Premier and the Treasurer of our state, actually sit down and discuss what they are going to do?'.

This week alone we have seen on two occasions the Premier and the Treasurer at total odds on what I would describe as particularly important issues. On Monday we heard the Premier say that the previous

government's plan for its rail tunnel was totally obsolete and something the Labor government would not even consider: 'It's so out of date it's not funny'. The Premier totally dismissed that plan in the arrogant way we have come to expect from him.

While the Premier was saying that on television, the Treasurer was on radio saying exactly the opposite. He said the government was preparing to update the plan put forward by the previous government. So we had a situation where the Premier was totally dismissive of any suggestion that there would be an increase in charges and taxes and so forth to pay for the Melbourne Metro project, and we had his Treasurer — the man you would imagine would have some vague idea of the financial state of Victoria — saying totally the opposite. That left Victorians shaking their heads and wondering exactly what is going on at 1 Treasury Place, and I think for very good reason.

Then once again on Monday we had the Treasurer come out and say that the new Labor government would be adopting the previous government's wages policy of 2.5 per cent. I thought to myself, 'That's going to be a big shock to the fireys and the ambos who did so much to get this government elected'. It came as a surprise to me too, I must say. What came as an even greater surprise to me was that today the Premier came out and totally dismissed this, saying, 'No, 2.5 per cent is just not enough'. So here we have, on an issue that has the capacity to blow the budget completely out the window, from Portland to Lakes Entrance, right across the state, the Premier and the Treasurer in total disagreement. Do these people actually speak to each other? Do they consult each other? Do they get together in the same room occasionally and discuss these matters? You have to wonder, because in the space of a week — in fact in the space of less than a week, and in budget week of all weeks — the Premier and Treasurer of this state have failed to agree on two vitally important issues that are crucial to the future of this state.

We saw floated last week — I say 'floated' because to my understanding there has been no agreement by the government at this point — and leaked to the media by the government the prospect of a western distributor, as it called it. This is a toll road which will, as I understand it, take some traffic off the West Gate and deposit it somewhere around Etihad Stadium. As proposed, it will be the most expensive T-intersection in the history of the world. This will be something that people will travel to; I think it could become quite a tourist attraction. People will travel from around the world to take a look at this enormous T-intersection and the traffic problems

it will cause as a result of this project that Labor is apparently proposing.

I thought — members should feel free to help me — that the Premier, when Leader of the Opposition, said before the election that he had a project called the West Gate distributor, which is very different to the western distributor, and this West Gate distributor was shovel ready. I reckon I know what Daniel Andrews was shovelling when he said that, and it is not smelling too sweet now. This is a bloke who told us that he was ready to go; he was shovel ready with his brand spanking new West Gate distributor. Of course when Labor was elected and we asked questions about this, he knew nothing about it. He could not answer any questions; he did not know anything about it. It is now clear to all and sundry that there were no plans for a West Gate distributor. This was something he had cobbled together to try to cover up for his negligence in unilaterally scrapping the east–west link —

**Mr Ramsay** — \$680 million.

**Mr FINN** — \$680 million indeed — we will get to that in a minute, Mr Ramsay. But you have to remember when we talk about arrogance, when we talk about people taking it upon themselves, thinking that they know all, that here is a man in Daniel Andrews who single-handedly and unilaterally announced without consulting anyone — it is no wonder that he does not consult with his Treasurer; he does not even consult with his cabinet or his shadow cabinet — that if Labor was elected, he would scrap the east–west link.

I have to say — and I know this to be true — that this absolutely staggered a number of his colleagues. For starters, they were not expecting it. But they knew, and they know still, that the east–west link is a vitally important road for the future not just for Melbourne but for Victoria. This is a road that would bring great benefits not just to the eastern suburbs and the western suburbs of Melbourne but also to country Victoria. It would bring enormous benefits to Gippsland. It would bring enormous benefits to Geelong. It would bring enormous benefits to Ballarat, right through the Western District down through Colac. During the summer it would bring great benefits to those who wish to access the beaches on the Surf Coast, as I have been known to do myself from time to time.

But this bloke, Daniel Andrews, now the Premier of this state, just got up one morning it seems and declared that as far as he was concerned the east–west link — the biggest project that Victoria had ever seen or was ever going to see, the most important project on

anybody's agenda at this time — was gone. If he became Premier, it was gone.

Guess what? He did become Premier, and much to everybody's surprise, he actually scrapped it. Can you believe it? I know a lot of Labor voters who said to me prior to the election, when I raised this issue of the east–west link with them, 'Don't be stupid; he wouldn't do that. He must know how important this is'. I am talking about people down at the footy in Werribee, people in Footscray, people in Deer Park and people in Sunbury, who said, 'We're going to vote Labor, but he's not going to do it. Just calm down, will you? Just relax. He won't scrap this; it's far too important'.

Guess what? The Premier scrapped it. He spent hundreds of millions of dollars not to build a road. I have no objection if people spend hundreds of millions of dollars and at the end of the day have something very worthwhile. That is a good thing; it is an investment in our future. However, to spend up to \$800 million to get nothing is insane. At the end of it what we have left is traffic gridlock morning and night and quite often during the day right across Melbourne, and we know what happens to our road network if just one accident occurs. A couple of trucks have a bit of a bingle on the West Gate Freeway and the next thing you know the whole network is closed down. Cars are banked back up the Calder Freeway, they are banked up the Monash Freeway and they are banked up the West Gate Freeway just because of one bingle. The Premier is very happy to let that continue.

We know every morning thousands of Victorians are caught in the traffic as they crawl to their place of work, whether it be from the east or from the west, whether they are going into the city or whether they are going to the east or to the west. They are caught in the traffic on the Monash Freeway, on the Eastern Freeway, on the Tullamarine Freeway, on the Calder Freeway, on the West Gate Freeway and on the Princes Freeway. We know just how horrific that traffic can be, and it is, but Premier Andrews is very happy to let that continue.

I say to the Premier of the state that he should be ashamed of himself. He should be somebody who has a sense of responsibility to the people of this state. Why did he do it? It had nothing to do with the need to build trains or railway tracks or anything like that. He scrapped the east–west link — he did this to the people of Victoria — because he wanted to save a handful of mates in the inner city who were under threat from the Greens. That is why he did it, and he could not even succeed in that, with Ms Kanis biting the dust in the Assembly electorate of Melbourne. He might have

saved Dick Wynne, the member for Richmond in the Assembly, and he saved Ms Garrett, the member for Brunswick in the Assembly, but he could not save them all. However, he was very happy to sacrifice the people of Victoria and allow them to face a situation where they are stuck in traffic morning, noon and night — and on weekends too, I have to say.

I do not know if anybody has noticed, and it was interesting listening to the 3AW breakfast radio show, which has picked up on this as well, but the traffic on weekends — Saturday afternoons and so forth — is now just as bad as morning and afternoon peak hours, and I can vouch for that, as I often head into the general vicinity of the MCG on a weekend. The traffic from the west is absolutely shocking, but the Premier does not care about that. He is very happy to let people spend hundreds of thousands of man and woman hours — you have to balance these things — in traffic. He does not care. He gives the people of Victoria the big finger, the middle digit, as they sit in traffic. We say, 'Isn't he a great Premier?', and the answer comes back, 'No, he is not'.

There is the western distributor proposal that has been floated but not paid for, of course. Nothing is ever paid for; those opposite just talk about it. No jobs come from it, because of course that would mean you would have to put money in, and we do not have a lot of money, because we just spent up to \$800 million not to build a road. This western distributor is a joke. What it will do is replicate the mayhem we see on a daily basis over at Hoddle Street and Alexandra Parade at the end of the Eastern Freeway. What happens there every day is going to be replicated on the western side of Melbourne. Hey, what a brilliant Premier we have, a man who will spend all that money and put us in hock even further — making Transurban very rich, it has to be said. He will do that so that we in the west can enjoy the same traffic hassles they have in the east. How even-handed is that? It is just staggering.

When I say this is Monty Pythonesque, I am not joking. If you made a movie of the sort of carry-on we are seeing in this state right now, nobody would believe it. They would say it is too far-fetched. They would say this bloke was on drugs. They would say he is as high as a kite. Nobody in their right mind could come up with a script that includes Premier Andrews and his government, because it is just too extraordinary.

We know one thing, and that is that in Victoria under this Premier the Socialist Left is back in charge. It is only a matter of time — if it has not already happened — before John Setka from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union is given his own

door. I remember back in the bad old days of the Kirner government when the Minister for Transport, Peter Spyker — some of you might remember him — had a special door into his office for the union leaders. They did not have to go through reception; they had a special door in the corridor, and they just went into his office whenever they liked.

**Mr Ramsay** interjected.

**Mr FINN** — I do not know much about the Melbourne Club. I cannot wait to see that happen. It is only a matter of time before there is the Setka door into the Premier's office, if it has not already been installed. Then there is Peter Marshall. I have to feel a tad sorry for Peter Marshall, because I am a man who believes in justice and in fairness, and Peter Marshall went out of his way. Let us face facts: he did some appalling things in the campaign to get this government elected. He sacrificed the image of the fireys and he led some pretty gross acts of thuggery, it has to be said, on polling booths and surrounds.

**Mr Ramsay** — Intimidation.

**Mr FINN** — Intimidation was the order of the day; Mr Ramsay is absolutely right. That was done at polling booths and pre-poll booths right around Victoria. If you were in a marginal seat, you could expect Peter Marshall and his mates to come in and give you a hard time. In many instances it was a physical hard time; it was physical violence that we saw.

**Mr Ondarchie** interjected.

**Mr FINN** — And against women, as Mr Ondarchie says. Given that Mr Marshall went out of his way in the manner that he did to get Daniel Andrews elected, I feel a bit sorry that he has been shafted. He may have to get together with Adam Bandt and they can compare experiences, because as we know, earlier this day Adam Bandt was shafted as well — by Richard Di Natale. And Sarah Hanson-Young was not so lucky and did not have a good day either. Anyway, enough on the Greens because that could keep us here for a couple of weeks. I understand Mr Barber is very pleased because they have kept it in the family.

There is no doubt that with the Socialist Left back in charge it is only a matter of time before we are all wearing polka dots again. I have to say that I am not particularly looking forward to that, because I remember when the polka dot princess was running the show, and Victoria was not a happy place. Those of you who can recall those years will remember the Melbourne international tram festival where the trams

were banked up all the way down Bourke Street as far as the eye could see. They were there for weeks. Lou Di Gregorio was the union secretary at the time. I fear that it is only a matter of time before instead of a tram festival we will have the Melbourne international fire truck festival, because Mr Marshall will not take well to being treated in such a way by the government he got elected. He will not take well to that, so it is only a matter of time — and this will end in tears. Lovers tiffs are one thing, but this is going right over the top. You can see that this will come to blows. This is not going to be pretty at all.

The Premier went to some lengths to protect his mates — only mates in the Socialist Left, might I add; he was not particularly interested in Labor Unity. What are they now? They have had a factional realignment — —

**Mr Ramsay** interjected.

**Mr FINN** — Centre Unity. It sounds like a super fund. I was just about to ask the Acting President if he joined and how much he is kicking in a fortnight.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr)** — Order! Mr Finn should come back to the motion.

**Mr FINN** — It is interesting that despite all the effort the Premier went to to protect his Socialist Left mates in the inner city, one of the first things he did upon becoming Premier was to jump into bed with the Greens. That is something I have to say turns my stomach. But he happily did it. Yesterday we saw in this house one of the results of that most unfortunate cohabitation of Labor and the Greens. We saw it yesterday with the bill that came before the house to turf the cattle out of the high country. They are shackled up together, and not a pleasant shacking up it is, but I gather they are quite enjoying it. They are doing to each other what he is doing to Victoria.

What we should be aware of is that the legislation that went through this house yesterday was a direct result of the coming together of the Greens and the Labor Party on so many areas. We should get ready for this because we are going to see a lot more of it. We are going to see the green nutbags running all sorts of things in this state as a result of the coupling of the Greens and the Labor Party. I have to say to my two friends from the Shooters and Fishers Party over there in the corner that they should be very aware of the agenda the Labor-Greens coalition has for them and their pastimes. They should be very much aware of that. There are a lot of shooters and hunters out in the western suburbs.

**Mr Ramsay** — And fishers.

**Mr FINN** — And fishers, my word there are, out in the western suburbs, do not worry about that. They will fish anything. If you put a bucket of water down in the Footscray mall, there will be blokes there with a fishing rod. My colleagues from the Shooters and Fishers Party should be very aware that they are coming for them.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmr)** — Order! Through the Chair, Mr Finn!

**Mr FINN** — I apologise, Acting President; I hope they are not coming for you. You are a good man, and I would hate to see that happen. They are certainly coming for the pastimes of shooting and fishing — for the recreations that people have enjoyed for many years. The Greens and the Labor Party have a clear agenda, and that will show its ugly face in this place and across Victoria before very long. You can put your bottom dollar on that. We are now back to the tired, old hoary chestnut of climate change and global warming.

**Mr Ramsay** — Sandbagging.

**Mr FINN** — Sandbagging, indeed, as they call it now. In this unholy alliance of the Labor Party and the Greens one leads the other on. What we are in for over the next three and a half years is not something that I am particularly looking forward to, given that in the six months of this coalition government the damage that has already been done is pretty significant. Sadly, it will continue until 2018. Those of us who have a word with the bloke upstairs from time to time should give thanks for the fact that we have somebody of the calibre of Matthew Guy as the Leader of the Opposition in this state. Mark my words, and I have no fear of being repudiated on this, when I say to this house that Matthew Guy will be an outstanding Premier of Victoria.

He will be an outstanding leader of this state. Quite frankly, we are going to need him and his team and all the skills they can muster to put this state back together when this mob has finished, because I have a feeling — I may have said this before — that give it another 12 months — —

**Mr Ramsay** interjected.

**Mr FINN** — I will let you know. Give it another 12 months of this crowd with a Treasurer and Premier who do not speak to each other and Martin Foley telling people to bite each other — there are all sorts of strange things going on in the other house today, I gather — —

**Ms Crozier** interjected.

**Mr FINN** — He is not very pleasant at the best of times.

**Ms Crozier** interjected.

**Mr FINN** — It was to Mr Southwick, was it?

**Ms Crozier** interjected.

**Mr FINN** — Mr Foley is not a very nice person.

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

**Mr FINN** — I apologise, Acting President — I just got a bit carried away. I will try to not do that again.

We should be aware that there is hope that better times are ahead after 2018. What I was about to say before I got a bit off track is that in less than 12 months we will look back on the Kirner Labor government as the good old days. We will look back on the Kirner government as a time when we had good economic management and we did not have any surprises in government. We will look back at the Kirner government and say, ‘God, that is when Labor knew how to govern — look what we’ve got now!’. It is sad to think of what is coming, but we know what is coming because we know what has transpired. Leopards do not change their spots — or stripes for that matter. What we are seeing is a major assault on Victoria led by the Premier and the government of this state.

I support the motion. I wish we had not needed to move it, but we did. I think it is important that we point out to the people of Victoria that we in the coalition parties are on their side. We are on their side and we will continue to take their side as Victoria is belted from pillar to post over the next three and a half years by a government that quite frankly is not up to it, does not have a clue about what is going on and is driven purely by an ideology that died years ago. The only place you could find a communist these days is in the Victorian ALP — and the Greens of course but they call themselves something else — —

**Ms Crozier** interjected.

**Mr FINN** — Lee Rhiannon, God help us. We on this side of the house must prepare ourselves over the next three and a half years for what is ahead, but most importantly we must prepare ourselves for what comes post 2018 when we will be called upon by the Victorian people to put this state back together again.

**Mr RAMSAY** (Western Victoria) — My contribution on the motion this afternoon will be

relatively short. The motion moved by Mrs Peulich recommends:

That this house notes the Andrews Labor government’s term of office has been characterised by lies, confusion, excuses and spin.

I support the spirit in which this motion has been brought to the chamber, but I think it is somewhat premature given that we are only five months — I am sure other contributors will identify how many days it has been — into the Andrews Labor government’s term of office. It is still in the first stage of its four-year term.

I will take the opportunity to revisit the actions of the previous Labor government in relation to spin, confusion, lies and excuses. I want to tell the chamber of a personal experience. In fact I did that earlier this week and got a lot of interest, but unfortunately it was not the experience that was sought. I was president of the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) when the then Premier, Steve Bracks, was seeking support for the project known as the north–south pipeline. I remember quite distinctly that we had been supportive of the then government in relation to protecting Victorian irrigators, particularly regarding the Howard federal government’s plan to refer powers from the state to the commonwealth to protect the Murray–Darling Basin. Without going into a lot of detail, there was a great deal of consensus between the then state government and the VFF about the need to protect our irrigators.

We worked with the then Labor government in good faith on that issue. At the same time we were fed a line about how there was a significant need to upgrade water infrastructure in the north, in particular the Goulburn. This was part of Prime Minister Howard’s \$10 billion national water plan deal, whereby the state would split by thirds investment to upgrade water infrastructure in the irrigation channels in the north, at the same time provide some water for environmental flooding and provide a third to water users in Melbourne. In effect there would be a partnership between the government and Melbourne water users to provide funds to upgrade water infrastructure channels in the north.

I appreciate that this is quite a long story, but the crux of the matter was that the government would provide over \$750 million to build a pipeline from the north to the south of the state to provide Melbourne with water security during what had then been a 10-year drought. In doing so the trade-off was improving water infrastructure to create efficiencies in water management which would create excess water in the north.

The spin in that case was that the government said, 'If you support us on this, we will have \$1 billion from the federal government as part of the national water plan and \$750 million from the state government, and we will improve your channels, increase your productivity, create water management, have more water for both the farmers and the environment and provide security in Melbourne via the north-south pipeline. Are you with us?'. As we were having that dialogue with the government, unbeknownst to us Steve Bracks was flying across the Thomson Dam in that little bright red helicopter to create advertisements and say that the government was committing to a project called the north-south pipeline which had the full support of all stakeholders, including the Victorian Farmers Federation.

That was not the case. In fact we were not even up to that discussion at that point in time. The government was using third-party endorsements, like from the VFF, to support this project without us actually confirming our support. That is when I became aware of the Labor Party's ability to spin, lie, tell untruths and do anything it could to seek favour from those it believed would support its causes.

It was not only that project. Members might remember the debate around that time over whether we were to have a desalination plant. The advice given to the Labor government of the day was that there would be generalised support, even from the Liberal Party, for a number of small desalination plants built in different areas of the state, which would help to provide water security not only for Melbourne water users but for regional Victoria water users as well. As we know, the Labor government ignored that advice. It ignored international investors who advised that the proposed desalination plant in Wonthaggi had too large a scope, was too expensive, was not required and would have difficulty attracting sufficient capital.

The Labor government then spun the story that Victoria required a desalination plant that would provide water security forever. It was not able to provide the business case, but it created so much spin around the project that it was able to convince a number of investors to sign on. As we know, the desalination plant was built and water users now pay dearly — over \$1.2 million per day — for that very expensive project in Wonthaggi that is yet to provide any water to anywhere in Victoria.

On top of that Labor managed to convince Geelong that it needed a connection to the pipeline — and I now understand that all water users across all 19 water boards will start paying for it very shortly thanks to the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water.

Minister Neville has, in her wisdom, decided to advise all those professional, highly skilled and highly knowledgeable corporate water board members that they are to resign because they are all climate change deniers and therefore do not share the ideology of the Greens and Labor, which is an absolute disgrace. It is a totally arrogant and rude way to treat all of those people who have volunteered their time and significant expertise to sit on those boards and provide good oversight and management of our waterways, catchments and environmental activities. I will have more to say about that when I give a statement on a report in relation to water entities down the track.

I will also take this opportunity to reflect on a couple of other lies and other examples of spin from the Labor Party. I remember the Ararat jail saga easily and in detail because when I moved to Ballarat one of the first constituents who came to my office was one of the subcontractors working on the jail upgrade. They told me that the management practices there were so bad that they feared their jobs would go. There was a feeling within the consortium that the public-private partnership Labor had created was such a mess that it was unlikely to continue as a group and that it was therefore unlikely to complete that significant jail upgrade.

Sure enough, as we know, one of the parties to the consortium fell out and had liquidity problems, and that flowed on to the subcontractors, many of whom were from Ballarat, Ararat and western Victoria. Suddenly a whole lot of families from that region were exposed to job losses. I congratulate former Premier Ted Baillieu and former Minister for Corrections Andrew McIntosh, who spent a considerable amount of time rehashing that agreement with international bankers to form a new consortium and a new public-private partnership to enable work to start again at the jail. I am pleased to say that through the good work of Mr O'Donohue, who took over the corrections portfolio from Mr McIntosh, the facility was completed. It is one of the best in the world in relation to some of the assets and activities that have been incorporated to reform the low and medium security prisoners housed there. The Ararat jail was yet another project botched by Labor's spin, lies and deception and for which we had to pick up the pieces.

I also refer to the regional rail link. Yes, this wonderful project was initiated by the Labor government, but it was underfunded to the extent that there were no rolling stock, no signals and considerable delays in the rollout. It was again the coalition government that had to come in and pick up the pieces. Labor tried to spin that the regional rail link was on track and on budget with

sufficient funding for the complete rollout, but we know that is not true.

I can talk about myki as well; there is a long history of myki. We inherited a card system for train, tram and bus passengers that was ineffective in its previous form. By looking at the contracts and at how to better use the technology to create a superior model for myki, the coalition fixed the mess, even among the lies, spin and deception that Labor was creating around it.

Mr Finn talked about some of the road infrastructure that Labor has put a significant amount of spin around, telling us what wonderful projects they are, but under examination and scrutiny we find they are not at all wonderful, and I will get to that in a minute.

I want to raise one thing that concerns me about the first 150-odd days of the Labor government, which is that the budget indicates an increase in the public service of 7.7 per cent. This is tragic Kirner policy. It was Mr Finn or someone else who indicated that the current Labor government has all the hallmarks of Joan Kirner-style government — that is, the Guilty Party. I still have this picture — I do not know whether anyone else does — of the then Treasurer, Tony Sheehan. Does anyone remember Red Beard of the Guilty Party and those shifty eyes that fluttered back and forth as he tried to lie, spin and deceive the Victorian public during that whole horrible period of Kirner-style government? Even in this early period of office Labor is demonstrating the typical hallmarks of the Kirner government, the Guilty Party.

Straightaway we are seeing deception. Invariably the first thing Labor governments do is increase staff numbers in the public service. I came into the Parliament as a new member four and a half years ago, and I remember the then Treasurer, Kim Wells, the member for Rowville in the Assembly, clearly identifying that our first priority was to reduce the public service because it was gobbling up 48 per cent of the total budget expenditure. It took three or four years. This is no different to what former Prime Minister John Howard did when he took over from a Labor government, when he had to retrench nearly 15 000 public servants, as also happened under then Premier Campbell Newman in Queensland. We had the task of reducing the public service by nearly 4500, which was very hard on those who were retrenched or took voluntary leave and whose families were affected, so it is terribly disappointing for the Labor government, within 150 days, to have a budget item that shows a 7.7 per cent increase in the public service. It will have a significant impact on the long-term economic viability of the state.

I am disappointed that we are now seeing Labor following in the tracks of the Kirner government, with an increase in the size of the public service. The forward projections show a decrease, after the initial 7.7 per cent increase, back to about 3.2 or 3.4 per cent, but I do not see that as being possible. Enterprise bargaining agreements will come around in another year and a half, and you cannot tell me that the United Firefighters Union, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, the nurses, the teachers and everyone else will not be seeking significant increases in salaries. There is no way the government can possibly contain the increase in the public service to between 2 and 3 per cent. It is more spin, lies and deception.

It is a real concern of mine that in these 150 days we are seeing the trademark of the Kirner period, the Guilty Party, being duplicated by the current Labor government. We will have to watch this space so we do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

**Mr Finn** interjected.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Polka dots all round, certainly. Just briefly, because I want Mr Ondarchie and Ms Crozier to have the opportunity to speak as well — —

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Mr RAMSAY** — And Ms Fitzherbert. I will be very brief then, because we have only about 15 minutes left in this debate, in speaking about the western distributor. In past contributions I raised the importance of the east–west link and its western section, particularly for my region of western Victoria. It is important that we have a second river crossing, and I have advocated for that as much as possible. However, what I see in the western distributor, Labor’s alternative to the east–west link, which is a \$680 million off-ramp on the eastern side, is total spin. I have brought Labor to account in a number of contributions, and the RACV and other motoring groups also see it as a total dud. I call it the distributor dud. The Labor government trying to hoodwink us and the Victorian community, saying this is a great alternative to the east–west link, is a disgrace.

The western distributor is nothing more than an opportunity for Transurban shareholders to get richer than they already are and for Transurban to get richer than it already is. It wants to toll the West Gate Freeway, whereas it is not tolled at the moment. It wants to push traffic onto CityLink just before the West Gate Bridge and create a funnel. Motorists will then be

charged three or four times along CityLink, which is great for Transurban but no good for us in the west, who want access to the city without being stuck on the West Gate Bridge. It is more spin, lies and deception, and there will be plenty more coming.

I am aware of what Labor is up to, and I hope we will keep a high level of scrutiny of the government through its term of office. On that basis, I congratulate Mrs Peulich for giving me the opportunity to raise those issues, and I look forward to further contributions from members on this side of the chamber.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on Mrs Peulich's motion, which asks the house to note that the Andrews Labor government's term of office has been characterised by lies, confusion, excuses and spin. Victorians know there are only 1297 days to go before they can turf this mob out of office. Already they have had enough. The Indian Premier League cricket competition is about to get a new entrant — Daniel Andrews and his frontbench — because they are the spin kings of this globe. They will turn anything to make it sound plausible, but the Victorian public is very sharp and will not fall for it. This government has been full of confusion and excuses — —

**Mrs Peulich** interjected.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — coupled, as Mrs Peulich rightly points out, with arrogance. The Premier and his frontbench started their innings in this Twenty20 premier league by saying there would be no compensation for the east–west link — not one single dollar. They also said the contract was not worth the paper it was written on and that they would table the contract in their first week of office. That did not happen. Spin, confusion and lies. What did they do? They immediately wrote a cheque for about \$740 million, which we think will be more than \$800 million, not to do something. The taxpayers of this state are aware that this government paid a substantial amount of money, which could have built many schools, hospitals and train stations, not to do something.

But Premier Payback is doing what he said; he will look after his mates. He said during the election campaign that all his policies were fully costed and fully funded. We and the Victorian taxpayers have found out, added to the beautiful spinning ball coming out of Mr Andrews's hands, that Mernda rail will get only \$9 million. His projects are fully costed and fully funded! What does he need the \$9 million for? He said it is because he needs to plan it and work out how much

it will cost to build. I thought he said it was fully costed and fully funded. Spin, lies and confusion. We should stand up in this chamber today and say, 'So noted', as all Victorians are saying, 'So noted'. In 1297 days we will open this door and boot them out.

As my colleague Mr Ramsay so eloquently advised the chamber, those opposite have form on this dating way back. Victorians are paying \$1.8 million a day for the desalination plant — the Wonthaggi rust bucket. In the short time that Daniel Andrews and his spin kings have been in office Victorians have paid \$284.4 million towards the desalination plant that they do not need.

The myki ticketing system that the Baillieu-Napthine government inherited never worked properly. I do not see in the budget — and I will talk more about the budget tomorrow — where the government is going to spend money to fix myki. It is in denial that it mucked it up in the first place. The electronic gaming machine licences that those opposite issued too early cost Victorians \$3 billion worth of revenue. The north–south pipeline is one in Daniel Andrews's collection of white elephants in this state. His own HealthSMART ICT project started with a whole lot of spin, confusion and lies and ended with a whole lot of spin, confusion and lies. Those opposite have got form.

As Mr Ramsay pointed out, the Ararat prison project was botched at the start, because those opposite do not know how to manage money. If any confusion exists in this state, it is their confusion that they have the capacity to govern in this state. They are wrong.

In Epping North, which is in my own electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region, is the Aurora housing estate. For the life of the previous Labor government the people in that area were sold a pup. They were told they were going to get great public transport, bus services, a train station, schools, community centres, fibre to the home and a whole range of things that would result in wonderful quality of living at Aurora estate in Epping North. What did those opposite deliver? Zip. No train station was built. They built bus shelters on the roads but provided no bus services. They promised a whole lot of community infrastructure, but they did not deliver. The Labor Party now, as it did then, falls silent about its spin and its lies.

In 158 days Victoria has lost more than 8500 jobs. Where is the Daniel Andrews jobs plan for Victoria? It does not exist. The government's excuse today for anything that cannot be found in the budget is that it is in contingencies, which is code for 'we have no idea'. It is more spin, more confusion and more lies from this government that is not capable of governing.

Those opposite talk about important level crossing removal. They came out and said they were going to remove level crossings in their first term as their transport solution for Victoria. We are 158 days into this period of government, and the only level crossings being removed are the ones that were started under the coalition government. Level crossings in Coburg, Preston, Campbellfield, Glenroy and Alphington, all of which are in my electorate, are not in the budget. How much money is there in the budget for the level crossing at the big junction in Reservoir that Ms Mikakos's office overlooks? Zip; there is nothing for the railway crossing removal that the most local representative, Ms Mikakos, looks out on from her office. There is not one single dollar, only spin, lies and confusion.

**Mrs Peulich** — It's all right; she's got her white car. She doesn't worry about anyone else.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** — As she gets picked up in her limousine and driven to her palatial office she does not have to worry about ordinary Victorians trying to find their way to work through the Reservoir junction.

There is no extra car parking at South Morang station. People park their cars in a paddock that becomes a bog during the winter because in their term of government those opposite created a car park that was too small. It fills up at 6.40 a.m., and they have no solutions.

This is a government that, as Mrs Peulich rightly points out, should be ridiculed because it is full of confusion, lies and spin. The problem is that those opposite are starting to believe in their own lies. What they do not realise, however, is that outside the Labor Party everybody else has worked it out. I commend Mrs Peulich's motion to the house.

**Ms CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) — I am also pleased to rise to make a brief contribution to the debate on Mrs Peulich's motion:

That this house notes the Andrews Labor government's term of office has been characterised by lies, confusion, excuses and spin.

I have been listening to the contributions from my colleagues over the last little while, and I could not agree with them more. There is a consistent theme with Labor governments that we know about and Australians know about. Information was put out prior to the election. But we know the Premier said one thing before the election and said something else after the election.

I listened with great interest yesterday, as we all did, to the Treasurer's budget speech, and I could not help but think, 'Oh, my goodness, this entire speech is just one-line platitudes. Where is the substance?'.

**Mrs Peulich** — No vision.

**Ms CROZIER** — Mrs Peulich is right, there was no vision. The one line that jumped out to me is on page 6, and when the Treasurer said it I thought, 'Goodness me'. We had been listening for a few minutes and he had been going on with these one-liners. As I said, there was platitude after platitude, and then there was this line:

It's too often spoken by governments who have no idea where we're transitioning to.

I thought, 'Isn't that the truth?'. Mr Pallas has said it. He has no idea where he is transitioning to, and Victorians will be worse off for his decisions and for his shameless rhetoric that was undertaken in the lead-up to the election.

The Labor Party's biggest shameless discussion that dominated the media in the lead-up to the election was the one about east-west link. We did not get Labor's costings until two days before the election, so there was no time to scrutinise what was in those costings or the financial position the government was going to put us in. There was no time to look at the programs that were cut and at what Victoria was heading for.

Let us remember what we faced when we came to government in 2010: eleven years of Labor administration. In its last four years in office that administration increased Victoria's net debt by around 400 per cent. In addition, over the decade to around 2011 the Victorian public service grew on average by 5.3 per cent, despite an average population growth of around 2 per cent. That meant that we were living beyond our means. The budget handed down yesterday, which was full of those one-line platitudes, is sending us down the same path. Victorians will understand that sooner rather than later.

I return to the issue of the east-west link, which was dominant before the election. The now Premier, Daniel Andrews, was trotted out saying one thing. I find, when we are talking about confusion, spin and lies, that the most extraordinary thing was his makeover. That somebody has to change their name to get elected says it all. Regarding the east-west link, the open letter sent by the Prime Minister to the then Premier and the then Leader of the Opposition was very clear. It states:

I want to make it absolutely clear to the people of Victoria that the \$3 billion the commonwealth government has

committed to this project is for one purpose and one purpose only — and that is to build east–west link.

Let me repeat: the \$3 billion the commonwealth government has committed for the east–west link is only available to build the east–west link.

How much clearer does it have to be? It is pretty clear. I am sure that Victorians will understand that that money has been put into this year's budget and is elevating the government's figures to make them look rosier than they actually are. That is absolutely shameful.

The government might say that Victorians did not vote for the east–west link, but the spin and the confusion surrounding the argument at the time clearly led to the inability of the Victorian community to comprehend just what was at stake. The Labor opposition was threatened by the Greens in the inner-city seats. That had a huge hold over its decision in refusing to honour a government contract that had been planned and put into previous budgets with all the elements of good government. It is extraordinary for the Premier to say that he is not paying one cent in compensation while paying \$640 million for a road that is not being built. That is the biggest spin of all time.

It is disappointing that Victorians are wearing these decisions. We have a Premier who has put his position to Victorians. Each day they realise what his decision to pay that huge compensation bill of \$640 million means. It would pay for an incredible number of schools. It would enhance our workforce in necessary areas, whether it be in health, police, community services, child protection. That money has been blown in one fell swoop.

I asked a question about level crossings, and I think the response is the biggest spin of all time. Victorians understood that 50 level crossings would be removed. I asked a question of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety about this, and I received a response. It states:

Tender proposals to remove four level crossings at Main Road, St Albans, Blackburn Road, Blackburn, Burke Road, Glen Iris, and North Road, Ormond, have been received and are being evaluated. These four project sites are being procured into contract packages.

They were undertaken under the former coalition government. My question was about the removal of various level crossings in my area. This is what the minister said:

The removal of level crossings at Koornang Road, Carnegie, and Murrumbeena Road, Murrumbeena, is being considered as part of an unsolicited bid to government by the Rail Transformation Consortium. This unsolicited bid is currently being assessed and the timing for the commencement of

works at these crossings will be determined as part of the assessment.

One hundred million dollars has been announced to establish a dedicated level crossing removal authority for planning work for the level crossing — —

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Finn)** — Order! I apologise to Ms Crozier, but it being 5.00 p.m. it is now time for me to interrupt business for statements on reports and papers.

**Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.**

## STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

### Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2014–15 (part 2)

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) — I will make contributions on two reports, the Auditor-General's report on *Emergency Service Response Times* and the government response to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's report on the 2014–15 budget estimates. In doing so, I note that the state budget has been brought down this week. However, the response to the 2014–15 budget estimates makes a number of comments, particularly at recommendation 1, around the timing of the budget. The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee suggested the budget should be tabled after rather than before the federal budget. Of course that is an old debate, and the government has said it will look at this.

In the context of the budget this week it is worthwhile looking at a number of the programs where there is a genuine interplay of commonwealth and state programs. I am looking in the health area at real-time prescription monitoring, which is an area of state and federal cooperation and discussion. The federal government is calling for the implementation of real-time prescription monitoring. I know that the opposition, then the state government, had an election policy to fund real-time prescription monitoring which, following the commissioning and completion of a detailed business case, did stack up. We were comfortable with and aware of how this could be undertaken.

In that context it is concerning that \$0.3 million is all that has been allowed for real-time prescription monitoring this year. We had allocated around \$7 million, which would have seen the successful implementation of real-time prescription monitoring, which is a cost-saving measure because of the impact that is avoided by preventive activities. I believe the state government has made a mistake in not proceeding

as quickly as it can, given it had a firm and solid business case on which to do so.

Another program in this year's budget relates to HIV point-of-care rapid testing. The PRONTO! program, which is the community-based, free rapid testing and syphilis testing service in Rose Street, Fitzroy, is an innovative, patient-centred, peer-led model in partnership between the Victorian AIDS Council and the Burnet Institute. Following a trip to the United States to the AIDS conference in 2012 and a visit to Magnet in San Francisco as the then Minister for Health I was proud to support this program, which saw the first community-based rapid testing centre in Australia.

In that context it is interesting to see on page 64 of budget paper 3 that rapid testing is funded at \$500 000 and at \$600 000 in the three out years. That is a significant cut. A reduction from \$1 million to \$500 000 is a 50 per cent cut, a very significant cut that will hamper and reduce the ability of PRONTO! to do the protective work it is doing. Early, available and accessible testing means that those who may have reason to be tested are in a position to have the testing, and early detection means early treatment and consequently less transmission. This is a sensible, practical measure that will reduce the spread of HIV by early detection, initially uncovering cases that had not been tested and seeing a rise in the first instance in the number of people detected with HIV but then enabling the relevant testing.

I was also proud that as health minister I was able to commission the pre-exposure prophylaxis trial — known as PrEP — and other significant public health measures that were designed to support the community and support the availability of greater testing.

It is with some concern that I note that HIV prevention, community-based, rapid point-of-care testing at PRONTO! is only receiving half the funding we had allocated. In government our commitment going towards the election in November 2014 was for \$1 million a year and \$4 million over four years. It is shameful to see that the government has not put sufficient money and resources into this important area of preventive support. As I said, PRONTO! is a peer-controlled, peer-supported service. I pay tribute to the Victorian AIDS Council and the Burnet Institute for the work they have done, and I express my disappointment in the Labor government under its Premier, Daniel Andrews, for cutting funding as its first act in this area.

### **Auditor-General: *Emergency Service Response Times***

**Mr EIDEH** (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's report entitled *Emergency Service Response Times*, of March 2015, and I thank all those who worked on the report. The report brings to the forefront the issue of emergency service response times and how this vital information is conveyed.

Response times to emergencies are critical not only for ensuring the best outcome from the emergency itself but also for the Victorian public to keep their trust in the reliability of these services to respond quickly when they are needed. The report indicates that four of Victoria's emergency services organisations, Ambulance Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board and the Victorian State Emergency Service, all have procedures to measure performance times. Victoria Police does not have any response time measures. All four emergency services that measure their responses report publicly on the time lines to calls for assistance. The report found:

The performance frameworks that ESOs —  
emergency services organisations —

use to monitor emergency response times do not allow Parliament and the public to hold agencies fully to account. There are multiple problems with the design of the measures and methods for calculating results and therefore the reported results fail to appropriately describe performance.

The report also highlights that the current mechanism for measuring performance:

... may distort the public and Parliament's understanding of how effectively these services are being delivered ...

The current performance measures for Ambulance Victoria, the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board and the Victorian State Emergency Service all include call processing and dispatch activity in their response times, which can alter the results. The report found a number of weaknesses in the reliability and accuracy of reported response time performance. The report makes a total of 10 recommendations to overcome the issues identified and to ensure that the Parliament and the public can better assess the performance of emergency services, have a clearer understanding and expectation of emergency response times and pass judgement as to whether the performance is improving or declining.

I commend the report to the chamber, and I urge all departments identified in the report to accept the Auditor-General's mandate and recommendations.

### **Cancer Council Victoria: annual review 2014**

**Ms CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to rise this evening to speak to the Cancer Council Victoria annual review 2014. It is a very informative review that demonstrates just what the Cancer Council undertakes each year and the developments and improvements that are being undertaken in this space. I know all members are very supportive of Cancer Council Victoria. It has multiparty support, and I think we will continue to see support for it in the years to come.

I was particularly pleased to read a number of things in the report. Chief executive officer Todd Harper said in his opening statement:

Each year we are seeing improvements in cancer control — from advances in research, improvements in cancer detection and increases in five-year survival rates.

The statistics are pleasing, although there is much more to do. We know that contributing factors like obesity, smoking, alcohol and diet can increase the chances of developing cancer, and we need to do more to educate our community about the risks of cancer and encourage them to utilise the available screening programs.

The report highlights the very effective Cats Don't Smoke app. Under the heading 'Cats help smokers kick the habit' it says:

Quit Victoria teamed up with the Geelong Cats and Healthy Together Geelong to tackle the city's high smoking rates.

In my former role as Parliamentary Secretary for Health I was pleased to launch the app at the Geelong-North Melbourne game in May last year. It was a tremendous game; I think we won that night, although I cannot quite recall. Nevertheless, it was terrific to be there. I note from the report that 27 000 fans were watching the game. The government has put a lot of money into Skilled Stadium, and on that occasion the stadium was full, and I got a very good reception at the launch of the Cats Don't Smoke app. Channel 7 news reporter Rebecca Maddern, who was in the audience, was absolutely horrified — —

**Mr Ramsay** interjected.

**Ms CROZIER** — She is the no. 1 ticketholder, isn't she, Mr Ramsay? She does a terrific job and is an excellent ambassador for the football team that both Mr Ramsay and I support. Rebecca was horrified at the

statistics I relayed to the audience. The rates of smoking in Geelong are higher than in other areas of the state. In fact average smoking rates across Victoria have fallen to a record low of 13.3 per cent, but more than 20 per cent of adults in Geelong still smoke. Rebecca did a great service for the Cats app and also the Geelong football team, everyone who was there and the Geelong community, because she wrote about the app, speaking of its benefits and of the Geelong players giving words of encouragement to people to quit smoking. Cancer Council Victoria's developers worked in partnership with the Healthy Together team, showing how innovative we are in Victoria.

I cannot let this opportunity go by without acknowledging the work of Dr Shelley Bowen, who was absolutely terrific in running the Healthy Together programs across the state. Indeed I was disappointed to see that future funding for Healthy Together Victoria was not confirmed in yesterday's budget.

**Mr Ramsay** — It is a shame.

**Ms CROZIER** — It is a shame, Mr Ramsay, because the program is targeting some very disadvantaged areas across our state and getting tremendous results. There are leading people in our state such as Professor Paul Zimmet who say that this is the largest preventive health measure of its kind in the world. It was having real impacts and had some very good initiatives. It is very disappointing for those people who have been engaged in the program, for those Healthy Together teams, especially those in Geelong — they were a terrific team which I worked with very closely. This demonstrates the work of Cancer Council Victoria, the Healthy Together teams and the Geelong Cats football team. I commend that initiative as well as this report to the house.

### **Auditor-General: *Emergency Service Response Times***

**Mr ELASMAR** (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's report titled *Emergency Service Response Times*, which was tabled in March 2015. The report is good in parts; however, the overall response times must be demonstrated clearly. The factual method used to obtain true figures must be reliable, honest and believable in order for the community to have confidence in the facts presented to this Parliament.

The report states that the audit conducted on two emergency service agencies — namely, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice and Regulation — found that emergency

response time targets are outdated or not based on evidence. There appears to be a lack of clear understanding of how the data is interpreted or indeed how it is collected and stored. It would be impossible to map out a strategic plan based on the way the information is currently obtained. By and large community members are not familiar with the methodology or quantifiable statistics being used. When danger threatens, they simply need to know that an emergency response will be swift and timely.

Due to the lack of solid evidence of a strategic and coherent plan for data collection, we in the Parliament are not in a position to give assurances to the Victorian community. It is time to institute better practice protocols aimed at aspiring to reach the highest possible service efficiency, which should ensure improved delivery outcomes. As the matter currently stands, it is impossible to provide the public with up-to-date and reliable information for future emergency responses. The metropolitan area has some evidential data, but country Victoria is a complete blank. This has to be a worry for our rural residents. The lack or unreliability of information is not a measure of the failure of the performance of the current delivery of emergency services, but having that information allows for future planning of resources and manpower. Importantly, it demonstrates accountability, efficiency and cost effectiveness.

Our emergency services personnel are champions, and nothing can change that. We owe it to the men and women of the emergency services to establish a proper mechanism whereby their effective proficiency in doing the harrowing jobs they do for the community is able to be clearly seen and appreciated by the Victorian community. The recommendations set out in the report mainly relate to inter-agency consultation and collaboration. I fully support their speedy implementation, and I congratulate the Auditor-General's office on a comprehensive and interesting report.

**Auditor-General: *Water Entities — Results of the 2013–14 Audits***

**Mr RAMSAY** (Western Victoria) — I thank the house for the opportunity to speak to the *Water Entities — Results of the 2013–14 Audits* report by the Auditor-General. I do not intend to refer in detail to the report, but I want to make two observations in relation to the Auditor-General's comments, and then I want to lead on to another issue which is related and is causing me quite a lot of distress. In the Auditor-General's comments in the report he says:

The sector generated a net profit before income tax of \$318.2 million, an increase of \$234.5 million.

I have not done the arithmetic, but a quick calculation would tell you that that is about an 80 per cent increase in net profit by the 19 water entities from 2012–13 to 2013–14. From those figures you could calculate that the entities have been performing very well financially. I am speaking in general terms.

In the audit summary under 'Conclusions' the report notes:

Parliament can have confidence in the adequacy of financial and performance reporting of the water entities for the year ended 30 June 2014.

In essence that tells me that the accounts presented by the water entities are true and accurate reflections of the performance of those entities. The summary conclusion goes on to say:

Key financial challenges for the water entities include repaying growing debt and continuing to meet ongoing financial obligations to the state such as taxes and levies. The depth and breadth of debt refinancing is another area we plan to assess more closely ...

There is no doubt that some water entities are facing considerable financial challenges. The summary conclusion then states:

Parliament can have confidence that the role of audit committees at water entities is being carried out in an effective manner.

I am totally perplexed. Why then would the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water see fit to write to members of the boards of all 19 of those water entities and seek their resignation? Why would she do that when the Auditor-General has indicated that the water entities have been performing well and showed a more than 80 per cent increase in profit from the previous year? Why would she seek the resignation of men and women like Michael King, chair of Barwon Water; John Vogels, chair of Wannon Water; Jeremy Johnson, chair of Central Highlands Water; and Terry Burgi, chair of Southern Rural Water, to name but a few. These are the people I have been dealing directly with to help and support them in their endeavours to keep water pricing low, to reduce debt and to provide water management plans that meet the community's environmental expectations. Why would she do that?

These are professional people who have volunteered their time. They come from corporate backgrounds and manage their boards in a corporate and professional manner that adds a huge amount of knowledge to their task. They are not complicated or compromised by politics. They are not creating overarching policy. What

have they done to deserve the minister demanding their resignations? To me, it is total disrespect shown to people who have provided their corporate knowledge to the government by working on and providing their intellect to these water boards.

What I find even more perplexing is the fact that there has been no direct engagement by the water minister with the chairs or members of these boards. In fact the only response from the water minister in relation to the reasons she would endeavour to seek their resignations was the fact that she believes they are climate change sceptics — they do not meet the Labor Party and Greens ideology and cannot be trusted to run corporations. I find it totally unfathomable and incomprehensible that she would do this and, even worse, that she is not available to speak to those people. It is a slap in the face of all those people — all those board members with all that skill and knowledge — and those chairs who have been overseeing responsibility at those entities that have shown profits to sack them and then for the government to pull dividends from those water entities to puff up its budget.

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

#### **Auditor-General: *Education Transitions***

**Mr MELHEM** (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's report titled *Education Transitions*. The report shows encouraging signs for the Department of Education and Training's initiatives to improve early learning transitions as students move from kindergarten to primary school.

The Auditor-General found that the department has developed a strong and effective framework to assist schools with transitioning kindergarten students, with improvements in outcomes recorded across this audit. However, similar progress has not been made at a secondary school level. No similar strategy or framework exists for helping students make the critical transition from primary to secondary school, a time when we know students are under increased stress.

That is so true; I speak from personal experience with my two kids. I found that their transition from primary school to secondary school has been very challenging. Year 7 is very challenging because it is a shock to the system, with students having to learn to do more homework and to be more disciplined in comparison with their years in primary school. The question is whether a bit more attention should be given across the

board at year 6 level on how to prepare young kids to transition from primary school to secondary school.

The Auditor-General's report says that essentially schools are having to fly blind and make do on their own without adequate oversight or support from the Department of Education and Training in managing secondary school transitions. As a result there are well-documented declines in academic performance as teachers manage students' difficult transitions. The report contains a number of recommendations related to that exact point.

The Auditor-General recommends that the department adopt some of the recommendations which appear on pages xiv and xv and on page 25 of the report. Basically the report provides recommendations for how the department can make some improvements to children's transition from primary school to secondary school so as to make life easier for children and their parents. Most importantly, we need to give whatever assistance these children will need to cope when they are undertaking their secondary education. We all want them to achieve great things, so we need to make sure that they have a good foundation for their future.

I urge the department to look seriously at the recommendations of the Auditor-General and to look at putting in place a framework to implement his recommendations to make sure that we get the best possible outcomes for our kids. With those comments, I commend the report to the house.

#### **Auditor-General: *Emergency Service Response Times***

**Mr MULINO** (Eastern Victoria) — I rise to speak in relation to the Auditor-General's report titled *Emergency Service Response Times* and dated March 2015. When one thinks of an horrific car accident, of somebody suffering a heart attack or of a structure fire, the first thing one usually thinks of is how quick will the emergency services response be. That makes sense, because more often than not the effectiveness of that response will depend upon how quickly the service provider can arrive. An interesting aspect of the report that the Victorian Auditor-General has handed down is that there is much more to it than that. Because of that, the aspects of the response that we need to measure become much more sophisticated. We are not currently doing that, and we need to. I will provide an overview of where we find ourselves and then make some observations about where it is that we should move in response to some of the key findings of the Auditor-General's report.

The first thing to note is that four agencies currently have performance measures — namely, Ambulance Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board and the State Emergency Service. Of course Victoria Police also has emergency response times which are comparable in terms of being critical to service effectiveness, but Victoria Police does not currently have emergency response time measures or report them publicly.

We have five agencies, and the first thing that that brings to mind is that with multiple agencies one has multiple IT systems; the potential for complex organisational interface; and differing responsibilities across those agencies, and therefore different types of responsibilities that one has to measure the performance of. It is also important to note that we have a very wide and varying geographic distribution of responsibilities, so we have some agencies whose responsibilities are focused in metropolitan areas, some agencies whose responsibilities are focused in rural and regional areas, and some agencies whose responsibilities are statewide. All of these complicate the task of effectively measuring performance.

Why is it that we want to measure performance in this area? Firstly, it is because measuring and reporting on public sector agency performance is important per se. At all levels of government over recent decades there has been an acceptance across all parties that we need to become more transparent in reporting performance. Secondly, in order to have meaningful comparison of the effectiveness of services across different agencies, and in order to look at the trends in the effectiveness of service delivery over time, we need to have effective measures of performance. The reason we want to have comparison across agencies and also measure trends in performance over time is that both are critical to improving performance over time. Thirdly, if we want to provide incentives to agencies to improve their performance, it is critical to have effective measures of performance.

One thing that the Auditor-General found was that response times are a relevant component of performance measurement, but they are not the only thing to measure. Response times in and of themselves do not measure other aspects of outcomes, such as the quality of services, or the quantity or cost of service delivery. Moreover, they do not cover other aspects of emergency service performance, such as prevention, investigation and education. We need to have, for example, risk-adjusted targets which take into account the fact that different types of events might require different types of response times. We need to take into account the fact that as service quality improves, that

might affect the appropriate time it takes to respond. We need to develop sophisticated measures of service delivery which take into account all these different components.

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

### **South West Institute of TAFE: report 2014**

**Ms TIERNEY** (Western Victoria) — I rise to make a contribution on the South West Institute of TAFE's annual report 2014, which was tabled last sitting week. It is fair to say that it has been a tough few years for South West Institute of TAFE, as it has been for every other TAFE in this state. This sector has operated under duress because the previous government did very little to support it, not only in terms of cuts to funding but also in every other aspect of the operation of our TAFE system.

In 2014 South West TAFE returned a net operating deficit of \$8 million which, as stated on page 9 of the report:

... is largely due to a \$9.3 million reduction in revenue as a result of the decrease in government-funded contributions in 2014.

In 2013 South West TAFE reported a net operating deficit of \$4.36 million, which was due to the Liberal-Nationals coalition government's cuts of \$2.8 million in government-funded contributions that year. This represents a cut of government funding of more than \$11 million over a two-year period, leaving this TAFE in a position where it had no choice but to sack staff, increase fees and of course shut down courses altogether.

On page 21 of the 2013 report it states that South West TAFE received a total of 11 679 enrolments, delivering a total number of 2.98 million student contact hours, the highest in its history. However, at the end of the 2014 calendar year, with a cut of \$9.3 million in government contributions, page 20 of the report documents that the total number of enrolments at South West TAFE had reduced by more than 2000 to 9538, with the number of student contact hours falling by an extraordinary 1.2 million to 1.79 million contact hours. This sharp fall in student contact hours from 2013 to 2014 represents a decrease of over 40 per cent.

As well as denying young people the opportunity to attend TAFE, the previous government's cuts to the TAFE sector resulted in a number of highly valued staff losing their jobs. In 2013 the total number of full-time equivalent staff was just under 260. However, as stated

on page 21 of the report, in 2014 that figure decreased to 210, meaning that 40 staff members lost their jobs in the space of one year.

South West TAFE is the largest provider of vocational education and training services in south-western Victoria, and it plays a critical role in the education and training of young people in the south-west. But it also plays a major role in terms of our older workers and retrenched workers. It has campuses in Warrnambool, Portland and Hamilton, and has a highly skilled, unified staff body. I would argue that it has one of the best staff bodies in the entire TAFE sector.

However, it is clear from the drop in substantial student contact hours and enrolment figures, which are decimating Victoria's TAFE system, that the previous Liberal government has robbed thousands upon thousands of young Victorians in the south-west of an opportunity to improve their lives through education and skill attainment. It is little wonder that youth unemployment levels in the south-west have consistently been above 20 per cent, which is among the worst not just in this state but in this country. That is why Labor promised at the 2014 state election to restore state government funding to TAFE through the Andrews government's \$320 million TAFE Rescue Fund. That is exactly what we are doing, and that is exactly what was demonstrated in the state budget package yesterday.

I am very pleased to be part of an Andrews government that is making sure we restore TAFE to where it should be. We also have a minister who is working day and night to make sure that children, young people and older people get the opportunity they deserve to attain skills and education in the state.

## GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

### Address-in-reply

#### **Debate resumed from 16 April; motion of Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria) for adoption of address-in-reply.**

**Mr ELASMAR** (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise to make my contribution to the debate on the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. I thank His Excellency for his contribution to our state, particularly in his most recent role as Governor of Victoria. I personally wish him and his wife, Mrs Chernov, all the very best for the future. I have met this vice-regal couple on several occasions, and I have always found them to be gracious and charming.

I am proud to be a part of the Andrews Labor government. I thank my constituents in Northern Metropolitan Region for their generous support in re-electing me, together with Minister Mikakos, a fellow Labor representative in Northern Metropolitan Region. I am very much aware of the great honour bestowed on me in representing such a diverse and varied community. My electorate begins in the Melbourne central business district and extends all the way to the outer suburbs of Melbourne's north. It is a huge electorate, with more than 440 000 voters, some of whom are from the most disadvantaged communities in the state.

Notwithstanding the enormity of the task before all of us in this chamber, I will continue to work hard for the electors in my community. I re-read the speech of the previous Victorian Governor, His Excellency Professor David de Kretser, AC, who spoke at the opening of the 57th Parliament in 2010. I would like to quote a few words from his speech:

The government will set new standards on integrity, accountability and transparency. The government will act immediately to establish an independent, broad-based anti-corruption commission, which will work to investigate misconduct and corruption across government.

Freedom of information will be significantly strengthened and made more transparent through the appointment of an independent freedom of information commissioner, whose office will oversee the administration of FOI.

Another major reform will be to advertising standards. The government will end the use of taxpayers funds for self-promoting party-political advertising, introduce clear principles that all government advertising must comply with and establish an independent government advertising review panel to oversee, scrutinise and approve taxpayer-funded advertising to ensure that it accords with those principles.

Those words sound fine and principled. It was supposed to be the dawn of a new era of transparent and accountable government. Instead what we witnessed was under-resourcing of community services on a grand scale, together with grandiose spending on a huge scale — for example, the east-west link project.

My vision for my electorate is that a Labor government will provide greater opportunities for the disadvantaged and a proper education that will lead to real jobs and career paths for our younger generation. That is why the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the cabinet and everyone on this side of the chamber will call Victoria the education state, and we will make sure that that will happen. Our state needs rejuvenation after four years of savage cuts to essential services. The Andrews Labor government is committed to striving to provide a better quality of life for all Victorians.

**Ms TIERNEY** (Western Victoria) — I begin my address-in-reply by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and pay my respects to their elders both past and present.

I will also start by congratulating the President of the Legislative Council, Mr Bruce Atkinson, on again being elected as President of this place. I look forward to working with him.

I would also like to congratulate all members of the house on their election or re-election to the Legislative Council. In particular I congratulate the new members on their inaugural speeches, which right across the political spectrum were insightful and entertaining and of a very high standard. I believe these speeches have set a new benchmark for those who will follow those members into this place.

The outcome of the election, to say the least, has been complex. The new complexion of the Legislative Council is quite unprecedented, with three political parties having their first members of Parliament elected to this place. As a member of the Andrews government I look forward to working with members of all parties both in this chamber and on the various parliamentary committees. At the end of the day I believe if goodwill is demonstrated then we will get through the most trying legislative times. So far that has not occurred, but I am sure it will over the next three and three-quarter years.

I would also like to thank the constituents of Western Victoria Region for voting for me and for electing me to this place for a third time. It is a great honour and privilege to represent them. I have had an opportunity to have been a member of government when I first entered this place, a member of the opposition and now a member of the government again. I will continue to work hard to get the best possible outcomes for my constituents.

I have never found it difficult to find motivation in this role. I have had the pleasure of representing an area of the world that boasts some of the most stunning natural attractions. Western Victoria Region spreads from Melton and parts of Wyndham Vale and Werribee right through to the South Australian border. In the last electoral redistribution Western Victoria Region lost places like Trentham and Daylesford. I extend my best wishes to those constituents whom I no longer represent; I very much enjoyed my time representing those areas. I am sure the Minister for Training and Skills, Mr Herbert, and Ms Symes, along with the

member for Macedon in the Legislative Assembly, will ably represent their interests.

The electoral redistribution provided more physical additions to the electorate of Western Victoria Region, particularly in the north. I have had an opportunity, along with Ms Pulford, the Minister for Agriculture, to meet a number of constituents in the local government offices in that area, as well as community and business leaders. I intend to do so again over the next few weeks.

Western Victoria Region includes major regional cities like Ballarat, Geelong and Warrnambool and major towns such as Portland and Hamilton. We also have Maryborough and Horsham and many mid-size towns as well as small towns. It is a diverse electorate. It has local economies that are interlinked. The region has a number of industries that have faced many challenges in recent times. Whether it be Alcoa, Shell, major car manufacturing, car componentry or the wind farm energy industry, Western Victoria Region has punched above its weight.

But we have had and continue to have challenging times, whether it be under the previous government, which essentially saw no role whatsoever for governments in supporting industry or even in industry policy, or whether it be the situation Mr Purcell and I have highlighted in relation to the renewable energy industry, where the federal government is dragging its feet on the renewable energy target. That is having a major impact on jobs, and those job losses have further impacts in our area, particularly around Portland.

Even given the enormous challenges Western Victoria Region faces, the people of the region are up to the challenge. I say that because I have come to know a whole range of people right across the electorate over the last eight and a bit years, and I represent them with pride because they have not only the capacity to work out that they have enormous resilience — and look at what resilience can do — but also the ability to know how to partner up to face challenges together and work through issues. However, they cannot do that without government support, and that is why I believe they voted so overwhelmingly for an Andrews government. They were very frustrated by the lack of action from the previous government in relation to jobs and the very little action there was in relation to education and training. What action there was was devastating, because it involved just straight cuts, and there was little effort demonstrated in relation to health and transport.

The situation now is one where Western Victoria Region is primed, eager and wanting to work with the

Andrews government to make sure that we have a genuine future in terms of not just industry but also vital, sustainable communities right across the electorate that will take us forward, for ourselves and also for our children and future generations.

I want to pay tribute to a number of organisations, including Deakin University, which has really shone not just as a major regional university but a major university in respect of innovation and the work it is doing in collaboration with business. It has absolutely cornered the market in demonstrating that practical links between industry, community and academia can really work. They can not only work but provide spin-offs for industry and assist in terms of making a profit and a serious contribution to our economy. To those at Deakin or involved in the associated activities there, I thank you for the work you are doing, and I look forward to some really good dialogue and working with you over the next four years and more.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank some other people. Kym Pearl and Luke Humphries are my electorate officers, and I have been very fortunate in having two people with me almost from day one after my election to this place. It has been very important to my constituents to have that consistency in my office, where people are known and the issues are known. My team understands how my office works. I would challenge anyone to find a person who did not feel comfortable or that their issue was not being dealt with in the most appropriate way. That we have operated as a team in every sense has held us in good stead.

On top of that, we have also had some casual employees who have provided backup and stepped in when required. Rosemary, Torin, Marcus, Heidi and Stef have been absolutely fabulous over the last eight years. I also acknowledge all the volunteers, supporters and party members who have gone beyond the call of duty. It is their energy and their strong belief systems that sustain such great political engagement.

Finally, I also acknowledge and thank my immediate and extended family for all their support. It gets a little bit difficult from time to time when you are not home for several days and nights because of the electorate being so large, but my family knows that is part and parcel of who we are as a family unit. Sometimes some of them can actually join me, and that makes life a little bit easier. It also makes it a bit easier in terms of explaining things at home.

Again, I am very pleased to be a member of the Andrews government, and I am extremely pleased that the priorities of this government are jobs, education,

health and transport. The communities I represent in Western Victoria Region are strong, resilient and looking forward to working with an Andrews government that will support them to get going again, a government that cares and a government that wants a fair go for all Victorians, including those in regional and rural areas.

**Mr EIDEH** (Western Metropolitan) — I rise to speak on the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. Firstly, I congratulate the newly elected members of Parliament in this chamber. I welcome them. They look to me to be talented, and they will add a valuable contribution to this house.

Since being given the honour to represent my electorate in 2006, I have experienced a great journey and shared in many experiences, which I will never forget. The most obvious and recent highlight was on 29 November last year when, after the former government's one term in office, the Victorian people recognised that they needed a change in government to ensure that the policies they valued were heard and implemented. Under the government led by the Premier, Daniel Andrews, we have set the wheels in motion to bring these policies to the forefront.

I am very proud to be a part of this government, a government which has shown leadership, tenacity, courage and commitment to getting on with it, which is why within its first 100 days of government it has a growing record which speaks for itself, and there is much, much more to come. All policies have been designed by our team to help make Victoria stronger, fairer and better, and I will list some of those policies.

When in opposition we made it very clear that our main priority was putting people first, and since forming government we have. One of the first priorities for the Premier was to take the necessary action on the ambulance crisis to ensure that ambulance officers received the recognition and respect they deserved for the dedicated work they provide each and every single day to Victorians across the state.

Our government is working with paramedics to reduce response times and ensure that Victorians get to hospital and receive vital treatment sooner. Arriving at a hospital quickly is not where our commitment to better health care ends. We want to make sure that Victorians have access to health care, which is why we have commenced a bed census, conducted by Dr Doug Travis, to identify the missing beds in our hospital system. Preventive health care is a priority for this government, unlike for our predecessors, who cut the free whooping cough vaccines for new parents in

Victoria. The Labor Andrews government has brought them back.

Perhaps one of the most important actions in future health care for terminally ill Victorians and Victorians with life-threatening illness was the Premier's action to take the use of medical cannabis to the Victorian Law Reform Commission. Since then Victoria has joined with the New South Wales government to participate in three medical cannabis clinical trials. The Premier has made a very clear point to Victorians. Families of seriously ill children should not have to choose between breaking the law and watching their child suffer.

Keeping our children safe and Victoria safe is a key priority for the Premier and the Victorian government, which is why it released its *Ice Action Plan* to target the ice epidemic facing Victorians. I am pleased to say that this policy has been committed to by both sides of the Parliament, and this bipartisan support will ensure that we as leaders of the state can do everything we can to support not only the users grappling with the effects of drug addiction but also the family and friends who watch their loved ones spiralling into deeper addiction every day. At a federal level the National Ice Taskforce has been formed, and together we can have the greatest chance of tackling the problem of ice head-on.

One of my greatest moments during my term in representing my constituents in Western Metropolitan Region was the announcement by the Premier of a Royal Commission into Family Violence. It was only last year that he announced it at our state conference, and this year within only months of our victory, on 23 February, the Royal Commission into Family Violence was formally established. This is the very best example of us getting on with it.

Family violence is the state's no. 1 law and order crisis. It is frightening. The royal commission has been tasked with providing recommendations that will influence generational change to prevent and respond to family violence. It is simply inexcusable that family violence is the most pervasive and common form of violence against women in Victoria. It is inexcusable. It is simply inexcusable that it is the leading cause of death and disability in women under 45. It is simply inexcusable that every week, on average, one Australian woman is killed by a current or former partner. It is simply inexcusable that we as a state have failed to intervene, until now.

Reducing the prevalence of family violence is a priority for the Premier, which is why he announced the first ever Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence to ensure that the government does as it has promised —

that is, to reduce the prevalence and raise the awareness of the violence going on behind closed doors in homes across Australia.

On another point, Victorians across the state have confronted the rising cost-of-living pressures. Another unnecessary strain on the weekly family budget is the unfair increase in local council rates, which seem to be increasing each and every year. This is why we have introduced a fair go for ratepayers with the introduction of rate capping in the 2016–17 financial year. It is unfair for ratepayers to have to confront unnecessary rate increases each year, and we are proud to finally put an end to wasteful council spending.

This government has also placed high on the agenda the provision of necessary infrastructure to keep Victoria moving, and the Premier has wasted no time in getting the government's projects underway.

The Melbourne Metro rail project will transform Victoria's rail system. We have committed \$1.5 billion to start work on the project. This project should have been started a few years ago. As Melbourne is Australia's fastest growing city, we need a rail system to grow with it. This rail system will not only ensure that our metro rail system is running more efficiently and carry an extra 20 000 people in peak times but it will offer employment prospects to get Victorians back to work — which is something that this government takes very seriously.

We introduced into the Parliament our \$100 million plan to help create 100 000 jobs for Victorians to ensure that they can continue to provide for their families and not have to worry about what their future career prospects will be, as so many did under the previous government.

The Premier has committed to boosting regional freight capacity with improvements to the Mildura rail line and road bridges within our state to make our freight network faster. And we have ordered 30 new carriages for Melbourne's train network from Ballarat's Alstom factory to keep its manufacturing alive.

We are not just stopping with the Melbourne Metro rail project and regional freight. We are very proud to be removing 50 of the state's most dangerous and congested level crossings, and that has already begun. I was delighted to see that within those 50, 4 are within my electorate, at St Albans, Furlong Road, Melton Highway and Essendon. My constituents have been calling out for the removal of these crossings for years, as too many innocent lives have been taken by these crossings.

In addition to the rail network, last week the Premier announced that the West Gate distributor has progressed to stage 3 of the government's market-led proposal guidelines and the project could be completed by 2020. This highlights how serious we are about our commitment to take 5000 trucks off the West Gate Bridge every day.

In my closing statement I wish to raise the government's commitment to an issue which I value very much — Labor's commitment to education, and in particular TAFE, in Victoria. Under the previous government, Victorians were locked out, and on many occasions they were young people who did not wish to pursue their future education under the tertiary system. Many of these people reside in my electorate, an area made up of working-class families who view TAFE, as I do, as the necessary opportunity to better their skills and training for future career prospects. The previous government closed facilities across the state, slashed funding, cut jobs and, as a result, crushed the hopes and dreams of so many.

Education opens doors. Education gives young people the training they need to better their career prospects and, more importantly, offers Victorian people the vital skills needed to continue to make Victoria a better, more efficient and stronger state. All people need is an opportunity, and I am testament to that, as it feels like only yesterday that I was working sorting mail and later, along with my family, driving interstate with a freight van.

I am proud to be a part of this government which places such a high importance on education and TAFE and, more importantly, offers opportunities. We have saved TAFEs across the state with our \$320 million TAFE Rescue Fund, which is saving campuses on the brink of closure and helping them grow, and I am very proud of this. And this is only the beginning for Victoria's new government.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ordered that address-in-reply be presented to the Governor by the President and members of the house.**

## ADJOURNMENT

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

## Legislative Council regional sitting

**Ms LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and it is about the next regional sitting of Parliament. My request of the Premier is that we hold the next regional sitting of the Victorian Legislative Council in the city of Greater Shepparton. An initiative of the Bracks government in 2001 was to introduce regional sittings of the Victorian Parliament. Since that time five regional sittings have taken place.

The first regional sitting was held on 16 August 2001, when the Legislative Council sat in the city of Ballarat and the Legislative Assembly sat in the city of Greater Bendigo. On 30 October 2002 a regional sitting of the Legislative Council was held in Benalla. On 17 November 2005 the Legislative Council sat in Colac and the Legislative Assembly sat in the city of Greater Geelong. In 2008 both houses sat in Gippsland — the Legislative Council in Lakes Entrance on 15 and 16 October and the Legislative Assembly in Churchill on 15 October. On 6 September 2012, in the last Parliament, the Legislative Council sat in the city of Greater Bendigo and the Legislative Assembly sat in the city of Ballarat — the second time each of those cities has hosted regional sittings.

Regional sittings provide a great asset to the areas chosen for these visits. There is a financial benefit from the sitting due to the hiring of venues, catering and the need for accommodation for members of Parliament and staff. There is an educational and cultural benefit to the region through the access a regional sitting gives to residents and students in the area to experience firsthand a sitting of the Victorian Parliament. The greatest benefit to a community of hosting a regional sitting is the focus on the issues and concerns of the area visited by the entire membership of the Legislative Council or Legislative Assembly.

Shepparton is the fourth largest regional city in Victoria. However, despite Bendigo and Ballarat having had two sittings each, Shepparton has so far been overlooked as a site for a regional sitting. Shepparton and the broader region face a number of challenges that need to be addressed by the government, including the need to expand and redevelop the hospital at Goulburn Valley Health's Shepparton campus, the need for improved and more frequent rail services and the need to progress the Shepparton bypass and the Shepparton CBD revitalisation project. Employment opportunities and jobs growth must be a priority, as Shepparton currently has a youth unemployment rate of 25.3 per cent, which is the highest in Victoria and the third highest in

Australia behind outback South Australia and northern Tasmania. Many other issues face not only Shepparton as a city but also the many communities in the district.

My request of the Premier is to hold the next regional sitting of the Victorian Legislative Council in the city of Greater Shepparton.

### **Caroline Springs railway station**

**Mr MELHEM** (Western Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport. It concerns the progress of the Caroline Springs railway station. The station is to be delivered as part of the \$220 million new stations in growth areas program. It was first committed to by the previous Labor government in 2010. It was then shelved for about three years by the coalition government before being committed to in that government's last budget. The station has long been needed by the people who live in Caroline Springs and surrounding suburbs. The action I seek from the minister is that she provide me with an update on when construction will commence and when it is expected to be completed so I can notify my constituents and respond to some of the queries I have been getting in the last few weeks.

### **Old Coach Road, Narrawong**

**Mr BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) — The matter I raise tonight is for the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water, Lisa Neville. Old Coach Road in Narrawong has been a public road on Crown land for many years, and I believe it was the main road from Portland to Melbourne long ago. It is a road that is regularly used by people going fishing or just enjoying the view. Recently the Glenelg Shire Council closed an 860-metre stretch of the road, citing safety concerns. In 2013 the council proposed a special charge, which the landowners rightly rejected, presumably so that the safety concerns could be rectified. I call on the government to investigate the closing of Old Coach Road as soon as possible and to allocate adequate funding to ensure that the road can be maintained in a safe state so that it can be reopened and used by the public again.

### **Southern Metropolitan Region public housing**

**Ms FITZHERBERT** (Southern Metropolitan) — The adjournment matter I raise tonight is for the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing, and it concerns the effects of pigeon mess on public housing in Southern Metropolitan Region. The house may be aware that this has received a reasonable amount of publicity recently because of what appears to be an

impasse over what is to be done about the mess both in the short term and the long term.

Residents of the two high-rise buildings affected have reported that the windows have turned opaque with excrement and that there is also a considerable amount of mess on the footpaths. There is also a suggestion that this is affecting the health of residents. A tenant has been reported as saying that the department told them it would not be possible to clean up the mess — that it would cost too much money and there is no money to do it. I note that the minister has said he will look into it and fix it, but more recently he has apparently declined to comment on the issue. I know the issue dates back at least a year or so, so it is long past time that this was addressed. The request I am making is that the minister advise what action the department is taking to deal with the mess and what measures will be introduced on a permanent basis to address the issue.

### **Geelong–Warrnambool rail services**

**Mr RAMSAY** (Western Victoria) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Public Transport and concerns the failure of the Andrews government to increase the frequency of the Geelong to Warrnambool rail passenger service in the state budget. V/Line operates three daily passenger trains from Monday to Saturday in each direction on the Warrnambool line from Southern Cross station. Two services operate in each direction on Sundays. The current level of rail passenger services on the Geelong to Warrnambool line, which services Colac, Winchelsea, Birregurra and many other towns in between, is a barrier to the development of these communities and the wider region.

People living in the south-west of the state deserve more frequent rail passenger services to access higher education, jobs and appointments out of town. Additional access to Geelong and Melbourne would help to connect regional communities and encourage more people to move into country areas. Increasing passenger services from three to five in each direction daily will increase accessibility and provide opportunities for employment and access to post-secondary education for many people in this region.

Prior to the 2014 election the coalition committed to increasing passenger services on the Warrnambool line. G21 Geelong Region Alliance chair Elaine Carbines and City of Greater Geelong mayor Darryn Lyons said at the time that all parties needed to match the coalition's promise. Even Libby Coker, the Labor candidate for Polwarth, said the Warrnambool line

needed more services. Regrettably the Andrews government has no plans for improving passenger services in the south-west and no vision to improve job prospects for the unemployed or attract more tourists to the south-west. Earlier this week Colac Otway Shire Council CEO Sue Wilkinson said:

Communities along the Melbourne to Warrnambool rail line require five return services a day to provide greater connectivity and enhance the south-west region as a place to live, work and invest.

Ms Wilkinson also lamented that:

... the Warrnambool rail line is the worst serviced in the state ...

It is clear that improved train services are needed for local residents who commute to work, for the growing number of tourists and students and for those who travel by train for meetings and appointments in either Geelong or Melbourne. My request is for the minister to indicate what the Andrews government is doing to increase rail passenger services on the Warrnambool to Geelong line.

### Sunshine Hospital

**Mr EIDEH** (Western Metropolitan) — I direct my matter to the Minister for Health, the Honourable Jill Hennessey. During the 2014 election period the now Andrews Labor government made some much-needed commitments to the people born in Melbourne's western suburbs. This was of great relief to my constituents, many of whom frequently visited my office to voice their concern over the lack of support they were receiving from the previous government for issues affecting the community. During the election period the now government committed to upgrading the St Albans, Furlong Road and Melton Highway level crossings, which was met with great relief.

The Labor Party, as Victorians and Australians across the country see each time Labor is given the honour to lead, also puts health high on the priority list, and this government has done so by committing to the opening of a dedicated women's and children's centre at Sunshine Hospital. The women's and children's centre will have 237 beds, 39 special care nursery cots, 4 theatres and additional outpatient clinics. Sunshine Hospital has been the first choice for mothers in the west for some time, and this development will ensure that the hospital can continue to offer specialised and dedicated care to patients in the west, which is one of the fastest growing areas of the state. Around 5500 babies were born in Sunshine last year, and in 2025 this number will reach 7500 per year.

This centre will allow for an additional 2000 births per year, and the children's ward will be modelled on Labor's last health legacy, the Royal Children's Hospital, which has changed the lives of so many children undertaking treatment. Those receiving health care from the dedicated staff at Sunshine Hospital will not be the only beneficiaries of this commitment. A total of 2000 jobs will be created during the new centre's construction and 500 jobs will be created in the hospital, which indicates to the people of Victoria that the Andrews government is dedicated to creating employment for Victorians. I ask the Minister for Health when the construction of the women's and children's centre at Sunshine Hospital will commence.

### Craft Victoria

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) — Thank you, President, for your earlier birthday wishes that mark the anniversary of my 21st birthday. I could not be happier than to spend today with everyone in this chamber. I must say that when I had my 21st birthday I could not have imagined I would be celebrating it here.

**Ms Shing** — Where else would you rather be?

**Ms PATTEN** — Nowhere. I thank Ms Shing. I take this opportunity, as part of my adjournment contribution, to talk a little bit about the creativity and innovation I have found in Northern Metropolitan Region. I have met with over 100 different groups — —

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! Who is the member raising her adjournment matter with?

**Ms PATTEN** — The Minister for Creative Industries.

**The PRESIDENT** — Right; it was the minister I wanted to check. We do not have a minister for birthdays.

**Ms PATTEN** — Not yet. I have met with over 100 different groups and individuals from Northern Metropolitan Region, and it has been really interesting to hear the issues they face. I have been inspired by the creative organisations I have met, like La Mama Theatre, the Broadmeadows youth centre, Craft Victoria, Melbourne Chamber Orchestra, Circus Oz and the Abbotsford Convent. One of the tours I took was at the Coburg Junior High School, where I met with the principal and was introduced to a 3D sugar printer, an internal school wiki learning platform and a very strong focus on creative learning. In fact I really wanted to go back to school; I did not want to leave. What I was really enthused by was a meeting I had with

some representatives of Craft Victoria. They proposed to me — —

**Ms Shing** — They proposed to you?

**Ms PATTEN** — They did. They proposed that there be an inclusion of commissioned, consigned and purchased work from Craft Victoria in the parliamentary gift shop to showcase the exceptional talents of Victorian makers in the craft and design sector. My adjournment matter is to ask the Minister for Creative Industries, Martin Foley, to raise with the Presiding Officers the issue of the inclusion of Craft Victoria-consigned and purchased work in the Victorian parliamentary gift shop.

### Supported accommodation

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) — I raise a matter for the minister responsible for community services regarding an email I received from a constituent that tore at my heartstrings. The matter concerns the plight of young people and relatively young people forced to live in aged-care facilities. The email reads as follows:

My friend Kathy is only 54, currently in ...

such and such a nursing home —

in Newport. Kathy has MS and is high care. For the past seven months, she has been totally isolated in a room with only a TV to keep her company. With the help of Elders Rights, we now have a cordless phone for her, carers to take her out, and her kitchen dresser in the room. Seemingly small requests but extremely difficult to achieve, and there is still a long way to go to help this lady get some kind of normality, independence and freedom back into her life. She needs quality of life, not just existence, and this is just not happening.

I cannot begin to imagine how this lady must feel in this particular situation, but she is not the only one. There are even younger people also in that situation. I was quite pleased to see that somebody regards 54 as young, but I am aware of people in their 20s who are in a similar situation and who, due to injury or a debilitating disease, have been forced into living in an aged-care facility. There may well be a situation where a 21-year-old or a 22-year old is living with 90-year-olds and 95-year-olds, and that has an effect on their mental state and on how their recovery progresses.

I know it is nothing new — this has been going on for quite some time — but it is time that as a society, as a government and as a Parliament we do something about it. I ask the minister to investigate the depth of this problem in our aged-care facilities and that, having established the problem, she then set up a task force or

some sort of inquiry to find a solution so that people can live with dignity and honour in a situation that is not like the one I have described.

### Office of the Victorian Government Architect

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and it concerns the state budget. The output summary in budget paper 3 shows that the Office of the Victorian Government Architect will have its funding cut from \$1.8 million to \$1.7 million. That is a 5.6 per cent cut, which is modest, but it comes at a time when the government says it has many major projects, many things to plan and many things to assess, and I would have thought the Victorian state architect has a significant role in those processes. Along with that, I notice the discontinued performance measure 'Formal letters of Office of the Victorian Government Architect advice issued within 10 days following design review', which is replaced with an even more vague 'Average number of business days to issue formal advice'. There is a tampering with measures for unclear reasons and a cut in funding.

Parallel with that, the Victorian state architect has not received a permanent appointment. In saying that, I in no way reflect on Jill Garner, the acting Victorian government architect, who is a co-founder of Garner Davis Architects, a St Kilda-based architecture studio. She has an academic background at RMIT University and Melbourne University, and her firm has won design competitions, so she is eminently qualified for the position. However, given the need for a permanent appointment, I implore the minister to get on with the task of appointing a permanent state architect, because it is now some period of time since there has been a permanent architect, as Geoffrey London resigned last year.

The action I seek is twofold: that the minister take immediate steps to ensure that the state architect's position is appropriately recognised and made permanent — that there be a permanent state architect — and that the minister restore the funding cut that appears to be part of the output summary in budget paper 3. This comes at a time when the government claims it has a large number of construction and planning projects underway that require significant input from the state architect.

**The PRESIDENT** — Order! To clarify, which is the action the member would prefer to pursue tonight?

**Mr DAVIS** — The appropriate recognition of the state architect, demonstrated by appropriate funding

and the appointment that is required. Both go together to ensure that the state architect is in a position to achieve their full potential.

**The PRESIDENT** — I will let it through, but it really is two matters.

### Responses

**Mr HERBERT** (Minister for Training and Skills) — I have written responses to adjournment matters raised by Mr Morris on 18 March, Mr Ramsay on 14 April and Mr Dalidakis on 15 April.

With regard to this evening's adjournment debate, Ms Lovell raised a matter for the attention of the Premier. She wishes to ensure that the next regional sitting of the Legislative Council is in the greater city of Shepparton — —

**Ms Lovell** interjected.

**Mr HERBERT** — The city of Greater Shepparton. It is a tremendous place and the home of GOTAFE.

Mr Melhem raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport seeking an update on the construction schedule for the Caroline Springs railway station.

Mr Bourman asked the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water to investigate the closure of Old Coach Road and fund its reopening.

Ms Fitzherbert raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing regarding pigeon mess on high-rise buildings in St Kilda and South Yarra, seeking that the issue be addressed in both the short and the long term for the benefit of residents.

Mr Ramsay raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport seeking more passenger services on the Geelong to Warrnambool rail line.

Mr Eideh raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health seeking information on the construction schedule of the new women's and children's centre at Sunshine Hospital.

Ms Patten raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Creative Industries seeking that the minister consider the possibility of the Parliament commissioning and consigning work from Craft Victoria for the parliamentary gift shop.

Mr Finn raised a matter for the attention of the minister responsible for community services regarding the inappropriate location of young people in aged-care

centres seeking that she investigate the frequency of occurrence and address the issue with a task force in the future.

Mr Davis raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning seeking the appointment of a permanent state architect and the recognition of the importance of that position with funding.

I will refer all those matters to the appropriate ministers.

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

**House adjourned 6.29 p.m.**

**WRITTEN RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

*Responses have been incorporated in the form supplied to Hansard.*

**Public holidays**

**Question asked by:** Mr Ondarchie  
**Directed to:** Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade  
**Asked on:** 5 May 2015

**RESPONSE:**

Wage costs are a normal part of the base funding for departments. Adjustments are made to funding from time to time to reflect changes in cost structures. The total cost of public holidays varies each year, as holidays in some years fall on weekends, such as Anzac Day this year, when no additional holiday is granted.

I am responsible for the implementation of the Easter Sunday public holiday on behalf of the government and each minister is playing their respective roles in the implementation of our policies upon which we were elected.

Funding required to deliver Labor's election commitment to make the Easter Sunday 2015 a public holiday have been dealt with as part of the budget process, and thus are a matter for the Treasurer and each individual minister in terms of their own departments.

I am therefore not in a position to answer on behalf of other ministers.

**Industry and enterprise innovation**

**Question asked by:** Ms Fitzherbert  
**Directed to:** Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade  
**Asked on:** 5 May 2015

**RESPONSE:**

This budget does not scrap any programs in my portfolio of Small Business, Innovation and Trade within industry and enterprise innovation output in the 2015-16 State Budget.

As I am previously on the record as saying, the Andrews Government is currently reviewing all existing programs, grants and initiatives to ensure that they are in line with government priorities and that they achieve the outcomes they were designed to achieve.

I can reassure the Member that the \$500 million Premier's Jobs and Investment Panel, the \$200 million Future Industries Fund, and the \$500 million Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund will provide funding for programs that we deem to fit within the government's priorities and will achieve the outcomes they were designed to achieve.

