

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 26 May 2010

(Extract from book 7)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

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Minister for Gaming, Minister for Consumer Affairs and Minister Assisting the Premier on Veterans' Affairs	The Hon. A. G. Robinson, MP
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Legislative Assembly committees

Privileges Committee — Mr Carli, Mr Clark, Mr Delahunty, Mr Lupton, Mrs Maddigan, Dr Naphthine, Mr Nardella, Mr Stensholt and Mr Thompson.

Standing Orders Committee — The Speaker, Ms Barker, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Langdon, Mr McIntosh, Mr Nardella and Mrs Powell.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Batchelor, Mr Cameron, Mr Clark, Mr Holding, Mr Lupton, Mr McIntosh and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): Mr D. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Jennings, Mr Lenders and Ms Pennicuik.

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Beattie, Mr Delahunty, Mrs Maddigan and Mr Morris. (*Council*): Mrs Coote, Mr Leane and Ms Mikakos.

Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr Crisp, Mr Lim and Ms Thomson. (*Council*): Mr Atkinson, Mr D. Davis and Mr Tee.

Education and Training Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Dixon, Dr Harkness, Mr Herbert, Mr Howard and Mr Kotsiras. (*Council*): Mr Elasmarr and Mr Hall.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr O'Brien, Mr Scott and Mr Thompson. (*Council*): Ms Broad, Mr P. Davis and Mr Somyurek.

Environment and Natural Resources Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Duncan, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Ingram, Ms Lobato, Mr Pandazopoulos and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): Mr Murphy and Mrs Petrovich.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Kairouz, Mr Noonan, Mr Perera, Mrs Powell and Mrs Shardey. (*Council*): Mr Finn and Mr Scheffer.

House Committee — (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Ms Beattie, Mr Delahunty, Mr Howard, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Scott and Mr K. Smith. (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), Mr Atkinson, Ms Darveniza, Mr Drum, Mr Eideh and Ms Hartland.

Law Reform Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Clark, Mr Donnellan, Mr Foley and Mrs Victoria. (*Council*): Mrs Kronberg and Mr Scheffer.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Hodgett, Mr Langdon, Mr Nardella, Mr Seitz and Mr K. Smith. (*Council*): Mr Elasmarr, Mr Guy and Ms Hartland.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Graley, Mr Noonan, Mr Scott, Mr Stensholt, Dr Sykes and Mr Wells. (*Council*): Mr Dalla-Riva, Ms Huppert, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Rich-Phillips.

Road Safety Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Eren, Mr Langdon, Mr Tilley, Mr Trezise and Mr Weller. (*Council*): Mr Koch and Mr Leane.

Rural and Regional Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Nardella and Mr Northe. (*Council*): Ms Darveniza, Mr Drum, Ms Lovell, Ms Tierney and Mr Vogels.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Burgess, Mr Carli, Mr Jasper and Mr Languiller. (*Council*): Mr Eideh, Mr O'Donohue, Mrs Peulich and Ms Pulford.

Heads of parliamentary departments

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

Council — Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr W. R. Tunnecliffe

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Mr P. Lochert

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

Speaker: The Hon. JENNY LINDELL

Deputy Speaker: Ms A. P. BARKER

Acting Speakers: Ms Beattie, Ms Campbell, Mr Eren, Mrs Fyffe, Ms Green, Dr Harkness, Mr Howard, Mr Ingram, Mr Jasper, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Languiller, Ms Munt, Mr Nardella, Mr Seitz, Mr K. Smith, Dr Sykes, Mr Stensholt and Mr Thompson

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The Hon. J. M. BRUMBY

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:

The Hon. R. J. HULLS

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition:

Mr E. N. BAILLIEU

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition:

The Hon. LOUISE ASHER

Leader of The Nationals:

Mr P. J. RYAN

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Mr P. L. WALSH

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
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Campbell, Ms Christine Mary	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Nardella, Mr Donato Antonio	Melton	ALP
Carli, Mr Carlo Domenico	Brunswick	ALP	Neville, Ms Lisa Mary	Bellarine	ALP
Clark, Mr Robert William	Box Hill	LP	Noonan, Wade Mathew ⁷	Williamstown	ALP
Crisp, Mr Peter Laurence	Mildura	Nats	Northe, Mr Russell John	Morwell	Nats
Crutchfield, Mr Michael Paul	South Barwon	ALP	O'Brien, Mr Michael Anthony	Malvern	LP
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Eren, Mr John Hamdi	Lara	ALP	Powell, Mrs Elizabeth Jeanette	Shepparton	Nats
Foley, Martin Peter ²	Albert Park	ALP	Richardson, Ms Fiona Catherine Alison	Northcote	ALP
Fyffe, Mrs Christine Ann	Evelyn	LP	Robinson, Mr Anthony Gerard	Mitcham	ALP
Graley, Ms Judith Ann	Narre Warren South	ALP	Ryan, Mr Peter Julian	Gippsland South	Nats
Green, Ms Danielle Louise	Yan Yean	ALP	Scott, Mr Robin David	Preston	ALP
Haermeyer, Mr André ³	Kororoit	ALP	Seitz, Mr George	Keilor	ALP
Hardman, Mr Benedict Paul	Seymour	ALP	Shardey, Mrs Helen Jean	Caulfield	LP
Harkness, Dr Alistair Ross	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Mr Kenneth Maurice	Bass	LP
Helper, Mr Jochen	Ripon	ALP	Smith, Mr Ryan	Warrandyte	LP
Hennessy, Ms Jill ⁴	Altona	ALP	Stensholt, Mr Robert Einar	Burwood	ALP
Herbert, Mr Steven Ralph	Eltham	ALP	Sykes, Dr William Everett	Benalla	Nats
Hodgett, Mr David John	Kilsyth	LP	Thompson, Mr Murray Hamilton Ross	Sandringham	LP
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Hudson, Mr Robert John	Bentleigh	ALP	Tilley, Mr William John	Benambra	LP
Hulls, Mr Rob Justin	Niddrie	ALP	Trezise, Mr Ian Douglas	Geelong	ALP
Ingram, Mr Craig	Gippsland East	Ind	Victoria, Mrs Heidi	Bayswater	LP
Jasper, Mr Kenneth Stephen	Murray Valley	Nats	Wakeling, Mr Nicholas	Ferntree Gully	LP
Kairouz, Ms Marlene ⁵	Kororoit	ALP	Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay	Swan Hill	Nats
Kosky, Ms Lynne Janice ⁶	Altona	ALP	Weller, Mr Paul	Rodney	Nats
Kotsiras, Mr Nicholas	Bulleen	LP	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Scoresby	LP
Langdon, Mr Craig Anthony Cuffe	Ivanhoe	ALP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling	Doncaster	LP
Languiller, Mr Telmo Ramon	Derrimut	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

¹ Resigned 6 August 2007

² Elected 15 September 2007

³ Resigned 2 June 2008

⁴ Elected 13 February 2010

⁵ Elected 28 June 2008

⁶ Resigned 18 January 2010

⁷ Elected 15 September 2007

⁸ Resigned 6 August 2007

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Wednesday, 26 May 2010

The SPEAKER (Hon. Jenny Lindell) took the chair at 9.33 a.m. and read the prayer.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of motion: removal

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to advise the house that under standing order 144, notices of motion 31, 108, 109, 151, 191 and 223 to 225 will be removed from the notice paper on the next sitting day. A member who requires the notice standing in his or her name to be continued must advise the Clerk in writing before 6.00 p.m. today.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Rail: Mildura line

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house for the reinstatement of the Mildura–Melbourne passenger train.

The petitioners register their request that the passenger service be suitable for the long distance needs of the aged and disabled who need to travel for medical treatment, for whom travelling by coach or car is not a comfort option, and for whom flying is financially and logistically prohibitive.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria reinstate the passenger train to service the needs of residents in the state's far north who are disadvantaged by distance.

By Mr CRISP (Mildura) (54 signatures).

Electricity: smart meters

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of citizens of the state of Victoria draws to the Legislative Assembly's attention the Brumby government's mismanagement of smart meters, in particular:

the Auditor-General's finding that the project cost has blown out from \$800 million to \$2.25 billion, all of which will be paid for in higher bills;

the Auditor-General's finding that the electricity industry may benefit from smart meters at the expense of the consumers who pay for them;

the unfairness of many consumers and small businesses having to pay for smart meters before they are installed; and

findings by Melbourne University that many families will have to pay around \$300 per annum in higher electricity bills as a result of Labor's smart meters.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly require the Brumby Labor government to immediately freeze the roll out of smart meters across Victoria until it can be independently demonstrated that consumers will not be forced to pay for the Brumby government mistakes in the smart meter project.

By Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) (259 signatures).

Tabled.

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Mildura be considered next day on motion of Mr CRISP (Mildura).

OUTER SUBURBAN/INTERFACE SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Sustainable development of agribusiness in outer suburban Melbourne

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) presented report, together with appendices and transcripts of evidence.

Tabled.

Ordered that report and appendices be printed.

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Pedestrian safety in car parks

Mr EREN (Lara) presented report, together with appendices, minority report and transcripts of evidence.

Tabled.

Ordered that report, appendices and minority report be printed.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Budget estimates 2010–11 (part 1)

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) presented report, together with appendices and transcripts of evidence.

Tabled.

Ordered to be printed.

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SEVERE SUBSTANCE DEPENDENCE TREATMENT BILL

Council's suggested amendments and amendments

Returned from Council with message relating to suggested amendments and amendments.

Ordered to be considered next day.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS**Planning: Mornington Peninsula**

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — Hundreds of Mornington Peninsula residents attended an emotional meeting recently to demand the right to build homes on their own large blocks in the peninsula's green wedge zone. Many of my constituents have bought large land-holdings in the green wedge but now have been told that they cannot build homes on their land; many will lose their life savings. One of my constituents who has 20 hectares in Boneo Road told the meeting that he

faced bankruptcy following a huge devaluation of his land.

The Brumby government must intervene immediately and recognise that there are grey areas in the green wedge planning laws, that a common-sense approach must be taken so that the green wedge can be protected on the Mornington Peninsula, but at the same time ordinary people are not ruined financially by the inflexible application of planning laws.

Schools: Officer

Mr DIXON — On another matter, residents in the Pakenham–Officer growth corridor are disappointed that the member for Gembrook has backflipped in her support of a much-needed government secondary school in the area. Due to the lack of planning by the Brumby government, more than 50 per cent of students of secondary school age in the area are already attending non-government schools. Local primary schools have huge numbers of students, and parents want the certainty now that a government secondary school will be built in the near future.

Liberal members in the area, the member for Bass and Edward O'Donohue, a member for Eastern Victoria Region in the other place, together with the Liberal candidate for Gembrook, Brad Battin, have championed the need for a new government secondary college in the area and were instrumental in the formulation of the coalition's \$20 million commitment to purchase land, and its plan to build a secondary college in Officer in our first term of government.

Syndal South Primary School: Premier's reading challenge

Ms MORAND (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — Education Week was held last week and was a chance for schools and early childhood services to showcase the great work that they are doing in their communities. Events were held right across Victoria that allowed parents and members of the broader community to access local services to see the great programs being run in their local schools and kindergartens.

I enjoyed visiting Syndal South Primary School to help celebrate Education Week by participating in the reading challenge visit by children's author and reading challenge ambassador Dave Metzthen, who spoke to the grades 3 and 4 students about his inspiration for writing and why reading is not just great for learning but is also great fun. The children obviously really enjoyed his visit. More than 200 000 students have

registered in the challenge so far, and they have read more than 800 000 books to date. The Premier's Reading Challenge is in its sixth year and is going from strength to strength.

Essex Heights Primary School: council

Ms MORAND — I also had the opportunity to visit Essex Heights Primary School during Education Week to acknowledge an important contribution by three people to this school's community. Essex Heights's council has been doing a great job for the past few years and council members have included two community members and a representative of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The committee members, Cliff Picton and Warren St Clair, and Judi Hanke from the department have made a significant contribution to this great school through their service on the council; the school also enjoys great leadership from the principal, Chris Cotching. I was very pleased to be able to formally acknowledge that contribution at the school assembly and also to welcome in the new committee.

Wedderburn: community emergency response team

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — I want to raise the challenges facing the Wedderburn community emergency response team (CERT). The Wedderburn CERT team was established in 2005 and was told by Ambulance Victoria at that time that it would probably get 3 to 4 call-outs per month. In the first year they had 120 call-outs. The number of call-outs has steadily increased each year since then, with 216 call-outs in 2009. The Wedderburn CERT call-out rate is equal highest, with Nagambie, of all the CERT teams in Victoria.

The Wedderburn team has had to deal with several fatal drug overdoses, suicides and fatal road accidents; Wedderburn, as everyone knows, is located on the very busy Calder Highway. The challenge for the Wedderburn CERT team is that since the first year, the number of volunteers available to fill the roster has declined to only 10 being available to fill the 24/7 roster. Those 10 have to manage their time around employment and family commitments, which is very challenging for them.

A new recruit to the CERT team is required to travel out of town, usually to Bendigo, for up to six full weekends to train, which is almost impossible for those with families. The short-term need is the delivery of training for new volunteers in Wedderburn; in the longer term the Wedderburn Lions Club has taken up

the challenge to start a campaign to get an ambulance service based in Wedderburn, and I commend the Lions Club for its interest in the welfare of the Wedderburn community.

Alan Leggo

Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) — My father-in-law, Alan Clifford Leggo, had a long-running fight with cancer over 14 years and finally succumbed to his final two-year battle with cancer on Wednesday, 12 May at the Tattersall's Peninsula Palliative Care Unit in Golf Links Road, Frankston.

Born in Warrnambool on 13 December 1939, Alan had very interesting and varied career, including working as a bookie's clerk and a bookmaker, a manager at various Commonwealth Bank branches, including for a while the branch on Norfolk Island. Most recently he was a team leader at Telstra's 000 centre in Windsor, a 15-year placement in which he took enormous pride and showed fierce loyalty. He and his wife, Sharon, also ran a small business — a newsagency — for many years.

Born immediately following the Great Depression and at the commencement of the Second World War, Alan's early and formative years were challenging, to say the least, with his family in a constant struggle. Leaving school at 14 years of age, Alan went to work to earn extra money to help his family make ends meet. This was absolutely typical of Alan, a person who would always make sacrifices throughout his life for the benefit of others. His funeral on Tuesday, 18 May, led by his old Warrnambool school friend, Fr Des Fitzgerald, was a very fitting tribute to a man who brought great pleasure to all around him. I wish to place on record my condolences for the loss of a much-loved husband to Sharon, a dad to Tawny and Andrew, brother to Val and Judy, grandfather to Kirsten, and to the extended family. Alan will be very sadly missed.

Minister for Industry and Trade: performance

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — Once again the Brumby Labor government's lack of openness and accountability is on show, with the Minister for Industry and Trade now refusing to explain to Victorians just what benefits the many grants that have been issued from her department have brought to Victoria.

The minister has had a number of questions on notice posed to her, but they have been largely ignored for more than three months. The only acknowledgement of these questions in that time has been for the minister to

tell me to redirect a portion of them to another minister within the same department. It is accepted that government grants can do much to help businesses to support jobs, to access export markets and to assist with research and development. A comprehensive and well-monitored grants program is supported by the coalition and, I am sure, by the broader community.

However, what is concerning for Victorians in light of Labor's appalling record of cost blow-outs and waste on such things as myki, smart meters and a whole host of other projects is that the government is refusing to account for the millions of dollars of taxpayers money that has been spent by the minister. This reluctance to explain the benefits of these grants comes after a recent Auditor-General report that blasted the Labor government for failing to properly account for whether \$31 billion of taxpayers funds has been spent effectively.

While it is hoped and expected that the recipients of these grants deserve them, Victorians should be entitled to know if their money has been wisely spent and that a measured benefit has been achieved. Victorians have understandably become progressively more and more suspicious of this government's casual use of taxpayers money, and this further reluctance to demonstrate accountability shows the Brumby Labor government cannot be trusted with taxpayers' money.

Diggers and Greeks — The Australian Campaigns in Greece and Crete

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park) — I draw the attention of the house to a range of events that reflect the links between Greece and Victoria and the ways in which our tolerant, multicultural community is building new dimensions to this changing relationship.

The first of these was the Hellenic RSL sub-branch commemoration of the contribution of the Hellenes to the Australian war effort. The Hellenic RSL hosted the launch of a book which deals with the history of the Australian and Greek peoples' unfairly maligned historic struggle in 1941 throughout the subsequent occupation against the invading German armies. This work focuses on the stories of communities and people who have built a strong bond between our two communities. *Diggers and Greeks* by Dr Maria Hill comes well credentialled and brings new insights into the war, its role in the broader conflict of the war against fascism and the links between the Greek and Australian communities. This relationship continues to prosper, as only yesterday the Parliament hosted a delegation from the prefecture of Rethymnon, the scene

of a great Anzac effort and losses, and of Greek support for our troops.

Kastellorizian Association of Victoria: 85th anniversary

Mr FOLEY — On another matter, over the weekend I also attended a celebration by one of our smaller Greek communities, the Kastellorizian Association of Victoria, marking its 85th anniversary of activities in Victoria. I note the work of the outgoing president of the association, Mr Michael Spartels, for his decade of leadership and congratulate the Australian Kastellorizian of the year for 2010, Mr Nicholas Pappas, for his work in the law, the arts, sport and promoting Greek history and culture.

National curriculum: Greek language

Mr FOLEY — I also take this opportunity to support the Brumby government's support for the Greek community language in the national curriculum.

Croydon: Youth Space project

Mr HODGETT (Kilsyth) — I raise the matter of funding for the Croydon Youth Space project, a project to build a youth facility within the Croydon parklands. This will provide opportunities and activities for young people in the local area. The project will not only replace the Town Park skate facility but also broaden the appeal to be more than just a skating and BMX facility and may include a shelter or stage, a half-court for basketball and outdoor gym and fitness equipment.

An application to Sport and Recreation Victoria major facilities grants for funding for a similar sized area was unsuccessful. I understand the council will be submitting an application for funding in the next round of SRV grants, and I call upon the state government to get behind the Croydon Youth Space project and allocate the necessary funding so that the youth facility can be built within the Croydon Parklands. Similar facilities exist on the Geelong foreshore and Cairns esplanade, all of which are multipurpose youth spaces, accessible to all, that blend in well with the surrounding environment. I strongly support the application for funding for this very worthwhile youth facility.

Lilydale and Yarra Valley Netball Association: facilities

Mr HODGETT — I call on the Brumby government to support the Shire of Yarra Ranges in establishing a new regional netball facility to relocate the Lilydale and Yarra Valley Netball Association from

the current site in McDermott Avenue, Mooroolbark. While a few sites have been considered, new netball courts at Pinks Reserve on Liverpool Road, Kilsyth, would be a terrific addition to this sporting precinct, particularly with associated car parking works to improve traffic management and improve access and egress at the site, as well as the fact they would utilise the existing changing room facilities at Pinks Reserve. I have been a strong advocate for a new netball facility, and I will continue to work hard on behalf of the local netball association and clubs to support the hundreds of people playing netball in the area to relocate to a brand new, modern outdoor netball facility.

Shirley Shackleton

Mr HUDSON (Bentleigh) — Last night I went to the launch of Shirley Shackleton's book, *The Circle of Silence — A Personal Testimony Before, During and After Balibo*. The book would probably never have been written if Shirley's husband, Greg, a young journalist, had not been murdered at Balibo in East Timor on 16 October 1975, along with four others — the Balibo Five. This event and the subsequent denial and cover-up by the Indonesian and Australian governments propelled Shirley into a life of activism. In the process Shirley became one of those beacons that shone a light on the suffering of the East Timorese people and advanced the cause of democracy and freedom.

Shirley is determined, feisty and fearless. She once said to me, 'I have only ever sought two things: I want an answer to the question "What happened to my husband?" and I want to see those who murdered my husband brought to justice'. This simple but powerful quest has been a constant burr in the saddle of Indonesian and Australian governments since 1975. It has led to denials, cover-ups and the suppression of official records that are still not available to the families to this day. There have been several investigations, two official inquiries and finally a New South Wales coronial inquiry in 2007 that found the Balibo Five were murdered to stop them exposing Indonesia's invasion of East Timor. Now those responsible must be brought to justice. Without Shirley's courage, along with others, the betrayal at Balibo of our own citizens and the people of East Timor would not have stayed at the forefront of the Australian consciousness. Shirley, you are a true hero. A luta continua — the struggle continues.

Peninsula Link: environmental plan

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — This morning I raise the matter of the manner in which work has finally

commenced on the Frankston bypass. I understand that operations have started despite the absence of an approved environmental plan. The plans are with the Environment Protection Authority but not yet fully assessed. This premature commencement of works is no doubt driven by the government's desperation to see something happening at any cost and to justify its taxpayer-funded self-promotional publications. It has meant that flora and fauna, particularly threatened species, has paid a massive price. An email I received on Monday reads in part:

One report from a wildlife carer has said that possums come out so muddied they are also unrecognisable. Echidnas have been buried alive under the felled trees which are then bulldozed, with the animals still in them ... Pobblebonk reserve is gone, and the frogs with it, and Willowbank reserve almost.

This senseless destruction of our native fauna and the heedless bulldozing of rare and precious flora must stop. I call on the Minister for Roads and Ports and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change to act this morning to stop this environmental vandalism in its tracks and to ensure that no further works are undertaken until an approved management plan is in place and acted upon.

Nepean Highway–Bungower Road, Mornington: traffic cameras

Mr MORRIS — The *Herald Sun* has confirmed this morning what we have long suspected — that drivers are being fined for offences they have not committed. I again call on the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to ensure that every ticket issued at the Bungower Road–Nepean Highway traffic lights is reviewed and the many incorrectly issued penalty notices are revoked.

Nicholas Butler, Alison Dudon and Charles Court

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — In light of Education Week having just been celebrated, I rise this morning to acknowledge the work of three teachers in my electorate who have been teaching for 45 years. This is an incredible achievement in any profession, but as a former teacher I can attest that teaching is not an easy gig and 45 years of teaching is no easy feat and shows huge dedication and commitment. Nicholas Butler from Sunbury College, Alison Dudon from Macedon Primary School and Charles Court from Gisborne Secondary College have each been teaching for 45 years. That is a staggering 135 years of teaching experience between them. That is a lot of preparation, a lot of corrections and a lot of parent-teacher interviews.

Teaching has been described in many ways — from growing humans, to the art of patience, to shaping the generations of the future. It is described as many things but never described as ordinary. Unlike many other professions teachers do not always have the satisfaction of seeing the final results of their endeavours. Students may blossom years after they have finished school and it may be the result of something a teacher said or did many years earlier. Many of us have experienced a teacher who had a profound impact on us.

It takes faith and stamina to continue teaching for so many years. As has also been said of teaching, 'Teaching is the greatest act of optimism'. I congratulate and thank those three extraordinary people for their continued acts of optimism over so many years.

Regional and rural Victoria: blueprint for growth

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) — In February 2009 the Premier and the Minister for Regional and Rural Development spoke about the development of a blueprint for regional Victoria during contributions to debate on the annual statement of government intentions. The Minister for Regional and Rural Development said:

Finally, there is the outline of a blueprint for regional growth, which is going to be one of our top priorities for 2009. The new blueprint is going to drive the next era of regional growth and set out the next generation plan to ensure that our state's regions — every rural community, every country town and every regional centre — is well placed to grow and thrive.

They are all nice words, but as we know, 2009 has come and gone without a blueprint for regional Victoria. We could jump up and down and argue this is yet another broken commitment by the Brumby government, or we could wait with anticipation to see if any plans and/or projects of substance are announced when the blueprint is finally delivered.

From the perspective of the Morwell electorate previous budgets announced in this term of government have been bare, to say the least, as have projects funded through the underspent Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. It is time this government stopped talking and started delivering on behalf of all Victorians, including those residing in the Morwell electorate. One hopes our community might finally see real projects with real benefits being committed to through the long-awaited and much-anticipated blueprint for regional Victoria.

Vic Guarino and Gino Iannazzo

Mr CARLI (Brunswick) — I would like to commend the work done by two tireless community activists in my area, Vic Guarino and Gino Iannazzo, and also the committee of the Moreland Seniors Action Group, a group they started. They are doing terrific work in the Moreland community in terms of raising issues and dealing with senior citizens and with the difficulty that many pensioners have in paying their council rates in particular. Recently they presented to me a petition of 2960 signatures indicating the difficulty older people in Moreland have in paying council rates, which over the last few years have increased at a rate higher than the consumer price index. In the petition they ask the government to increase the pensioner concession rebate for council rates to 50 per cent of the rates. I will make sure I pass a copy of the petition to the relevant minister.

The Moreland Seniors Action Group has been active in more than just the issue around rates. It has been active more generally in issues about community health, where it is supporting the expansion of the community health facility in Coburg and improving services for pensioners in the area, and of course in general issues around the cost of living and concessions and rebates for pensioners. I commend Vic Guarino and Gino Iannazzo and their committee, the Moreland Seniors Action Group, for their terrific work. I am sure they will continue their terrific work in the Moreland area.

Schools: Sandringham electorate

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — I wish to advise the house this morning of the concerns and the rising tide of anger among local Sandringham electorate primary school parents when they consider the educational options and opportunities in the secondary education journey of their children. For over a decade the Bracks and Brumby Labor governments have failed to properly invest in infrastructure in secondary school maintenance and upgrades in the electorate. There are health and safety issues, and on regular occasions the principal of Sandringham College has raised his concern and frustration about what would appear to be on my assessment partisan levels of funding being directed towards marginal seats and the failure to commit to the upgrade of the college, which provides an important educational pathway to over 1300 students.

Rail: Brighton level crossing

Mr THOMPSON — The second issue I wish to draw to the attention of the house is the continuing

disregard by the Brumby government for the interests of motorists in the Sandringham electorate, with the recent decision to permanently close the New Street railway gates. These gates have operated on a functional and effective basis for over 100 years. The consequence of this will be the clogging up of Hampton Street, continuing frustration caused to local shopkeepers through the immobility of their patrons up and down Hampton Street and the danger along Beach Road for right-turning traffic.

Migrants: community acceptance

Mr SCOTT (Preston) — There would be few greater supporters of migration in this house than me. One of the most ridiculous arguments levelled against migration is that it may lead to mass starvation in places such as Australia. Australia is a very large producer of food, as many members in this house would know. By my quick calculations Australia produces food for approximately 100 million-plus individuals around the world. For example, in the production of wheat in the year 2006–07 Australia produced over 20 million tonnes of the world's production of 606 million tonnes.

There are many legitimate debates about the range and make-up of the Australian migration intake, but the possibility of mass starvation in Australia is not one of them. Australia has a very successful agricultural industry, which in fact is one of the leading exporters of agricultural products. It is one of the six largest exporters of grain in the world. Fears of Australian citizens starving due to the level of population growth are ridiculous.

Samir Kairouz

Mr SCOTT — On another matter, I would quickly like to note the contribution of Mr Samir Kairouz, whose funeral I attended recently. Samir was a migrant who came to Australia and helped establish a business, Cedar Meats, which is one of Australia's leading meat exporters. It is a wonderful business that I understand has employed over 10 000 people since the time it was established. Samir Kairouz has made a great migrant contribution to our society.

Tyabb Primary School: parking

Mr BURGESS (Hastings) — I call on the state government to urgently work with the Tyabb Primary School, the school council and parents to develop a solution that ensures safe pick-up and drop-off arrangements for Tyabb Primary School students. Traffic conditions in Jones Road and Mornington-Tyabb Road pose a very serious risk to the

safety of students and their families. This is a problem which has existed for many years and which has recently worsened due to the growth in student numbers to 400.

Tyabb Primary School uses every metre of space available effectively and efficiently but is out of room and landlocked. Current parking arrangements mean that traffic needing to turn into the kiss-and-go zone of the school becomes banked up along the middle of Mornington-Tyabb Road, meaning that through traffic, including large trucks, is forced onto the gravel shoulder to overtake. This is an extremely dangerous situation for motorists passing the school and parents picking up or dropping off their children, as well as for the students themselves. It is only a matter of time before serious injury or death occurs as a result of parents being forced to wait to pick up their children in the middle of a very busy road.

The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council attempted to resolve the situation, and for several months a council officer had meetings with the principal, a local police officer and me. Council conducted a traffic study and formulated a plan to implement a right-hand turn lane, extend the shoulders on Mornington-Peninsula Road and increase the parking spaces available within the tightly confined school property. VicRoads's response to the plan was to say that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was responsible for the problem and would have to fund any works. The department has continued to ignore the problem and the dangers it presents.

Compounding the dangers facing the school is the situation that confronts motorists on Jones Road. During 40 kilometre-an-hour zone times, traffic travelling towards Hastings on Jones Road comes over the crest of a hill from an 80 kilometre-an-hour zone straight into a 40 kilometre-an-hour zone. This situation is contrary to the requirement that school 40 kilometre-an-hour zones should be stepped down from no more than 60 kilometre-an-hour zones, and it puts the students and parents at serious risk.

George Pappas

Ms THOMSON (Footscray) — I rise to congratulate Mr George Pappas on his installation as chancellor of Victoria University (VU). Mr Pappas has an extraordinary CV. Along with his multitude of qualifications and his work with groups such as Boston Consulting Group and in other distinguished occupations, he is also a member of the Western Bulldogs board. He is certainly a great asset to VU. He will make a significant contribution to VU and to the

west, and I want to congratulate him on his appointment.

Victoria University: Community Gateways project

Ms THOMSON — I would also like to congratulate Victoria University on its Community Gateways project. This is an innovative approach to getting information out to people about the kinds of courses they can undertake at any stage in their lives, whether they be early school leavers thinking about taking on a TAFE course, people who have already done a degree and are thinking about postgraduate courses or anyone in between, including migrant communities and those who have been unemployed for significant periods of time. There is a van that goes out to communities that people can go to to seek advice. That van will ultimately also be used for diabetic education. There are also stations set up at Highpoint shopping centre six weeks of the year to provide information to those who are interested in career options and choices that they may need to make. It is a very innovative program.

University of Melbourne: faculty of the VCA and music

Mrs VICTORIA (Bayswater) — The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing last week was the latest example of the Brumby Labor government's contempt for the arts in Victoria. After appointing a temporary minister to replace an incompetent one, it seems the Premier is in favour of passing the buck solely to the federal government. The Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) has been one of the best arts training facilities in the country, and its graduates have won many accolades, including Oscars and even two awards this week at Cannes. The Minister for the Arts has failed Victorians yet again. First it was in public transport, then in smart meters and now it is in refusing to commit the funding required to save this institution's teaching integrity.

Last July Victorians would have seen a photo of the Premier standing on the steps of Parliament House, umbrella in hand, to promote *Mary Poppins*. He claimed the decision to open the show in Melbourne was a 'testament to the strength of Melbourne's reputation'. One year on, the painful truth is that this government is only willing to support the arts in Victoria if someone else does the hard yards.

When will the Brumby Labor government learn that a successful arts industry requires more than just the attendance of a minister or member at a photo

opportunity or an opening night? If Melbourne is to remain the true arts capital of this country, the VCA must be saved. A Liberal-Nationals coalition government, led by the Leader of the Opposition, Ted Baillieu, will commit to making this happen, but my fear is that by 27 November it may be too late. The Premier needs to commit funds now.

Salvation Army: Red Shield Appeal

Mrs VICTORIA — Thousands of volunteers across the state are currently taking to the streets for the annual Red Shield Appeal. The Salvation Army works tirelessly in the community to support so many people in need. I am proud to lace up my sneakers and knock on doors for this most worthy cause. I encourage all Victorians to dig deep and help the Salvos in their efforts.

National Volunteer Week

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — To help celebrate National Volunteer Week, which ran from 10 May to 16 May, I held a thankyou morning tea on 14 May. I was overjoyed that a number of these amazing people, who selflessly give their time to assist people in and around the electorate of Forest Hill, were able to attend. This was a great opportunity for me to honour and acknowledge the contribution volunteers make. It was fantastic to catch up with volunteers from Box Hill Hospital, shops such as the Red Cross Shop in Mahoneys Road, University of the Third Age, Nunawading, and Eastern Volunteers. Each person shared an anecdote about their experience as a volunteer.

It was not surprising that all of these experiences were positive ones; enforcing the benefits volunteering can have not just for the people you help but also for yourself. Volunteering is a terrific way to meet new people, feel connected, learn new skills and of course give something back to the community. I was pleased to be joined on that morning by the Minister for Community Development, Lily D'Ambrosio, who assisted me in presenting acknowledgment awards to those in attendance and shared with us the government's vision for volunteering in Victoria.

Thank you to all of those who attended and to the many other volunteers in my electorate, who through hard work and selflessness are helping those less fortunate and making the already great Forest Hill community even better.

Neighbourhood House Week

Ms MARSHALL — On another matter it was great to be back again at the Avenue neighbourhood house on Friday, 14 May in honour of Neighbourhood House Week, which ran from 10 May to 16 May and is an annual celebration of the role that neighbourhood houses play in strengthening communities. There are 373 neighbourhood houses across Victoria, two of which are located in the electorate of Forest Hill.

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

Beaconhills College: level crossing survey

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) — I wish to raise an issue for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport. I have raised the upgrade of the Lardners Track rail crossing in this house on numerous occasions, and it has been the subject of considerable discussion with the previous minister over the past three years.

Year 7 students from Beaconhills College in Pakenham have taken on this issue as a community project. The enormous concern in our community regarding the safety risk to those using this crossing has prompted their interest. In developing their options they have undertaken extensive research and condensed their findings into four realistic and very practical alternatives for treatment of the rail crossing and adjacent road intersection.

They have met with me on a number of occasions and with the shadow transport minister, Terry Mulder. They are in the house today, and I would like to acknowledge the hard work, commitment and initiative of Josh Watson, Tom Lidgerwood, Mikiela Davis, Hayley Sharman, Jeremy Freemantle and Luke Hall. Whilst their teacher, Jodie Doble, had no practical input into their project, I would like to commend her for supporting and encouraging the students.

I will be forwarding the alternative solutions developed by the students to Minister Pakula today. In thanking the students for their fantastic work, I also call on the minister to do something. He cannot continue to allow the safety of Narracan residents to be constantly compromised at this level crossing.

Geelong electorate: sports facilities

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — On Tuesday, 11 May I was again privileged to have the presence of the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs in my electorate. The day kicked off with a morning tea that I

was delighted to host and where many representatives from sports clubs covering a range of pursuits listened to the minister speak, answered questions and enjoyed an informal chat over a cup of tea. The minister was very well received, and I thank the St Mary's Football Club for the use of its rooms and its hospitality.

From there we proceeded to the Western Oval where the minister announced government funding for the upgrade of change rooms at the ground. This historic ground is home to a number of clubs, including the Geelong West St Peter's Sports Club, the Blue West football club, Geelong West Cricket Club and the Geelong Cycling Club. The upgrade to the club rooms was warmly welcomed, with funding for the total project of \$420 000 not only coming from the Brumby Labor government but also from the City of Greater Geelong, and the Geelong and District Football League.

The minister is a regular visitor to Geelong, and such visits highlight this government's commitment to grassroots sport in Geelong. Only on Sunday I had the pleasure of attending the opening of the newly refurbished Corio Bay rowing clubrooms, along with the federal member for Corio and the state member for South Barwon. Again, there has been a partnership between the federal and state governments and the club. Sport is important to the fabric of a community. Of course Geelong is no exception, and this government will continue to support grassroots sport across Victoria, including regional centres like my electorate of Geelong.

Diabetes: seminars

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — I would like to place on record my congratulations to Cecilia Gomez-Benitez, who organised a series of seminars for Spanish-speaking people on diabetes and how to cope with it, including dietary advice. The diabetes centre from Victoria University held the seminars and provided information to people on matters relating to diabetes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The time for members to make statements has now concluded.

GRIEVANCES

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Gaming: licenses

Mr O'BRIEN (Malvern) — I grieve for the loss suffered by all Victorians as a result of the Brumby government giving away lucrative 10-year gaming entitlements at fire sale prices. I grieve for the golden opportunity that has been lost to this state because we have the most incompetent Minister for Gaming in our history. I grieve for the hospital wards that will never be built, the police officers that will never be hired to patrol our streets, and the new trains that will never be ordered, because the Brumby government has cost taxpayers between \$1 billion and \$2 billion in one of the most costly financial bungles ever visited on the people of Victoria.

Gambling is a sometimes controversial industry, and gaming machines especially so. But, whatever one's views may be on the positives and negatives of the pokies, surely there can be agreement that pokies are a very lucrative business. Victorians lost \$2.7 billion on gaming machines last year, which was a record. Of that amount, over \$1 billion went to the state in the form of taxes. We currently have a dependence rate of somewhere between 13 and 14 per cent on gambling taxes in terms of our total Victorian tax base. That indicates just how important gambling taxes are to balancing the books in Victoria.

Victoria has 27 500 gaming machine entitlements available outside the casino. The Brumby government had an obligation to ensure that in selling those entitlements it protected the interests of the taxpayers, whose assets they ultimately are. The people of Victoria expect the government of the day to act as trustee of their assets and to ensure that their interests are protected. The evidence, as I will detail, is that the government completely failed to do so.

But first let me deal quickly with this pathetic excuse being floated by the Minister for Gaming that it is somehow socially responsible for Victoria to sell off its gaming machine licences at fire sale prices. Measures to deal with problem gambling, such as spin rates, bet limits, the removal of ATMs and precommitment are completely separate from the process by which gaming machine entitlements are sold. It is arrant nonsense to suggest that problem gamblers are helped or that the number of problem gamblers will be reduced if Victorian taxpayers get less for the entitlement than they ought to as a result of a flawed auction system and an incompetent Minister for Gaming. It does not help to have less money available to spend on problem gambling programs, because this government has given away pokies entitlements to the big pokie operators and the big football clubs at a price which is ripping off

Victorian taxpayers. That does not help problem gamblers one little bit.

In April 2008 the Premier announced that his government was ditching Tattersall's and Tabcorp as the gaming machine operators in this state. Since 1992 Tattersall's and Tabcorp had operated between them the 27 500 gaming machines we have in Victoria, and this was done half through pubs and half through registered clubs. I said then and I say now that the Premier had the right to make the decision to change the operator system. He had the right to make this decision, despite a widely held view that the decision was motivated by a hatred of Tattersall's and Tabcorp that goes back to his days as Leader of the Opposition, when he tried to sabotage the floating of Tabcorp by the then Kennett government, which cost Victorian taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars in the process. But the Premier had the right to make this decision. However, the Premier also had a responsibility to get that decision right and ensure that it was in the interests of Victorians, and history shows that Premier Brumby failed to meet that responsibility.

For the issuing of 27 500 lucrative licences to operate the pokies for a decade what could taxpayers have reasonably expected to have received? There is an article in the *Herald Sun* of 11 April 2008 which carries the headline '\$2 billion jackpot'. It says:

Gaming industry analysts predict the 10-year licences for 27 500 machines are worth \$2 billion in up-front fees.

I can also refer to an article in the *Australian Financial Review* of 21 April 2010 entitled 'Victoria does its dough on the pokies'. The article says:

Industry insiders suggest the government could have reaped upwards —

upwards —

of \$3 billion had it retained the duopoly held by Tabcorp and Tatts Group.

That is the benchmark: \$2 billion, \$3 billion. What did the government actually achieve? Not \$3 billion, not \$2 billion, not even \$1 billion — \$981 million was all this rotten government received for selling off Victoria's pokie licences. Nine hundred and eighty-one million dollars! It reminds me of an old fairytale where the poor taxpayers send John and Tony off to market to sell the family cow, and instead they come back with a handful of magic beans; except there are no magic beans in this story and there is no happily ever after, unless your name is Woolworths, Mathieson, Taverner, Collingwood, Carlton or Essendon, in which case you get the happy ending and the rest of us are left to clean

up the mess. Nine hundred and eighty-one million dollars! If you put the licences in the *Trading Post* you would probably have got more for them than that. This is a financial disaster for Victorians, and it is not just the opposition that sees it this way.

I will list a selection of headlines from various press reports following the auction: 'You lose again — pokies chiefs hit jackpot as licences sold cheap' appeared in the *Herald Sun* of 12 May 2010; 'Victoria pokie auction a \$1 billion lemon', the *Australian Financial Review* of 12 May 2010; 'Disappointing result for pokies auction', 'ABC Online' on 11 May; 'Taxpayers short-changed in pokies fire sale', the AAP website on 11 May 2010; 'Pokies auction delivers worst of both worlds', the *Age* of 14 May 2010; 'Pokies licence auction a "farce"', the *Whitehorse Leader* of 19 May 2010; 'Government accused of bungling pokies auction', the 'ABC Stateline' website on 21 May 2010; 'Pokie sale haunts Victorian government', the *Australian Financial Review* of 21 May 2010; 'Brumby blunder', the *Herald Sun* of 12 May 2010; 'Fair game for pokies sale flop', the *Australian Financial Review* of 13 May 2010; 'Pokies pain spreads', the *Herald Sun* of 21 May 2010; 'Woolies pokies bonanza', the *Age* of 21 May 2010; and 'Brumby visits China, UAE on trade mission', the 'ABC News' website on 21 May 2010.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr O'BRIEN — I am delighted that the member for Melton interjected and said, 'That is the wrong one', because it is absolutely the right one. What that clip shows is that the day this disastrous result for Victorian taxpayers was announced the Premier could not be out of the state fast enough. He was on the first stage out of town. He did not want to hang around and cop the responsibility for taxpayers being duded out of \$1 billion or \$2 billion. He was getting out of here as soon as he could, and that is the relevance of that clip. I am delighted that my prop, the member for Melton, just came in right on cue.

Who were the big winners out of all this? The ALH Group, owned by Woolworths and Bruce Mathieson, collected around 35 per cent of the hotel gaming machines, many of them purchased at prices lower than those paid by not-for-profit community clubs like RSL and bowls clubs.

Dr Charles Livingstone wrote in the *Age* of 14 May 2010:

Kerry Packer, after selling Channel 9 to Alan Bond for about a billion dollars and then re-acquiring it later for a fraction of that price, remarked that 'You only get one Alan Bond in

your lifetime'. Victoria's pokies operators must be feeling that way about the Brumby government.

That is the judgement on this government's performance. You are the Alan Bonds of public assets in this state.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I remind the member for Malvern to speak through the Chair.

Mr O'BRIEN — Thank you, Deputy Speaker. The Brumby government is the Alan Bond of flogging off public assets in this state. The big AFL clubs and the big racing clubs got thousands of cheap pokies between them.

Mr Nardella interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I remind the member for Melton that he will have his opportunity to speak at a later time. In the meantime, he should cease interjecting.

Mr O'BRIEN — I refer to an article by Caroline Wilson in the *Age* of 13 May, which says:

The Blues have increased their pokie control from one to four venues, involving at least 260 machines all licensed at the bargain basement price of \$5500 apiece.

The article goes on to say:

Hawthorn, which remained solvent during the 1990s due to profits from its machines at Waverley Gardens, were celebrating after Monday's silent auction, having paid the \$5500 minimum for some 100 machines for which it had considered bidding \$110 000 each.

They paid \$5500 — they were willing to pay \$110 000!

The article continues:

Melbourne Football Club's board allocated chief executive Cameron Schwab \$4 million for 92 machines at the Mathieson-owned Leighoak club, but the Demons ended up paying a total of \$370 000.

They were prepared to pay \$4 million, but they only paid \$370 000.

The article goes on further to say:

Collingwood, St Kilda and Essendon, like Melbourne, all pre-purchased 40 machines apiece at a higher rate of between \$25 000 and \$40 000 before ensuring significant profits by securing all previously held machines for \$5500 each.

Mrs Powell — This government cannot manage money.

Mr O'BRIEN — As the member for Shepparton says, this government cannot manage money.

What has the Brumby government done? It has replaced a Tattersall's-Tabcorp duopoly with a Woolworths-AFL-racing club oligopoly and ripped \$2 billion off taxpayers for the privilege.

How can this have occurred? One reason is the absolute incompetence of the minister, who approved bidding rules that set a reserve price for these lucrative entitlements of just \$5500 for clubs and \$11 000 for hotels. The rules said that these reserve prices were set by reference to 'the lowest price for an entitlement offered in the pre-auction club offer' process. Because the prices offered in the pre-auction process were a function of a club machine's performance, this meant that the reserves for the auction were set by reference to the worst performing machines in the worst performing club in Victoria. Nobody but a complete idiot would set a reserve price for their own house based on the worst house in the worst street in their suburb, yet that is what the Minister for Gaming did in selling off this state's poker machine licences. What an absolute idiot!

One of the consequences is that the average price paid for club entitlements in the pre-auction process was \$42 000 while the average price at the auction for some of the club and all of the pub entitlements was around \$32 000, meaning that the pubs and the big clubs at the auction paid far less on average than did the small clubs that pre-purchased. The little RSLs, the little bowls clubs and the little golf clubs paid far more on average by going through the pre-auction process than did the Woolworths of the world and the big footy clubs, which picked up their entitlements for a song because we had a minister who set a reserve price that was ridiculously low.

I understand that ideologically Labor governments like redistributing wealth; I understand that it is in their DNA. I just had not understood that they wanted to take from the poor taxpayers and the little sporting clubs of this state and give to the big pokies barons, the huge footy clubs and the huge racing clubs. That is the sort of redistribution that this incompetent government has just engaged in.

I have to ask how popular this minister is with his colleagues. If ever there is a reason for a three strikes rule, this is it. He is the minister responsible for Intralot, the minister responsible for liquor licensing, and now the minister responsible for giving away our pokie licences for a bargain basement price. The minister tried to defend this. An article in the Whitehorse *Leader* of 19 May states:

Gaming minister and Mitcham state Labor MP Tony Robinson said the auction ... was about good governance rather than the financial bottom line.

It certainly was not about the financial bottom line.

He went on to say at a press conference on 11 May that 'sometimes good policy costs'. Bad policy also costs: it costs a lot more than good policy. Incompetence costs. In this case, the incompetence of this minister and this government has cost Victorian taxpayers between \$1 billion and \$2 billion. If there is any justice in this world, it will cost this incompetent minister his job, and it will cost this hopeless government the next state election.

Opposition: performance

Ms RICHARDSON (Northcote) — Today I rise to grieve on behalf of all Victorian working families who are not only poorly served by the state opposition day in, day out but also have their future economic prosperity and in fact their very jobs threatened by members opposite. There are two key things that I want to focus on today.

The bottom line is that in their quest for power, members opposite are prepared to say or do anything regardless of the potential cost to Victorian working families or to the state's economy. They have become masters at saying one thing to one group of people and something completely different to somebody else, just flip-flopping around continually. Of course the flip-flops do not stop there; they have to conduct the flip-flops when they are talking about something that they have got spectacularly wrong. They have to go out and try to paint themselves some way forward, because they have just got it spectacularly wrong; in the process they do untold damage.

The most reckless example of this kind of behaviour of those opposite — by the way, we are still waiting for an apology for this behaviour — is their determination to talk Victoria's economy down and into a recession. The member for Scoresby said on 24 April 2009, 'One would say a recession is inevitable'. What sort of clown would go out in the middle of the most severe global financial crisis since the 1930s and talk up a recession?

We all know that business confidence and consumer confidence is of critical importance to a state's economy, or any economy in fact, but our economy had to contend with this severe global financial crisis and then deal with this opportunist running around talking down Victoria's prospects.

In a press release on 5 May 2009 he said:

It's now clear that Labor will not protect jobs as the recession takes hold, even as the Premier and Treasurer continue to deny that Victoria is suffering from recession.

We all know the comments he has made on jobs are just ridiculous, and I will get to that a little later, but here he is talking up Victoria's prospects of a recession.

In June 2009 he said:

It is highly possible that Victoria could be looking at negative growth of over 1 per cent next financial year, or a turnaround of minus 1.5 per cent.

Again this is nowhere near the facts of the matter, but here he is again trying to trip up our economic prosperity.

In December last year he tried to manipulate the figures by suggesting that the Victorian economy was in recession on a population-adjusted basis. Thankfully for all of us, the truth is way different from that which is being proposed by the member for Scoresby. Victoria was not in a recession during the global financial crisis and is not now in recession. In fact Access Economics has praised Victoria's economic performance, saying it has been 'amazingly impressive'. We are the envy of so many economies around Australia and around the world, but those opposite, in spite of the challenges posed by the global financial crisis, still try to drive our economy backwards.

Let us look at what the Leader of the Opposition said about Victoria's economy in May last year:

... the financial situation Victoria finds itself in now is such that we may be threatening the state's AAA rating ...

We all know that Victoria's AAA credit rating throughout the term of the Labor government has been consistently affirmed. In fact it was reaffirmed in the budget this year. On 4 May Standard and Poor's said:

... the budget announced today for the state of Victoria is consistent with the 'AAA' issuer rating and the stable outlook already assigned to the state.

...

Today's budget is consistent with the government's demonstrated fiscal prudence.

Despite independent commentators and observers saying great things about Victoria's economy, members opposite consistently talk the economy down or get the figures spectacularly wrong.

If all that was at risk was a couple of male egos and Liberal pride, I would say, 'Who cares?', but the truth is that what is truly at risk here is Victoria's capacity to weather this economic storm, because that directly affects its capacity to deliver jobs for Victorian working families. The willingness of members opposite to risk Victorian jobs in this way is simply unforgivable.

I have watched leaders around the world at both ends of the political spectrum do something entirely different. They have put the interests of their state, province or country first and have not sought to talk down their economy's future prospects; they have done the exact opposite. That is not the case here in Victoria. The quest of members opposite for power comes at a cost to working families. They are on a quest for power no matter what the cost to the economy.

Members can all get a little blasé about the capacity of the member for Scoresby to get things hopelessly wrong. What was the most common refrain that was used when we talked about the member for Scoresby? It used to be, 'The member for Scoresby' and the reply, 'Who?'. Now it is, 'The member for Scoresby' and, 'Oh dear, what has he stuffed up today?'. Imagine making a career for yourself on the basis of blunder after blunder; it is not a good prospect.

The list is quite extensive. Members will remember him getting the budget surplus wrong twice in one day. On 11 March 2010 he came out and said the midyear surplus was '\$1.2 billion this time last year', yet only 2 hours later he said that the midyear budget surplus was '\$46.2 million this time last year'. He was wrong again. The correct figure, for all to see in black and white in the report, was \$85.9 million.

When he is not getting the budget surplus wrong, he is getting Victoria's growth forecasts wrong. He said on 2 September 2009, 'The government's forecast economic growth rate is 3 per cent for this financial year'. In fact the government's forecast was 0.5 per cent for 2008-09 and 0.25 per cent for 2009-10.

He has got jobs figures spectacularly wrong. He stated in September last year that close to 5000 jobs had been lost since the beginning of the year. In fact employment in Victoria had actually grown by 6200 jobs in 2009. Remember that famous statement, 'Labor governments just simply cannot be trusted when it comes to promises on jobs'? He must feel like a real right Charlie these days. We made a commitment at the last budget that we would deliver 35 000 jobs. We not only delivered on that commitment; we exceeded it — we delivered over 100 000 jobs in this financial year. In fact 92 per cent of all full-time jobs created in Australia were created here in Victoria. He must wake up in the morning and think, 'I really did get that spectacularly wrong'. It is all horribly embarrassing.

If we were only dealing with embarrassment, that would be something to put to one side, but the scale of this incompetence and reckless disregard for Victoria's economic interests is breathtaking at times. For me the

standout example was in September 2009, when panic erupted amongst Members Equity Bank depositors following statements by the member for Scoresby, who claimed — falsely again — that Members Equity was obtaining a government-backed bailout. The bank fought back; it said it was taking action against this ‘irresponsible’ MP. What other course of action could it take in the face of that sort of attack from the member for Scoresby?

On and on it goes — economic irresponsibility, error after error and, all in all, a blatant disregard for the interests of Victorian working families and our state’s economic prospects. Yet opposition members come into this place and go out into the community and would have people believe they are economic masters — that they are the responsible ones when it comes to Victoria’s economy. What a sad, sick joke that presents us with. They are about to try to fool Victorians all over again. Again it will be in their quest for power at any cost, and again it will be all about saying one thing to one group of people and something else to another group, and being what can only be described as prize hypocrites along the way.

The Greens tell anyone who cares to listen that they will hold the balance of power after the next state election. Meanwhile, the coalition tells anyone who cares to listen that the Greens stand in opposition to everything it claims to hold dear. In country Victoria in particular the coalition has beaten the ‘We all need to fear the Greens’ drum repeatedly ever since the Greens political party burst upon the stage. The Greens political party, according to the coalition, threatens farming communities, regional jobs, the economy and future prospects. This is what the coalition claims, yet we all know that success for the Greens in lower house seats in Victoria can come only via Liberal Party preferences. At the last state election the Greens split their how-to-vote tickets to the benefit of the Liberals in 23 seats across Victoria, including in the state seat of Hawthorn. In exchange the Liberals gave their preferences in four seats in the inner city. These are two political parties from the opposite ends of the political spectrum — or so they like to claim — that are about to jump into bed together all over again.

Sometimes political parties are led by leaders who will do whatever it takes to win power for themselves, whatever the cost to their organisations or the public at large. Right now we see this in both of these political parties. The member for Hawthorn and the Greens member for Northern Metropolitan Region in the Council are very similar in that regard — they are peas in a pod. But that is not my key concern. My key concern is the dishonesty and the sheer hypocrisy in all

of this. It all has a touch of the Tony Abbotts. We have Phoney Tony on the one hand and Truthless Ted, here in Victoria, on the other. These parties will both go out and rough each other up on the policy front.

However, I have noticed in recent times that the Greens have been studiously reluctant to say anything bad about the Liberals, and have at times even praised the Liberals on various positions they have taken. Of course when it comes to preferences the differences which they claim to have, to their supporters in particular, all evaporate and a preference deal is done. It is such a shame for both of those political parties that how-to-vote cards have to be lodged one week out from the state election! At the last state election this issue was brought to the forefront, and I have no doubt that it will be brought to the forefront again.

Let us look at the recent statements by the Liberal member for Northern Metropolitan Region in the Legislative Council in last week’s *Melbourne Times*. In response to the Greens saying it would be great for Labor and the Greens to be working together in government et cetera, he said that several Liberal branches are considering reversing the preferences given to the Greens. He wrote an email to his supporters saying that the Greens were considering a coalition government with Labor and that it was, ‘something for you to think about’. He also said:

Never before has it been put on the record by a senior Green that they want to go into a coalition, a power sharing, or whatever you want to call it.

Then the Greens went on to say that they were planning to knock off the Leader of the Opposition in Hawthorn — and on and on it goes. We had the Liberal member for Northern Metropolitan Region saying in mock shock and horror, ‘We cannot possibly consider doing a deal with these people’, and even receiving the headline ‘Liberals could look at Labor preferences’. We all know it is just a big scam; we all know that you will give your preferences in exchange for something from the Greens and then the Greens will deny that the deal was ever done. Meanwhile you will run around across the state presenting yourselves — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I remind the member for Northcote to speak through the Chair.

Ms RICHARDSON — Then they will run around the state saying, ‘Heaven help us if these greenies are put in charge’.

I say, ‘Enough is enough!’. To the Liberals in particular, I say: if you want to present yourselves as economically responsible managers, you should start by

being honest with your supporters, honest with the business community and honest with all Victorians across the state: stop the flip-flops, stop the dishonesty and be fair dinkum about what you stand for, because that is what Victorians deserve from the opposition parties, but clearly that is not what they are getting today from members of the coalition.

Regional and rural Victoria: parliamentary committee inquiries

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — I grieve today for the hardworking people of rural Victoria who are being treated as second-class citizens by the city-centric Brumby government: not only that, but the Brumby government goes to extreme lengths to cover up the ever-widening social disadvantage gap between rural Victorians and their metropolitan counterparts. Examples of these cover-ups include efforts by various ministers over the past years at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) post-budget interviews to hide the truth — for example, the concealment of the appallingly low year 12 retention rate of country students of 67 per cent compared with the state average of 88 per cent.

We have also had efforts to hide the very high rates of death on country roads compared with deaths on city roads; there were many other attempted cover-ups by the ministers when they appeared before the PAEC.

We have also had the Brumby government attempting to frustrate the parliamentary inquiry by the Rural and Regional Committee into the nature and extent of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria, by not funding that inquiry and giving the committee another inquiry so as to restrict the time and resources available.

There has also been a refusal by the Brumby government to implement PAEC recommendations to separately document, in budget papers, the funding of projects specifically in rural Victoria — that is, outside Melbourne and outside the provincial cities. The Brumby government claims that it is too difficult but it is just wanting to hide the gross underspend in rural Victoria. It is interesting to note that during the inquiries into the nature and extent of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria, a Labor member for Northern Victoria Region in the other place, Kaye Darveniza, was able to reel off area-specific funding grants according to each location.

Regional and rural Victoria: government performance

Dr SYKES — I now refer to and grieve for the Brumby government's actions and inactions which have exacerbated the effects of the past 12 tough years and the ongoing battle for survival by small country communities. Some include the construction of the north-south pipeline to steal water from the dry north to meet Melbourne's water requirements which can be met by other means — —

Mr Nardella — Plug the pipe! Go on!

Dr SYKES — In response to the prompt from the member for Melton, I again renew my call to the Brumby government to plug the pipe.

Another example is the Brumby government's failure to stand up to Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard's outrageous changes to eligibility criteria for the independent youth allowance, thus making it harder for young country people to attain tertiary education. Also the Brumby government has overseen and driven major cutbacks to the northern Victorian irrigation district without addressing the massive social and economic impact on local communities.

The Brumby government has failed to adequately fund local government, especially small rural shires such as Alpine, Mansfield, Murrindindi and Strathbogie. To rub salt into the wound, the Brumby government has continued to shift costs to local government, with a recent example being the cost of identifying, setting up and maintaining neighbourhood safer places.

In the context of this broader community issue I wish to highlight the situation in Benalla, the town which I have been proud to call home since 1975. Benalla is a great place to call home; however, it does have a serious social disadvantage problem and the viability of Benalla Rural City Council remains a constant challenge and seriously impedes its ability to address the deteriorating social disadvantage situation.

The key issues, as I have said, are social disadvantage and pressure on the viability of the local council. This situation has arisen due to government policies over a number of years associated with or causing the withdrawal of regional management of state agencies such as the SEC (State Electricity Commission), Telstra and the regional veterinary laboratory, and also the increase in social housing.

Linked to that is the influx of people with complex needs who are unconnected to the local community, who often have a high turnover rate or who are

characterised by short-term stays. There has also been a lack of adequate support services and poor communication between those service agencies. Over 12 tough years we have also had natural disasters and fluctuating commodity prices. We have had cost-shifting by the various governments: from state and federal to local government.

There has been inadequate income from state and federal government, forcing significant municipal rate increases. The seriousness of the situation was highlighted to the Rural and Regional Committee when it visited Benalla in April to undertake public hearings for its inquiry into the nature and extent of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria. The impact of the 12 tough years, in particular, was highlighted by Ivan Lister, outreach worker, who — without putting too fine a point on it — explained that the physical and mental health of many rural Victorian families is appalling.

At the same hearings the impact of overloading local government and non-government support agencies was highlighted in Margot Sherwill and Janet Gill-Kirkman's presentation. There are serious behavioural and discipline problems in Benalla's government schools, which is leading to many families choosing to remove their children from the state school system and place them in independent schools in Benalla and neighbouring Shepparton and Wangaratta. A chat with agencies such as the Salvation Army, the Benalla VicRelief Foodbank and the St Vincent de Paul Society will quickly provide an insight into growing problems associated with poor parenting, drug and alcohol abuse, and domestic violence.

There are solutions to this situation. We need to increase the wealth generation capacity of the Benalla community. If there was to be funding by the state or federal government of the Benalla west drain at a cost of about \$4 million, 1200 new homes could be built, thereby creating in excess of 200 jobs and encouraging people to come along and generate wealth. To do that we need additional industry in the area to create jobs for around 300 people. If we get the houses, we will get the industry, we will get wealth creators, and Benalla will get back on its feet.

We also need a decrease in demand for our support services. The government needs to address the issue of reducing the number of people with complex needs who are being directed to Benalla and to address the issue of reducing the churn rate of social housing tenants. The government also needs to address the need for increased coordination and targeting of our support services. We need to maintain and enhance the outreach

services provided for farming families, but we also need that form of service extended to people living in Benalla so that the people in need, whether they be in private housing or public housing, can be assisted to get to mental health services, financial counselling and other support services they need.

We need the government to support local initiatives such as the Tomorrow: Today Foundation's focus on education as the long-term solution. We need support for crisis accommodation for our young homeless, and we need further support for Central Access's transition to employment program for people with chequered employment histories. We need to cease cost shifting between the state and federal governments and an increase in annual funding for basic infrastructure, especially roads and bridges.

Whilst these and other solutions have been identified, there has been very little progress since the seriousness of the situation was reported some years ago in the Vinson report *Dropping Off the Edge*. The Tomorrow: Today Foundation has taken the initiative and has projects in the pipeline to improve the stimulation and education of young people, starting with the 0–3 age group, and also the year 9s. That said, the Tomorrow: Today Foundation has spent a lot of time fundraising, and as directors of the Potter Foundation said during a recent visit to Benalla, we have a major long-term project which requires significant long-term commitment from all three levels of government. Disappointingly state and federal government contributions at this stage can be best described as modest.

There is movement on the Benalla education regeneration project, which has been ably led by Margot Sherwill, but we need the Brumby government to immediately commit funding in the order of \$20 million so that our problem can be addressed in the longer term by having in place a regeneration project. Of course the model that is chosen must be the model that is supported by the local community.

As I have said, if both layers of government were to provide the additional \$4 million to complete the Benalla West drain upgrade, that would enable the construction of 1200 houses. There is a need to support two to three industries to create employment opportunities for 300 people, and we also need support for another learning institution and community institution — that is, a new library, one for which we have been waiting for over 40 years. We need additional funding to have in place so that our sense of community can be enhanced by going to our community library and working with each other.

Another here and now issue that we need government support for is a new or upgraded skate park. Young people in the area, particularly those led by Zac Connell and Cam Pianta, an international BMX bike rider, have made a strong commitment through skate and jam projects and other projects undertaken in conjunction with year 12 students from Benalla Secondary College to raise money and raise awareness for a skate park upgrade. We need funding of \$200 000 or \$300 000 from the state government to make that a reality.

In addition to these longer-term propositions that I have mentioned, we also need immediate action from the Brumby government to show leadership and to better define the high-risk families in Benalla and to adjust social housing policy to ensure that the needs of the people coming to Benalla can be met. We need to correct the current imbalance between the large number of people with complex needs who are coming to Benalla and inadequate and poor coordination in servicing their needs.

I am making this call on behalf of the full spectrum of the people of Benalla. Ordinary citizens in the streets, people from private housing and from public housing, community leaders and a number of local councillors are expressing significant concern that we need to address this issue. However, to address it we must have significant help from the state and federal governments. Rather than the rhetoric we have heard in times gone by, we need action. We do not need another plan. The poor year 12 retention rates in country Victoria have been flagged for a long time. This government has ignored and sought to hide that reality, but what do we have after 11 years of the Brumby government?

There is a proposal to release a plan to do something about it in the future. Let us have action, not just a plan. There is a similar situation with the blueprint for regional development that is going to be announced in June. It will be another plan. But we want to know if there are going to be serious dollars on the table and whether those dollars are going to be spent, or whether we will have a repeat of the performance by the Minister for Regional and Rural Development, where she puts up the plan to spend \$611 million but at the end of the term when that money should have been spent there is an underspend of about \$54 million? There is a similar underspend with the Provincial Victoria Growth Fund.

When this issue was raised with the minister her answer was that they were aspirational targets. We do not want aspirational targets; we want targets that are set high and are met. Country Victoria does not want the crumbs off the table from the \$45 billion that comes into the

coffers of this state government, much of which is spent in the city area. We want a reasonable proportion — a fair share — so that the social disadvantage that I have touched on in my contribution is addressed.

Before closing, although my grievance has primarily focused on Benalla, there are many communities in the electorate of Benalla and throughout country Victoria that have similar issues. In my electorate the Alpine shire has battled with the cessation of the tobacco industry and the consequent reduction of \$30 million of income and three megafires in the last six years. People in that shire are under the pump financially, but they battle on. That area now needs immediate assistance in meeting the increasing operating costs of Alpine Health services and to put in place an aged-care facility to cope with the ageing population in Bright.

Murrindindi shire has been impacted enormously by the bushfires. Whilst money has come in, which is much appreciated, that money and commitment needs to last for a decade or more to see Murrindindi turn around. Strathbogie shire continues to be under enormous pressure, with a \$60 million maintenance black hole, no public hospital but many public patients. Mansfield shire also has a major problem with the funding of roads and bridges.

In conclusion I grieve for the people of rural Victoria who are being treated as second-class citizens, and I grieve because the Brumby government seeks to hide that. I call on the Brumby government to live up to its claim to govern for all Victorians, and I will do my bit to make sure it does.

Opposition: performance

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — Today I grieve for the people of Victoria who are faced with an opposition that hates public housing and hates public housing tenants. Opposition members are real estate agents when they are in government. Their mantra is ‘Sell! Sell! Sell!’. That is all they know how to do. In the seven long, dark years of the Kennett government when people in Victoria were stepped upon day after day, the opposition’s policy on public housing was to sell housing, and even now it is recruiting people to keep this policy going. The opposition is going to recruit would-be politicians to become the new real estate salespeople through the preselection of their candidates.

In Ballarat West the opposition has preselected a bloke called Craig Coltman, who proudly calls himself a professional fly fisherman. Although he is a young bloke, he has retired. How did he get there? How did he retire? His family worked hard — decade after decade,

generation after generation — to build up Coltman Mitre 10, and they did this with their blood, sweat and tears. Craig Coltman inherited Coltman Mitre 10 in Ballarat, and within two years he flogged it off. That is what the Liberals know how to do — they become the real estate agents of Victoria and sell off any of the assets of Victorians — and this bloke wants to do the same thing if he ever gets elected in Ballarat West, which he will not be.

The Liberals have no policies on public housing. Their only policy is to get a hold of it and then to flog it off — to sell off the assets of the people of Victoria. They had a policy at the last state election. What was it? It was a measly \$5 million for public housing. That would not buy you a block of units in Victoria, yet that was their policy — because their real policy was to flog off any public housing they could get their hands on.

The Liberals are solid on social housing, because they have no commitment to it in Victoria. They have cried, and they now cry, crocodile tears when they talk about social housing, about how it is terrible that there is not enough social housing and about public housing not being built, but when they are in office they become the real estate agents of Victoria. All they do is flog off public housing willy-nilly for the lowest price, for prices that are just outrageous, and I will go through that shortly. The crocodile tears keep on flowing over housing affordability. When you have leaders on the other side of the house who are just real estate agents, there is an absolute lack of leadership on public housing.

In their seven long, dark years they ignored vulnerable Victorians. In their term of government all the Liberals did was take away the assets of Victorians and make it harder for Victorians to get public housing. The public housing waiting list blew out to 53 000 people or families. The Liberals did not care about public housing tenants or public housing waiting lists; they let it blow out to that massive figure. We have got it down to 39 000, which compares favourably to the 53 000.

The state Liberals' federal counterparts were no better. The \$1 billion they ripped out of public housing would have built about 6000 extra houses in Victoria. Those units could have housed 6000 extra families when John Howard was in office in Canberra, but all they did was rip money out of public housing. They could have done much better. Compare that to the building by both the Brumby and Rudd Labor governments of 6800 public housing units over the next couple of years.

The worst part about this is that the dog whistle is out there, because the state Liberals have learnt the lessons

of John Howard, Peter Reith and the rest of the Liberal cronies up in Canberra. The dog whistle is when you say something but really you mean something else; the opposition perfected it from lessons by the Howard government. The opposition is trawling the depths of the bottom of the barrel with its vocal opposition to public housing projects. The Liberals are creating division within the community. They are going out there and trying to scare people about public housing tenants, building new public housing units and buying public housing houses, and it is just wrong.

In 2009 the Honourable Andrea Coote, a member for Southern Metropolitan Region in the Council, misled the community in regard to 999 Nepean Highway, Moorabbin, when she said a planning permit was granted by the Minister for Planning. What were the facts? She was trying to sheet home to us that this was no good, but the fact is that the local council, by 7 votes to 2, granted the planning permit. The Liberals go out and spread these mistruths so as to attack public housing.

The honourable member for Doncaster opposed the Tram Road development. She went out and claimed there was no support from Manningham City Council for an approval for some public housing. The reality is that Manningham City Council approved the development in May 2009. She went further and quietly amended the page on her website that contained those untruths.

As the shadow Minister for Community Services, she is supposed to care about poor and vulnerable people in Victoria, yet she goes out there and attacks us for providing and building public housing in her electorate. Those are the type of crocodile tears shed and the type of non-commitment that the Liberals have in regard to public housing and vulnerable people here in Victoria. She should be ashamed of herself; she simply abandons the people she is supposed to look after.

Inga Peulich, a member for South Eastern Metropolitan Region in the Council, is a crocodile tears social reformer extraordinaire. In June and July 2009 she distributed and tabled petitions in which she alleged about the commonwealth's Nation Building investments in social housing that:

... Mr Brumby and Mr Rudd are using the economic downturn to mask the racket of stacking voters sympathetic to the Labor Party into marginal electorates to prop up local Labor MPs ...

Mrs Peulich hates public housing tenants and having public housing built in her electorate. Here is a dog whistler saying it is all about stacking people into

marginal electorates. It is actually all about trying to provide public housing and opportunities for vulnerable people in Victoria, Inga Peulich is out there with the dog whistle. She hates public housing tenants and anybody who is poor because she has got out of the gutter and done it all herself. She is out there attacking the most vulnerable people in Victoria. Like other members of the Liberal Party, she does not care about vulnerable people in Victoria. She hates disadvantaged and vulnerable Victorians and has no redeeming social conscience whatsoever.

In government the Liberals and The Nationals are dangerous; they are the most dangerous people that you can ever get in government in Victoria, especially for the most vulnerable and poor within society. Their record absolutely demonstrates that their actions speak louder than their words. They are more interested in selling off the assets of the Victorian people than looking after them. Their mantra is, 'Sell, sell, sell. Put up the real estate sign. Let us flog it off. We do not want to manage it; we do not want to look after poor people. We do not want to look after the disadvantaged or the vulnerable'. 'Sell, sell, sell' is the mantra of the Liberal Party and The Nationals.

What did those parties do when they were in government? They sold over 320 schools, they sold the railway lines, they sold 12 country hospitals, they closed 6 country railway lines, they sold public housing, they sold off the liquefied petroleum gas company, they sold the State Electricity Commission of Victoria, they sold the electricity generators, they sold the lines and the poles and the electricity infrastructure, they sold the Gas and Fuel Corporation of Victoria, they sold the buses and they sold the trams. It was sell, sell, sell to the lowest bidder they could get. They were lining the pockets of their mates in the real estate industry. The Liberals and The Nationals look after their mates who are the spivs and the carpetbaggers. The opposition really is appalling. That is the mantra of the opposition, and that is the Kennett legacy. The Labor government builds the assets for the people of Victoria and the mantra of the opposition is to sell them off, blow out the waiting list and sell public house after public house for a pittance.

Let me give some examples. The Latrobe Valley is one of the most disadvantaged areas in Victoria. What did opposition members do when they were in government? They went out and sold every public house they could get their hands on. What did they get for the houses? They got \$12 000 to \$16 000 for each of the public houses. Could you buy one of those houses now for \$12 000? Of course not. The private landlords are now sitting on capital assets and on capital

gains of over \$200 000, and yet that is the commitment of the opposition parties.

In Braybrook and Sunshine, the Liberal Party real estate politicians — that is all they are — sold houses for \$12 000 to \$16 000. Could you buy one now for \$200 000? No. Could you buy one for \$250 000? No. Could you buy one for \$300 000? No. What about \$350 000 out there in Braybrook and Sunshine? No, you cannot buy a house for that amount of money, you have got to spend around \$400 000. The morons on the other side are just the real estate agents of Victoria when they are in government.

Compare that record with what this government is doing in building public housing at a record level. We are working with the Rudd Labor government to look after the poor and vulnerable people here in Victoria. We are working to implement the national rental affordability scheme. Our record investment will be in more than 6800 new units over the next two years. There was a \$500 million investment in 2007 plus the additional \$1.167 billion economic stimulus package implemented by the Rudd Labor government. These are real projects to assist vulnerable, poor and disadvantaged people in our society.

Only this morning the Minister for Housing, along with the member for Burwood, turned the first sod on the \$140 million Ashwood Chadstone Gateway project, which will deliver 270 new homes in Ashwood-Chadstone and a further 250 homes in other sites across Melbourne. Earlier this month the Minister for Housing, along with the Minister for Education, who is also the member for Melbourne, announced the redevelopment of the Carlton housing estate, a \$260 million project which will create around 250 social housing units and around 550 private units. Young Street, Bacchus Marsh, is in my electorate and is a great development with 23 units for older persons. Construction on this project is coming to an end, and I look forward to being with the residents, who have been relocated while it is being built, when they come back to brand-new houses.

The Liberal Party and The Nationals cannot be trusted; the risk to the Victorian community is too high. Their sell, sell, sell mantra is wrong and will hurt the poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable people in Victoria. I grieve for the people of Victoria and for the housing policy of the Liberal Party and The Nationals.

East Gippsland electorate: government performance

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — Today I grieve for my constituents in Gippsland East and in regional Victoria. I will try to keep my comments to more recent history — the current decade — rather than to previous history.

I grieve about the inaction and inability of this government to solve ongoing issues, many of which are of its own making. You would think many of these issues would be able to be solved simply, although some may require increased resources. I use as a case in point wild dog management, which is an issue I have raised many times in this Parliament. I know many members from regional areas have similar problems. There are real issues on the ground with wild dog management. Wild dogs cause incredible damage on farms across my area. Anyone who has spoken to a farmer who has had sheep or calves killed or attacked by wild dogs knows of its heart-wrenching impact on those farmers.

The issue I would like to raise is to ask why the government has made it harder for the doggers to do their job and why it has lost the support of many in the community who are concerned about the future of wild dog management. One of the issues that has arisen recently is the changes in the trap sizes. Trap sizes have been reduced, apparently because of animal welfare concerns. This has meant that the efficient traps the doggers were using are no longer available.

The bigger issue going forward is that the government has passed legislation requiring 24-hour trap checks of each trap that is set. An exception that allows doggers to have traps set for longer periods has been put in place until next year, but there is no guarantee the 24-hour trap checks will not be required. What this means on the ground is that when the doggers go round to check their traps on a Friday they will be required to put a covering plate over them so the traps will not be able to be used at the weekend. On Monday they will have to go back out and uncover the traps. Any dog that wanders up that trap line will see this man-made object sitting over the top of the trap which will highlight the fact that it is somewhere they really do not want to go too near in the future. In effect it will mean the traps will only work 50 per cent of the time.

Let me put another situation to the house. If, for training purposes or for some other reason, a dogger needs to take off a day during the week — it might be a Tuesday — it would mean they could not operate the traps on a Monday. On Wednesday they would go out

and uncover the traps, and they would have to go back out on Friday and cover them up again. That week the traps would operate for only a couple of days, which would make it almost impossible for wild dog managers to do their job. The department is sending all the signals that it will no longer be operating trappers and is moving to baiting. Everyone you talk to understands that wild dog management requires a range of strategies, including baiting, electric fences, well-trained and adequately resourced doggers and a real commitment from government to push the dogs back out into the wild country — whether that be by aerial baiting or strategic high-level baiting — and to really put resources into wild dog management.

Farmers and communities are getting really concerned about the way the government is not addressing the issues at hand. The minister comes out and talks to the farmers, and they get very angry with him. They get angry because they are very concerned about their ability to farm in many areas. This is an issue right across my electorate and I know in the electorates of other members of this place.

Another case in point is the issue of firewood. I think this is now the third winter since we have seen the changes that have pushed firewood management from DSE (Department of Sustainability and Environment) to VicForests. What that has meant is that small-volume firewood contractors, commercial firewood cutters and even some of the larger professional operators have not had access to firewood coupes. The stupidity of this — and it is a stupid policy — is that after a coupe has been formed, after an area has been logged and waste product is sitting on the ground VicForests comes through to regenerate that and burn the coupe. The timber that is laying on the ground in many of those areas is burnt. Firewood contractors are not allowed to go in and harvest the wood to sell to people who do not have access to firewood. As a policy, this is just crazy.

There has been some inaction between government departments — between VicForests and DSE. Neither wants to take responsibility for this small-volume commercial cutting of firewood. We need to change these policies so that again those contractors can have access to the bush and access to the timber at a sensible price so they can take that waste product and use it for those people who do not have firewood. Pensioners and low-income people right across my electorate this year will again be struggling to find someone to supply them firewood because of a stupid policy of this government.

I also raise an issue that has generated a fair amount of discussion in the media — that is, paramedic and ambulance service coverage. I am always reticent to

appear to be ambulance chasing — and I am fairly disappointed by some of the media coverage from my area — but this is an issue I have been interested in. I have worked hard to try to find local solutions to the lack of paramedic and MICA (mobile intensive care ambulance) paramedic coverage across our region. I want to state that I fully back the dedicated paramedics, the MICA paramedics and the ambulance community officers who work across my region. They provide a very highly skilled, highly professional service.

Some of these issues have come out of media coverage, and I know that the ambulance service is doing a review of its services at the moment, looking at needs and where the units should be placed, but we have some particular issues in East Gippsland. Hayfield is one, and there are a number of places in Gippsland where there have been some fairly tragic outcomes. We need to make sure that we have got adequate resources to meet those needs.

I was involved in a lot of discussion with paramedics and MICA paramedics in my area about the EBA (enterprise bargaining agreement). I think the EBA has not delivered a good outcome for service provision in regional areas. The reason for that is the overtime call-back arrangements. Many of the paramedics are reluctant to go back on duty, or call-back, because of the way the new pay structure is working. Basically it means that if they are called back on overtime, they have to spend a set amount of time there; they cannot go back home. They may be rostered to be back on duty the next morning, but if they are called back, they have to actually spend 4 hours on shift.

What that means in a regional area for paramedics who are consistently called back, when they may have to actually go back to work the next morning, is that many of them are reluctant to come on call-back duty. That is a real issue which needs to be addressed to make sure there are adequate backup resources. It is quite clear to me that in Gippsland there are a number of stations which require additional night shifts and a better ability to meet the demand due to the increased population growth and increased job growth in that region. It is not okay just to say, 'There is a review going on at the moment' if patients are potentially being put at risk because we have to get crews from further away. Because of the long distances between towns in regional areas it is essential to have adequate, strategically placed resources.

The MICA air wing helicopter based at Traralgon provides a great service across Gippsland. It is very important backup for those critical emergencies, but we need to make sure we reward the MICA paramedics for

their increased skills and training, because they are the elite paramedics. They are at the top of the tree in Australia in terms of training and professionalism. We cannot have a MICA paramedic in every town because they would not have the workload to justify it, but we need to make sure they are available strategically across the region and have the resources necessary to be able to do their jobs.

One of the other issues relates to the Gippsland Lakes. We have seen they are of vital importance to our region. I have made many statements in this place in the past on the issue. I know there is real concern in my community about where the vision is and where the funding is, going forward, to continue the improvement of the health of the Gippsland Lakes. It is essential that funding be made available and that the next round of catchment management planning provide for a reduction in nutrients and increased water quality.

We have been very disappointed that there has not been the funding for the lakes that there was in the past. To a certain extent we have taken the low-hanging fruit; the easy gains have been made. But there is still important work that needs to be done. What is the next step? The next step is the Macalister Irrigation District 2030 strategy. Some significant gains in water quality improvement and also improvement of irrigation infrastructure will come out of that. That is something the government must fund. It has been floating around for a while as a project. It is important that it be implemented.

We also need to implement a broad catchment strategy to reduce the nutrient run-off and increase the vegetation on stream sides and gullies to ensure that farm nutrient run-off is reduced. There are a number of other issues, but I think the most important one is that we have seen this government talk long and hard about its environmental credibility, yet when it came to the crunch it withdrew the environmental water allocations from the Gippsland Lakes. The allocation is absolutely critical and the government has returned some of it.

The salinity of the Gippsland Lakes has increased over time, the majority of that being caused by increased extraction out of them. That extraction is absolutely critical, yet the government says it passionately supports the Gippsland Lakes. One thing it does when it has a bit of a water problem is take away the environmental flows and then not return them. This is a real issue. We need to protect the environmental flows and the environmental future of the Gippsland Lakes because this is our most important natural asset, our best economic asset, our tourism asset. It is part of the

reason many people come to live in and enjoy our region.

The timber industry is another ongoing failure of this government, as members have seen in the changes the government has made to the industry in this place. I stood alone in this chamber and voted against the changes to old-growth forests. The resource was taken away; now the issue is starting to come back and bite the government and the industry. We have not seen other commitments around it to ensure protection and support of the industry — the investment in alternative technologies so the industry can move to harvesting and processing the smaller diameter logs. It is an issue the government should stand condemned for.

This industry is vitally important for my region and for all of Gippsland. There is a lot of discussion around the future of the important timber industry. It has a strong future if it is given the commitment, support and security that is necessary for it to move forward.

I would like to finish by talking about the Snowy agreements. If you go back to 2002 and the celebrated outcomes of the agreements, you might ask why it has all gone wrong. It has gone wrong because the intergovernmental agreements have not been honoured. If you go back to the place where the original water was released on the Mowamba, eight years later it has been totally turned off against the views of both Victoria and the commonwealth. The New South Wales government is the main culprit, but both the Victorian and commonwealth governments also stand condemned, because they have allowed with barely a whimper for the New South Wales government to amend the water licence.

If you look at the breach of process undertaken, the agreed process established was to conduct a five-year review. New South Wales went out on its own and amended it in breach of its legislative obligations, without taking up any of the suggestions from Victoria and the commonwealth. These are the issues the government must address; they must be fixed to make sure my community is satisfied.

Wind farms: opposition policy

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — I grieve for potential wind farm investors and for our opportunities to address global warming if the Liberal-Nationals coalition is elected to govern this state. As a resident of the Waubra area and a representative of regional Victoria, I have seen the many benefits wind farms have provided to the economies of rural communities in my region. I have seen farming families gain income by

having wind turbines on their properties. I have seen local firms and local workers gain employment in the construction phase and also in the ongoing running phase of wind farms in my area, in Waubra in particular. In the construction phase of the Waubra wind farm 200 people were employed — it was a great employment opportunity for our region. Since the wind farm's completion, 26 permanent on-site staff have been employed by Acciona Energy in its operations.

I am also aware that the communities of Waubra and surrounds have gained by having the wind farm in their area through contributions Acciona has been able to make to community development projects: projects such as assisting the local kinder and school, recreation reserve developments, community activities, local Landcare activities and more. There have been a number of great beneficial spin-offs for rural communities that I am specifically aware of and that I see happening more broadly in rural communities across this state where wind farms have been established or are under construction. There are great benefits in terms of economies for local communities, and rural communities in particular.

On the other side of the wind farm scale, or on the broader scale, we know why wind farms are being supported. We know there is significant concern in regard to global warming that we as a government need to act to address. We know that in addressing global warming we need to find as many alternative energy sources that are clean and non-carbon polluting as possible. Other than hydroelectricity, which we know is very limited in terms of future development, wind power provides the most economic alternative in the production of large-scale clean energy which is going to be carbon-friendly and which sets us on a path to addressing those global warming issues.

The Brumby government has worked actively to support wind farm developments and the development of a broad range of alternative energies, but wind farms are the most prominent and economically available large-scale source of clean energy. We have supported that development both through the Victorian renewable energy target scheme and through a broad range of strategies we have put in place to address global warming. We continue to be very serious about showing leadership on the issues we need to pursue to address global warming, which is a very significant threat for our whole community, our rural communities, our farming communities and so on.

I therefore grieved when I learned that the Liberal-Nationals coalition recently released its negative policy on wind farms. With a large-scale list of

no-go zones, minimum buffers of 2 kilometres from the nearest home and the placement of wind farm applications into local government hands, these actions will simply kill off wind farm developments in this state. This policy simply plays into the hands of the wind farm opponents, the so-called landscape guardians, the not-in-my-backyarders, who have a loud voice and who spread misinformation as fast as they can about wind farms and who do not present any positive alternatives or any positive means by which we can either address global warming or support local communities.

Members of the community clearly have a right to express their views about wind farms. In terms of our planning guidelines, the policies we have in place ensure that local community members can feed their concerns into the process of considering applications, generally for those power stations above 30 kilowatts, which are then normally considered by the minister. We also have in place expert panels that go out into these communities and listen to the views of community members, weigh them up in a balanced way in determining whether or not wind farm applications should go forward and then provide their advice to the minister.

That is what has happened under our government. We have used good, sound planning policy guidelines. We have not just given in to the loudest voices but have weighed up the issues and addressed the issues which needed addressing. However, concerns that are unfounded or simply have no real planning basis are not weighed highly according to the guidelines. We consider issues surrounding global warming, economic development in communities and how we can address the real concerns of community members. But we do not pay attention to those who simply argue against wind farms on a not-in-my-backyard basis or because they have some other axe to grind within the system. That is what is happening under our government; it is good, sound planning that looks at the overall issues.

But in terms of the Liberal Party's proposals, if you look at the 2-kilometre buffer, all of those no-go zones and the issue of putting it all into local government hands, effectively you kill off the wind farm industry. Under our government we produced a wind atlas, which shows that the appropriate sites for wind farms in the state obviously need appropriate wind levels, and they also need to be near the main electricity grids in the state in order to be economic, to be further developed and to operate efficiently. Of course there are regions across the state that are clearly appropriate or economic for the establishment of wind farms, so it

is amongst those areas that proponents need to look at proposals.

I challenge the Liberal opposition to put forward its wind atlas now that it has put out its proposals. If it follows its proposals to knock out areas that are no-go zones, those areas that are within 2 kilometres of any housing and so on, I expect there will be no areas left in the state where wind farms can be developed economically. If you also take into account the fact that the Liberals are proposing to put the wind farm applications into local government hands, again I ask: how can it possibly work?

Recently the Moorabool Shire Council was required to consider an application for a wind farm proposal at Yaloak South. After 60 days the council found it did not have the expertise to respond to that application within the 60-day requirement, which meant the proponent could simply take the application off to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). That concerned many residents and the Moorabool Shire Council so much that the council said to the Minister for Planning, 'We want you to call this in. We want you to take responsibility for this application, because we do not have the expertise to be able to consider it. We want you as the minister to call it in'. The minister has done so only in the last fortnight.

The application was called in, taking into account the views that the Moorabool Shire Council clearly put to the minister — that is, 'We do not have expertise to consider this'. We also know local government is closest to the people, and where you have a lot of loud voices it makes it very difficult for local government to be able to make sound planning decisions. So we often see those decisions perhaps abrogated by local government or taken on to VCAT anyway and challenged and overturned at VCAT. It is very sound practice to have the Minister for Planning in this state overseeing large-scale wind farm planning and to consider it in a very sound way, with a properly experienced panel to look at all of the associated issues.

But of course the Liberal Party's proposal does not take into account the real concerns of local government. Municipal councils have not been saying, 'We want to consider wind farm applications'. What they are saying is, 'We do not have the expertise'. Again, we would see wind farm applications simply not getting anywhere if you went the route of local government in those few areas of the state, if there are any, where it would actually be economic to try to develop wind farms. But after the Minister for Planning called in the Yaloak South application, what was even more surprising was that the opposition spokesman on planning welcomed

the minister calling it in. That seemed to be an absolute flip-flop, when only two weeks earlier the opposition had just announced its policy of wanting wind farm applications to be placed into the hands of local government. Yet here it was welcoming the calling in of a wind farm application by the minister.

It is not just our government that is saying the Liberal Party policy will be a disaster for economies in rural communities and a disaster for progress in addressing global warming. Let us look at the *Warrnambool Standard*, which quotes comments from Lane Crockett, the general manager of Pacific Hydro, who said he:

... was shocked by the coalition's policy, saying it came out of the blue and appeared to be at odds with the rhetoric in support of new wind energy projects in Victoria.

He said:

... Pacific Hydro owns and operates the Codrington and Yambuk wind farms, located next to Port Fairy ...

If, under the Liberals, wind farms cannot be located near the coast, cannot be along the Great Ocean Road and so on, those developments would not be able to go ahead under Liberal Party policy. Mr Crockett expressed his great concern. He said:

This is a tourist area and therefore, under the proposal announced today, these projects would not exist, yet they are strongly supported by the community and council as they add to the tourist appeal of the area and provide ongoing benefits to local communities.

The Liberal Party is going even further than local communities, or what some noisy voices in local communities, are calling for. It is being politically opportunistic, but in terms of the community benefit it is clearly abrogating its responsibility within this policy.

The *Australian Financial Review* reflects the same views from Pacific Hydro and others, and also quotes the views of Vestas Wind Systems, which is a group aimed at supporting wind farm development. The article reports director Ken McAlpine as having said:

... the policy was a risk to \$2 billion worth of clean energy investment in Victoria.

It shows that Mr Baillieu will cave in to NIMBY protesters and that is something that all investors in Victoria should be concerned about.

People who are within the industry are already coming out and expressing their concern, not seeing any path forward, and of course all environmentalists in this state should also have a great concern about this. We seriously need to find positive ways forward to support the use of alternative energy. This policy by the Liberals is an absolute flip-flop policy. It is one that

simply panders, as we have heard, to not-in-my-backyarders, noisy voices in the community, and is an attempt to be politically opportunistic. But it really does not recognise what we need to do as a state in addressing global warming; it simply turns its back on those significant opportunities for economic development in this state.

The Leader of the Opposition is putting wind farm investments and reductions in greenhouse emissions in serious jeopardy with this policy. The Liberals are again showing they are not ready for government. They are simply acting in politically opportunistic ways. They are not showing leadership, as the Brumby government is doing. I am certainly proud to be a member of the Brumby government, which is serious about supporting regional communities. We have seen in the years since I have been elected as member for Ballarat East that our regional communities have benefited so much. The level of investment and the number of people coming to and living in the regions around Ballarat and the surrounding areas have been astronomical. It has been a good news story for our regions.

Wind farms are also a means, as we have seen, of providing economic opportunities for those smaller rural community areas that do not have a lot of other prospects of ongoing economic development and that have been clearly limited through the drought in their ability to gain agricultural income.

Wind farms have helped to underpin families in those areas and those regional communities. That has been something this government has been very supportive of and something we look forward to continuing to support. As a government we have also been very proud to support the addressing of global warming issues.

These policies, put forward by the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberals, simply put all of those issues in jeopardy. They put at issue the great movement forward in addressing global warming and supporting rural communities.

Ambulance services: performance

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) — Today I grieve for all Victorians because of the serious risks Victorians are being exposed to through the Brumby Labor government's continual failure to provide the resources Ambulance Victoria needs to maintain the level of service that all Victorians are entitled to expect. We are persistently subjected to spin and rhetoric from the Minister for Health about record spending in the health

portfolio. Every time he gets to his feet in this house to respond to a Dorothy Dix question from his own comrades or a very serious question from the coalition regarding the state of the health system in Victoria, we get the same rant about record spending by the Brumby government on health.

The facts are that what is actually happening on the ground is a far cry from the picture the minister constantly tries to paint. Service delivery across the board in our health system is struggling to cope with demand because it is seriously underresourced. In recent times there have been far too many examples of failure within Ambulance Victoria to meet even the government's own benchmarks for performance and far too many examples of the systems within Ambulance Victoria failing, thereby compromising the lives of Victorians.

I must say at the outset that the professionalism of our paramedics is definitely not in question. The systems in place to ensure that response times are appropriate are failing consistently, because Ambulance Victoria is forced to introduce rosters and allocate resources in an environment of enormous cost or funding pressure.

At a recent Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) inquiry into the budget estimates the member for Scoresby questioned the Minister for Health about response times. The budget papers for 2010–11 indicate that once again the government has failed to meet its own benchmarks for ambulance time lines, with the 15 minute target only achieved 83 per cent of the time statewide.

The member for Scoresby also raised the case of Mr Noel Cowie from Korumburra as an example of a failure to meet response times. Mr Cowie collapsed in his home after complications from pneumonia, and an ambulance took more than 2 hours to arrive. In response to questioning about the failure to meet targets and the specific case of Mr Cowie, the minister went into the normal spin of record investment and his twisted version of improvements in response times.

The reality, as evidenced by the case of Mr Cowie, cannot be ignored. It is a fact that lives are constantly being put at risk because our ambulance service is underresourced. There is no evidence on the ground or at the coal face to suggest otherwise.

At the same PAEC inquiry a member for South Eastern Metropolitan Region in the other house, Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips, raised two examples of less than satisfactory response times compromising the lives of seriously ill Victorians. He raised the case of

16-year-old Maffra girl Geordie Duguid, who died at a party in April when it took 27 minutes for a MICA (mobile intensive care ambulance) ambulance to arrive. He also raised the case of Ronald Cook, an ex-serviceman, who was driven for 7 hours in an ambulance from Sale to Melbourne. Sadly, Mr Cook died that night in the Royal Melbourne Hospital from bleeding on the brain.

The tragedy in this example is that Mr Cook's daughter said that a neurosurgeon had told her that if her father had been delivered to him sooner, there might have been a completely different outcome. She went on to explain how the whole incident continues to haunt her and feels that what took place was fundamentally not right.

Then there is the heartbreaking story of 5-year-old Rupert Rafferty from Briagolong. The editorial in the *Sunday Herald Sun* of 2 May 2010 describes the circumstances of this tragic event. I quote:

If Rupert Rafferty lived in Melbourne rather than regional Victoria, would his life have been saved?

It's an agonising question that is impossible to answer. But the facts revealed in today's *Sunday Herald Sun* suggest that the authorities, the health department and Ambulance Victoria need to at least consider the question as part of a serious investigation into the little boy's sudden death.

Rupert, 5, died on Friday of last week as his family waited for a MICA ambulance that might have saved his life. The ambulance arrived at his Briagolong home 65 minutes after his family made a desperate first call for help at 10.13 p.m. when the boy suffered a suspected seizure.

A first ambulance, without MICA equipment or lifesaving heart drugs, arrived from Maffra 22 minutes after the call, but was unable to help.

A second standard ambulance arrived from Sale 18 minutes later and was also unable to provide lifesaving assistance.

Rupert died of cardiac arrest as he was being carried to an air ambulance helicopter — 32 minutes after the MICA ambulance finally arrived.

MICA ambulances carry intensive care paramedics, the only people allowed to administer heart drugs outside hospitals.

The ambulance officers who fought to save Rupert are not to blame. They are dedicated public servants who work hard to save lives.

But one of the burning questions that needs to be answered is why a MICA unit was not sent immediately to the Rafferty home.

An Ambulance Victoria spokesman said the MICA unit was not sent straight away because after the initial emergency call, the case was listed as 'convulsion' rather than a cardiac problem.

Was there a misdiagnosis? Surely it should not be the sole responsibility of a family in panic to correctly diagnose a medical emergency.

The terrible truth — one that must be faced — is that this little boy's death may have been avoidable.

Rupert's father, Darren Rafferty, this week described his son as a normal 'happy and healthy' boy — an 'absolute joy'.

The small and tightly knit Briagolong community is devastated by the boy's death. Many are wondering if the nightmare could have been avoided.

Little Rupert is not the first Victorian to die waiting for help. In 1995, after a government revamp of the ambulance dispatch system, seriously ill patients were waiting up to 50 minutes for an ambulance.

Three years later, the ambulance service still could not cope with demand and critically ill Victorians were waiting up to an hour for help.

The present government's response time performance target of 85 per cent of Code One emergency calls being responded to within 15 minutes has not been met for five years.

Some of the current problems lie in the fact there are not enough MICA units in regional Victoria.

By Ambulance Victoria's own admissions, there are only four fully equipped MICA units in country Victoria.

But the spokesman said 100 trained MICA paramedics regularly ride in standard ambulances.

It is understandable that we cannot have a MICA unit in every town, including devastated Briagolong.

But when a 5-year-old child dies — perhaps unnecessarily — it behoves us as a society to ask some tough questions.

All the incidents I have just referred to occurred in Gippsland, so naturally they have special significance for me. I must point out though that there are a number of examples of lives being compromised in many parts of the state because this Labor government has failed in its duty of care relating to ambulance response times.

These problems are not confined to country Victoria. There is the case of Mr Adam Cummaudo, whose father, Sam, has been trying to get answers for two years over the death of Adam due to a delayed ambulance. Adam collapsed at his home in Epping. An ambulance was dispatched to deliver him from Epping to the Austin Hospital, which is normally a 20-minute drive away. In his case it took 1½ hours. Tragically Adam died soon after arriving at the Austin.

It is not only family members who suffer enormously because of these failures in the system. Paramedics are also severely affected by these events; they have a devastating effect on their morale and their confidence. This government's failure to manage this is presenting

Victorian families and paramedics with situations that are totally unacceptable.

The Brumby government has had 11 years of record income but it continues to let Victorians down because of its incompetence and its inability to properly resource our ambulance service. This is outlined in a media release of Friday, 7 May, issued by the shadow Minister for Health in the other place, David Davis, and headed 'Brumby culpable with weakened ambulance response times'. There is a bullet point which states, 'Must hold urgent review into country ambulance services'. The media release states:

John Brumby's weakened ambulance response time targets are putting Victorian lives at risk, particularly in country Victoria, shadow Minister for Health David Davis said today.

'I have called on Daniel Andrews to urgently review what has occurred with country ambulances. Victorians deserve to know what why the service appears to be performing so badly', said Mr Davis.

'The 2010–11 Victorian budget papers reveal that John Brumby has failed again to meet any of the timeliness targets set for ambulance emergency.

The tragic consequences of this failure include:

April 2010: a five-year-old Gippsland boy dies after waiting for 65 minutes for a MICA ambulance to arrive;

March 2010: police in Geelong are forced to transport two teenagers who had been bashed to hospital in the back of a divvy van because no ambulances are available;

March 2010: a 27-year-old man in Bairnsdale died shortly after paramedics arrived 26 minutes after being called;

December 2009: a Yarrawonga woman was impaled on a fence without pain relief or medical help for 47 minutes because there was no local ambulance crew;

April 2010: a Hamilton man who suffered a heart attack had to call for an ambulance three times and was forced to wait more than an hour before deciding to have his wife drive him to the hospital.

In 1999, Labor promised to cut waiting times for code 1 emergencies to 10 minutes, yet the Premier has put vulnerable Victorians at risk by instead disgracefully pushing response time targets from 13 minutes to 15 minutes.

These weakened targets were the Labor Party's own idea. The chief executive officer of Ambulance Victoria testified that the targets set by John Brumby were not recommended by Ambulance Victoria and that these targets were forced upon the ambulance service by John Brumby, stating "... at the end of the day, they are the policies or targets that are set for us. We did not advise to change anything".

Mr Davis goes on in the media release to say:

John Brumby and Labor have weakened and diluted these ambulance response time targets whenever they have failed them instead of taking responsibility and fixing them.

Despite weakening these targets to 15 minutes, John Brumby continues to fail to meet his own weakened targets, and Victorian patients are the ones being put at risk and suffering.

Victorians can have no confidence that they will get the emergency health services they need in time.

After 11 years, John Brumby has run out of excuses. It is time for him to take responsibility for Victoria's broken ambulance service.

John Brumby must immediately override his pathetic health minister and order the review of country ambulance services before more lives are lost.

The Labor Party policy leading into the 1999 election clearly identifies promises that were made that even today have not been delivered. The policy says Labor will:

aim to reduce the time it takes an ambulance to arrive at the scene of an accident from 15 minutes in 90 per cent of cases to 12 minutes in 90 per cent of cases. In addition Labor will seek to improve the service so that the response time target is 10 minutes in 90 per cent of cases within 12 months.

Under the heading 'Setting new standards', the policy says:

A Labor government will develop and maintain procedures and standards for all aspects of the ambulance services.

The procedures and standards, which will conform to world's best practice, will cover areas such as:

- response times;
- ambulance crewing levels;
- ambulance paramedic training;
- equipment on ambulances;
- availability of appropriate and required skill levels; and
- the number of ambulances that need to be available to meet peak emergency demands.

In my electorate of Narracan I have been approached by concerned paramedics, ambulance community officers and community members about the lack of available resources at times, especially at weekends. The heavy reliance by Ambulance Victoria on volunteer backup, also especially at weekends, is leaving outlying communities dangerously exposed.

The buck stops with this Brumby government and the Minister for Health. I have just outlined many examples of unacceptable response times. I have exposed

promises made by the Labor Party over 10 years ago that still have not been delivered. I have demonstrated the steady decline in ambulance services over the past 11 years that has occurred because the Brumby government has continually failed to provide the ambulance service with adequate resources.

When are the Premier and Minister Andrews actually going to do something? When are they going to drop the spin, fix the problem and give Ambulance Victoria the resources it needs to deliver an ambulance response that meets its duty of care to all Victorians?

Health: opposition policy

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — I am very pleased to rise today to speak in the grievance debate. Today I grieve for the opposition's inability to reconcile the record investment made by the Brumby government in Victoria's health system with its need to constantly talk down our hospitals and hardworking doctors and nurses.

Mr Burgess — It takes more than money.

Ms MUNT — I would just like to respond to that interjection from the member for Hastings.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! The member for Mordialloc does not have to respond to an interjection from the member for Hastings. Interjections are disorderly. I ask the member to return to what she was saying.

Ms MUNT — Acting Speaker, perhaps we could mention to the member for Hastings that interjections are disorderly while I am making my speech.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! The member could probably mention it to him afterwards outside the chamber.

Ms MUNT — We all know that those opposite secretly support the record investment in health made by this government. They support it every time they attend one of the many redevelopment inspections, sod turnings or openings of new health centres and hospitals made by the Brumby government in their electorates.

In fact the member for Bass, who is in the chair at this time, even asked in this house if more opposition members could be invited to events at local hospitals, presumably to show their support for government investments in their electorates, including in the electorate of Bass. The member for Bass said about the recent visit of the Minister for Health to that electorate

to make an announcement about the opening of two extra beds in an emergency ward at the local hospital that he would particularly like to be invited to those openings in support of the Brumby government's investment in local health. We have taken that on board, particularly for the member for Bass.

Of course members of the opposition will always say one thing in their electorates and another thing here in Parliament. Inevitably they return to what they know best when it comes to health — if they cannot close a hospital down, then they will just have to settle for talking it down. There was a closure of a hospital in my electorate during the Kennett years, and I will talk a little bit more about that later in my contribution.

There has been an enormous investment in health under the Brumby government. In the last budget there was a \$4 billion boost to our health system. This boost was provided to meet anticipated growth in patient demand by increasing the capacity of the health system to service those new and emerging communities with new and expanded health facilities. This extra funding is not just about money; it is actually about patient care and patients. The increased funding in the last budget will be used to treat an additional 50 000 emergency patients, to provide an additional 32 000 outpatient appointments in the public health system and to support an additional 10 000 radiotherapy treatments — and I know the importance of those radiotherapy treatments.

In my local area additional radiotherapy bunkers have been installed at the Moorabbin hospital to cut the waiting times for cancer patients who require radiotherapy treatment, the speed of which is very important. In addition \$45 million has been invested to treat an additional 9000 elective surgery patients to help them move through the system as quickly as possible.

A sum of \$2.3 billion has been allocated in capital money for new building projects, which will generate around 3472 jobs — and behind every one of those jobs is a family that benefits from those employment opportunities and then from the health care that is provided by that capital input into building projects.

I will run through a few of the projects that are included in the additional funding. There is \$90.5 million to complete the expansion and redevelopment of Sunshine Hospital to provide the very best patient care to the communities of the northern and western suburbs. There is \$11 million to expand the acute and intensive care capacity at Monash children's hospital — and I will talk a little more about that fabulous expansion of facilities later. There is \$7.4 million for a new cardiac catheter laboratory at the Northern Hospital. There is

\$9.1 million for the relocation and redevelopment of the Northern Hospital and \$407.5 million — a huge amount — for the redevelopment of Box Hill Hospital.

I was out at Box Hill RSL club once again the weekend before last, and the people there were over the moon at the investment that will be made in the Box Hill Hospital. I thank the member for Burwood for all his representations on behalf of the community to secure that investment in the hospital.

This funding brings to \$7.5 billion the total health capital investment by this government the largest health capital program in the state's history. I will say that again: this is the largest capital spend on health in Victoria's history. We have also had investment in a new women's hospital, a new children's hospital and a new dental hospital — the investment has been overwhelming. This is a vital issue for all Victorians.

Compare this to the \$855 million spent on health capital works by the former Liberal-Nationals government between 1992 and 1999. In that seven-year period the total capital spend was \$855 million. Contrast that with the \$4 billion committed in this year's budget — there is daylight between the two approaches.

We are reinvesting not only in the city — in the women's hospital and the children's hospital, those world-class facilities that are being built in Melbourne — but in the whole of Victoria, particularly in rural and regional areas. The budget allocated \$618 million for health capital works in regional Victoria. I will quickly go through some of those projects to put them on the record. There is so much good news; I will have to be fast. There is \$33.6 million for Barwon Health to deliver additional acute and intensive care capacity. In addition, the government is funding the purchase of land to plan for a second hospital in that area, where it will be needed. There is \$25.8 million for a new Coleraine hospital; \$25 million for a new Leongatha hospital; \$55 million, including a commonwealth contribution, for the Ballarat regional integrated cancer centre, which will be a great new facility for the residents of Ballarat and surrounding areas. There is also \$3 million to upgrade and fund the expansion of the Healesville hospital and \$3 million for the Wonthaggi hospital to expand its emergency department and upgrade its maternity ward and central sterilising department. This brings the total health capital expenditure by this government in regional Victoria alone to \$1.5 billion.

There is even more good news, and I would like to mention it. We have proudly invested \$68.9 million in stage 2 of the Olivia Newton-John cancer and wellness

centre at the Austin Hospital. I recall that the former government was going to privatise the Austin Hospital. If that had happened, this wonderful initiative would not have been possible.

I return to the topic of Box Hill Hospital. Box Hill Hospital will have a \$407.5 million redevelopment. This is the largest suburban health capital project ever undertaken in Victoria and is absolutely fantastic for the families and other residents of the area. By way of comparison, the previous government spent \$5 million, compared with the \$407.5 million we will spend on the health requirements of the local residents. When the redevelopment is completed Box Hill Hospital will provide 506 beds. There will be six new operating theatres; four refurbished theatres; a significantly larger emergency department, with 19 additional places; subacute services — for the first time — with 30 new beds; a new intensive care unit; critical acute services, including a new cardiology ward, coronary care unit and catheter laboratories; two new endoscopic laboratories; and a dedicated precinct for women's and children's services. The redevelopment will provide the capacity for an extra 7000 patients each year.

I would like to quickly discuss the new Bendigo hospital, and I thank the member for Bendigo for all her wonderful support for this great initiative for the area. I was in Bendigo the day before yesterday, talking to the local health service providers; they have never seen anything like this. It will be a great boon not only for Bendigo but for the surrounding areas and will provide fabulous new health services for that rural and regional community.

It will have 376 acute beds, which is an extra 135 beds; it will treat 10 000 more patients; and the number of chemotherapy chairs will be tripled from 8 to 26; it will double the renal dialysis chairs from 12 to 24; it will have a new consolidated mental health facility — increasing the number of beds from 42 to 75 — and a new helipad so that emergency patients can get the care that they need faster given they are coming in from areas all around Bendigo. It will have eight operating theatres, a new women's and children's centre, and 735 jobs will be created in the local area. It is a fantastic project.

I quote the health service's CEO, Mr John Mulder, who said about this development:

The proposed redevelopment includes a combination of refurbishment and new building works that represents best value for money and delivers everything that Bendigo Health has requested.

This will surely be a fabulous facility for Bendigo. This one investment alone dwarfs the \$312 million spent by the former Liberal-National government on regional health services; this one investment outdoes all of those investments. It has the overwhelming support of the community up in the Bendigo region, as I found out the day before yesterday.

I have more good news. A week or two ago I was at the Kingston Centre in my own electorate. The former government actually sold off the Kingston Centre's land, and none of the revenue from that sale was put back into the Kingston Centre. This government is investing over \$45 million in the Kingston Centre for rehabilitation services, which will include a new hydrotherapy pool.

The Mordialloc hospital in my electorate was closed, and I would like to contrast that with my experience a week or two ago when I was out at the Monash Medical Centre, where we are going to rebuild and refurbish the paediatric services and the neonatal intensive care facilities. This was most warmly welcomed not only by Monash Medical Centre but also by the local families who will now have access to world-class paediatric and intensive care for their newborn babies and children when they need it most.

I would like to contrast that again with what happened 10 years ago. I was actually at Monash Medical Centre paediatric unit 10 years ago with a sick child, during the dark years when the government cuts were being felt most harshly. The nurses and doctors were desperately trying to provide services to the children in that unit under the most trying circumstances involving cutbacks. It was a dark period.

I contrast that with the reinvestment the Labor government has made not only in that hospital but in the health services throughout Victoria. As I go around visiting hospitals in Victoria, I find they are afraid that those dark years will come back — that they may have to face those sort of cuts instead of having a supportive government, the Brumby government, which reinvests in health services and rebuilds hospitals.

It is not just a matter of capital; it is a matter of providing the services and capacity for Victorians to have access to the very best health care we can provide. We continue to be committed to that, so I hope, for the sake of the health services, the hospitals and the people of Victoria that the Brumby Labor government is returned to office, because if it is it will continue to put that at the top of its agenda as one of its most important items. I would hate to see the contrast, with the opposition and its approach returned to government in

Victoria, because if it goes on form, it will cut, slash and burn — and 10 years of investment will be harmed.

Question agreed to.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS

Road Safety Committee: pedestrian safety in car parks

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) — I appreciate the opportunity to make a statement on the Road Safety Committee's report on pedestrian safety in car parks, as it was tabled this morning.

Victorians can be proud of the Road Safety Committee and the work its members and staff have produced for well over 40 years. As many members are aware, the work of parliamentary committees is relatively unseen and unreported. However, many important legislative achievements, public debates and community actions have been instigated which lead to or are vitally informed by the investigative reporting of parliamentary committees.

This week the Road Safety Committee's report entitled *Inquiry into Pedestrian Safety in Car Parks*, which involved investigation and was compiled after a reference from the Legislative Assembly, was tabled in the house. A significant amount of time and resources — resources which are all too scarce — have been poured into gathering evidence and compiling this report. It was apparent almost immediately that this reference was given to the committee only to serve the political purposes of the executive. Put simply, this reference was created by the executive to artificially push back the reporting date of yet another highly politically motivated reference in relation to state and federal roads funding.

All this was done, no doubt, in the vain hope that the Premier and his cohorts can score some political mileage at the expense of road safety. It could not have been better put than by representatives of both VicRoads and the Transport Accident Commission who, during the committee's hearings, told members that data about loss of life and injury in car parks is not kept as it was not seen as a significant road safety issue. The government's own experts knew what was going on, yet the government burdened the Road Safety Committee with this superfluous reference. That was an absolute disgrace and a new low for the Brumby Labor government.

At this point it is important to place in *Hansard* that I and the other members of the committee who have put

our names to the minority report, despite strongly criticising this reference, commend the professionalism and hard work of the committee staff. As the minority report states, their integrity, diligence and hard work is not in question.

I have a unique perspective on any road safety debate, both as a committee member and a member of this place. As a former serving member of the Victoria Police traffic management unit — yes, the highway patrol — I dealt with matters concerning road safety on a daily basis. For many years as a serving member of Victoria Police I relied on the reports issued by the Road Safety Committee. As someone who worked at the coalface and who had to go to people's homes to inform family members that a relative would not be coming home, I know there is nothing worse than having to do that. It can be devastating to have to inform family members that they have lost a loved one. My view is that the waste of the scarce resources of the RSC is repugnant and a slap in the face to any Victorian who has had a loved one killed on our state's roads.

The Road Safety Committee has been a driving force in road safety policy development, and many significant changes to the culture surrounding safety on our roads are due to the committee's work, including the introduction of the compulsory use of seatbelts, ensuring responsible driving through the introduction of the demerit point system, leading the nation in combating the scourge of alcohol-related road deaths through blood testing of road crash victims, which eventually led to Victoria introducing the first random breath testing of drivers; licence disqualification for those caught drink driving; and recent developments, including the mandatory use of side curtain airbags and electronic stability control in motor vehicles. It was the Road Safety Committee that led the way on those issues.

It is shameful that, despite all that work, the Brumby Labor government has seen fit to waste vital committee resources to satisfy its election timetable rather than making our roads safer. It is clear the report before us will not lead into or spark any debate, and neither will it provide any guiding framework for legislative and community action to significantly reduce Victoria's road death and trauma levels. This reference has wasted the scarce resources of the committee and has been imposed upon the committee to satisfy the political desires of the Premier and his ailing government. The Road Safety Committee has a proud heritage of being at the forefront of the road safety debate, and the wilful abuse of the committee by the executive on the orders of the Premier is absolutely appalling.

Education and Training Committee: skills shortages in the rail industry

Ms BEATTIE (Yuroke) — I wish to comment on the inquiry of the Education and Training Committee into skills shortages in the rail industry, which was tabled earlier this month. I compliment the committee on the vast amount of work it has done in identifying various skills shortages. I have only to look at the executive summary for chapter 2 to understand the complexity of our rail and transport systems. I have often heard members of the opposition stomp in here and say, ‘Just bung another train on the tracks’. For their information, Victoria’s metropolitan train network has 15 lines, 211 railway stations, 400 kilometres of electrified track and a workforce of about 3500 employees. The network’s fleet of 146 six-carriage trains covers more than 30 million kilometres per year and services more than 200 million passenger journeys. The regional rail network covers five lines, with 4100 kilometres of track and 81 regional stations. That gives a snapshot of the train system, and then there is the tram system and the whole of the rest of public transport network.

The committee’s reference was to inquire into skills shortages, and I am very pleased to see the recommendation in chapter 3 that, in consultation with the rail industry, the Department of Transport undertake a comprehensive audit of the rail industry workforce. It is fair to say that things have been allowed to slide since the privatisation of the rail network under the Kennett government and that not a great deal of attention has been paid to the workforce.

Among other things, recommendation 3.1 is that the audit should identify all occupations and job roles; the location of work undertaken; the number and duration of job vacancies; and the employment status, including the number of hours worked, the level of overtime and the current leave liabilities within the industry. We in this place all understand that when you have a limited number of employees who are able to carry out particular tasks people are not able to take leave and there is high workplace turnover. We also understand the need for formal qualifications, and I am pleased to say there is a recommendation concerning qualifications which recognises prior learning. Informal training and development and on-the-job experience also count. The recommendations also mention up-to-date technologies, current and emerging skills shortages and skill gaps. This is a comprehensive report, and I urge all members of this house to read it before they stomp in here and say, ‘Just put another train on the track’.

The committee went interstate to look at other rail workshops and to report on the manufacturing of rail components. I am pleased to say that the federal Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Kim Carr, has recently appointed a manufacturing industry representative, Mr Bruce Griffiths, to champion Australian rail suppliers under the supplier advocate program. We know, and I am sure Kim Carr knows, that here in Australia we have wonderful people who have wonderful skills. We also have wonderful technologies — indeed other countries recognise that — and our rail-related skills are exported all over the world. I commend this report to members.

Road Safety Committee: pedestrian safety in car parks

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — I rise to speak on the report of the Road Safety Committee on pedestrian safety in car parks, which was tabled in the Parliament this morning. As one of the members who produced the minority report, which is contained at page 125 of the report, I have to speak seriously about the concerns I have about the direction the Road Safety Committee was given. The RSC has done some wonderful work over the years in promoting road safety for all Victorians on a number of fronts. On a personal level I have greatly enjoyed being involved in the work of this committee, and I have much experience of the great support given by the committee’s executive officer and staff. In fact the committee has been recognised as a world leader in the introduction of the compulsory wearing of seatbelts, drink-driving enforcement, vehicle safety and a range of other issues. On its own, the compulsory use of seatbelts in passenger motor vehicles has been credited with preventing huge numbers of road deaths and trauma, and in 1969 it was the RSC which sparked the original debate and subsequent legislation in this area.

However, the current reference before the committee to investigate the issue of loss of life and injury in car parks has been little more than a waste of very valuable time, particularly given that there is limited information about the number of deaths, because we have heard from VicRoads that the numbers are negligible. That is not to say that we should be ignoring such deaths or undervaluing in any way the tragic circumstances relating to each individual incident, but that pedestrian safety in car parks was made the primary reference of this committee for a number of months has been somewhat bewildering for those of us who are charged with keeping the road toll on a downward slide. The resources of this committee would have been far better used in looking at the bigger issues of road safety, given that at present the road toll in Victoria is ahead of

the road toll for the same period last year and is showing no sign of abating.

It is worth noting that the reductions in Victoria's road toll have stagnated in the medium term. In other words, all the good work done over recent years by this committee in reducing our tragic road toll is slowly being eroded, while the very committee charged with the task of keeping the downward trend continuing has been kept busy investigating deaths taking place in car parks. Vital committee resources and time have been wasted and misused by the committee being given this reference, which in my view will neither prompt community debate nor play a significant role in saving the lives of Victorians on our roads.

A large number of hours have been spent looking at car parks as far away as New Zealand, and there have been many and lengthy discussions with car park operators. A lot of the information gained has been very valuable and informative, and it has certainly not been a complete waste of time, but it is surely not the no. 1 priority for this committee.

The minority members of this committee have a strong view that this reference has been foisted upon us by the political machinations of the Labor majority on the committee. It is indeed a sad day when the lives of Victorian motorists are used as a political tool, but in the view of the minority members that is exactly what is taking place.

There is so much more work that could have been done to investigate new innovative and effective methods of keeping our road toll on a downward trend, and there are dedicated members on this committee who are committed to doing just that. However, I have to somewhat sadly report to this house that the minority members of the Road Safety Committee feel both disillusioned and disappointed at the direction which has been given to us over the last six months. The insidious shadow of a heavy-handed and power-hungry government has now reached into what has been, and should always be, an apolitical committee dedicated to saving Victorian lives.

I call on the Premier to provide firm and fair direction to this committee in terms of refocusing on the vital key areas of road safety in our state, whether it be road design, vehicle design, vehicle behaviour or driver training. There is so much more work that could be done. The challenges and opportunities in the field of road safety are virtually endless. Do not lock the willing and conscientious members of this committee away in a car park. Let us all work in an apolitical manner to get this proud and proven committee back on the road.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee: sustainable development of agribusiness in outer suburban Melbourne

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — As chair of the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee I rise to talk about the inquiry into the sustainable development of agribusiness in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. I would like to thank our committee staff, Sean Coley, Keir Delaney and Natalie-Mai Holmes, who worked diligently on that report, particularly as we started the investigation and then had to postpone it to do the GAIC (growth areas infrastructure contribution) report. I am pleased that the GAIC bill has finally passed through the Parliament, which was one of the recommendations that the committee made at the time.

This is a unanimous report from all the members of the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee, who are: deputy chair Ken Smith, Nazih Elasmr, Danielle Green, Matthew Guy, Colleen Hartland, David Hodgett, Craig Langdon and Don Nardella. They all put in an enormous amount of time. I must particularly commend those members from marginal seats for the time and effort they put in during an election year. David Hodgett put quite a bit of time in. Danielle Green had to resign from the committee in the end because of her work commitments relating to bushfires as Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services. Craig Langdon then came and joined the committee and had significant input into the development of this report.

The committee has made 84 recommendations to the government in this report. Committee members travelled right across the outer suburban councils that surround Melbourne and saw the diversity and productivity coming from all those areas that are growing food close to home. Most of the world's countries and cities are now waking up to the fact that fresh food grown close to the cities where people gravitate to live is important. Our green wedges are made up of land that is suitable for growing our food, particularly when we are talking about vegetables, seeds and the horticulture and viticulture that are close to our area. Those things are an important part of the community realising — as Deutsche Bank has said — that by 2050 we will have to double food production in order to feed the people on this planet. Only last week I heard another report saying that at the current rate of fishing which is taking place in our oceans, by 2050 we will be endangering the fish stock in the oceans unless stricter controls are put in place.

Food is an important part of life for all of us. In a members statement this morning a member spoke about those who criticise Australia as being overpopulated and about the fact that we produce enough food to feed the people of many other countries in the world. That is quite true, but what we are talking about here is fresh food, which is being promoted and should be promoted by the government. The advertising for supermarkets says 'Fresh food', and they want to talk about fresh food. We need to continue with the process of producing food close to home so we do not have to transport it. We are used to being able to have bananas from Queensland and garlic from China and Argentina. There is a world shortage of garlic at the moment. The price of garlic will be going up. People should be aware that food is a very important commodity because everyone likes to eat. You cannot survive on thin air.

I will elaborate on some of the issues the committee has raised. We recommended extending natural gas pipelines to horticulture areas around Melbourne in order to assist the greenhouse and hydroponic industries. It would be a very good move, one that the government should be looking at. It is done in countries overseas, and we have an ample supply of natural gas in Victoria that we can use to compete with other countries. We can export some of our hydroponic produce. Flowers can be taken by plane to markets all over South-East Asia. It would be an ideal process.

We also recommended a commitment to the recycling of water for the farmers in the Werribee South irrigation district. We should have a look at improving their greywater, because that land is a valuable growing area.

We recommended making significant vacant land in Melbourne available for farmers — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Education and Training Committee: skills shortages in the rail industry

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — I wish to talk this morning about the inquiry into skills shortages in the rail industry. That report was done by the Education and Training Committee, of which I am a member. I congratulate the members of the committee for their tremendous work together — we really work together well — and obviously the staff, who really put in the hard yards. We were very lucky to have the services of Peter Thomson, who was seconded from the education department to work with us. He brought with him an intimate knowledge of the industry and of the

department. His presence at the committee was very beneficial, and we will miss him.

The importance of the rail industry to Victoria cannot be understated; in fact, it is an industry of national importance. We see a growing use of rail in suburban and country Victoria. We also see the rail industry growing massively in other states, especially in the resource rich states of Western Australia and Queensland where there is a great expansion of the rail industry infrastructure including rolling stock. This is a growing industry for Australia, a country with such vast distances between places. We are unique in that we do not have a population that has people living on top of one another, other than in our cities. Our need for rail services is very different from those in northern Europe and in the United States of America.

The bottom line so far as our investigations were concerned is the skills shortage in the rail industry and in the various components of the rail industry in Victoria. That shortage has been growing; the committee recognised it and has made various recommendations to address those shortages.

The rail industry is not just about train drivers; they are just one very small part of it. It is also about the electronics, information technology, infrastructure and rolling stock. If you look at the rolling stock, you realise there is a need for painters, upholsterers, mechanics, diesel mechanics and glaziers. You see there is an incredible breadth of professionals within the rail industry when you look at it more closely.

Recently the government announced a number of initiatives in the rail industry, including new rolling stock and what have you. It has announced that billions of dollars will be spent in future investment to improve and expand especially suburban rail in Victoria. As we know, the transport plan is underfunded by many billions of dollars, and the government has said it is going to spend the money when it finds it — and a lot of that money is to go into the rail industry.

Unfortunately when you look at the government's transport plan there is very little mention of the training that is required, not only to build the new infrastructure but also for the ongoing running, maintenance and operation of the rail industry. There are no hard hats or fluorescent vests involved in training — it is the opening of railway lines and bridges, and announcements of those sorts that people can relate to and which the government is addicted to. The hard yards and the behind-the-scenes issues such as training just do not seem to rate a mention. I think the

committee's report has come along at an opportune time.

I want to talk about what I think are the key recommendations. Recommendation 4.1 is about the government coming up with a workforce plan in consultation with the rail industry out to 2020. It has been piecemeal, but if we are to grow the rail industry, we need to know what the workforce plan is, where the needs are and what sort of workers we will have in our rail industry workforce over the next 10 years.

There is also a recommendation for a centre of excellence, including simulators, at the Newport rail precinct. It is a great precinct, and I think we have a wonderful niche opportunity to expand that centre of excellence.

There is also a recommendation to develop a rail industry manufacturing strategy. That should be done at a Council of Australian Governments level, so the various states can do what they do best and what they are already doing well, and so we get a coordinated approach to the future of the rail industry in Australia.

Electoral Matters Committee: voter participation and informal voting

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — I take this opportunity to comment on the Electoral Matters Committee's inquiry into voter participation and informal voting. At this stage members would know there are under 200 days to the next state election, and our minds are very much focused around voter participation. Perhaps the light has just dawned for you, Acting Speaker, and perhaps this is a rather scary concept, but in fact that is the position we are in. Our minds are clearly focused on voter participation, voter turnout, the formality of voting and the like.

I want to pick up a couple of points from the report that I hope are foremost in the mind of the Victorian Electoral Commission. As members, we might also be able to assist with the implementation of some of the recommendations of the Electoral Matters Committee. The three issues highlighted in the report are trends — the Victorian trend for electoral enrolment is really important; the voter turnout rate; and informal voting. I will speak to each in turn.

On electoral enrolment, the report identifies that more work needs to be done to ensure young people are enrolled in the electoral process. Each of us, no matter what our age, is affected by decisions made in this house, but those above 18 years of age have the privilege and responsibility of being eligible to cast a

vote. Among some of the evidence we received it was very interesting to learn that many people do not realise they are obliged to enrol. They know that once they are enrolled, they should vote, and if they do not vote, they are likely to be fined. They might vote for the high motives of deciding who should sit in this place; they might vote simply because they are worried about the fine they will get. But the evidence we received makes it clear that many Victorians, not just those who are aged under 21 years, but people in their 20s, 30s and 40s have never enrolled and, in fact, have never been prosecuted for failing to enrol. Yet those who do enrol and do not vote obviously know they are going to cop a fine.

We highlighted the importance of everybody who should be on the roll taking their responsibilities seriously, and if not, being penalised for failing to do so. Once they are on the roll it is very important that they turn out to vote. Luckily, in my view, Australia has compulsory voting. I think it is really important that each MP, at occasional moments in our lives, is castigated for failing to do what each and every member of our electorate would like us to do. Those wishes might be at opposite extremes, but theoretically we are supposed to deliver what our electorate requests.

While people are happy to compliment us, and on rare occasions not be quite so complimentary, it is really important for us to know that every person who should have voted has enrolled and has cast a vote. It is a great tribute to Australian parliamentary democracy that when the committee did its investigations overseas, we learnt that many other countries are in awe of the system we have established. They think our compulsory enrolment and compulsory voting is fantastic.

The average Victorian voter turnout rate is in the vicinity of 93.38 per cent, so not everybody votes, but that rate is infinitely better than some of the worst examples we came across. In the 40th Canadian general election in 2008 only 59.4 per cent of the electorate voted. That was very disappointing for the Canadian government; it was the lowest rate ever recorded for a general election there. Also, members know what happened recently in the United Kingdom when voter participation increased markedly, and that is a good thing.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — The time for making statements on parliamentary committee reports has expired.

APPROPRIATION (2010/2011) BILL*Second reading***Debate resumed from 4 May; motion of Mr BRUMBY (Premier).**

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — In my budget response today I wish to talk about some portfolio issues. The bulk of my contribution will be on those issues, and I also wish to make a few observations regarding how the budget affected the electorate as a whole or, as in the case of my electorate, did not affect it. This government is always talking about education being its no. 1 priority. We see it in the glossy brochures, we see it in the television advertisements and we hear it in the radio advertisements. Millions of dollars are being spent telling everybody in Victoria that education is this government's no. 1 priority, so when I was looking at the Treasurer's speech and listening to Mr Lenders reading the speech in this place I was very interested in what was going to be addressed in education. I was disappointed.

I would have thought, given that education is the government's no. 1 priority, that perhaps one-quarter of the budget would have been dedicated to it. However, when I started to look through the speech I found it very hard to find any mention of education. In fact there were only nine lines in the whole of the Treasurer's speech regarding education, the government's so-called no. 1 priority. There are 350 lines in the Treasurer's speech and only 9 of them, on page 5, actually talk about education.

How can the government possibly say education is its no. 1 priority when the opposition has identified that \$83 million less is going to be spent on education in the coming financial year than in the last financial year? When that was put to the government it said, 'It is to do with shuffling amounts from the commonwealth around from here to there'. We said, 'Well, we'll take that on face value', and when the minister was challenged to show where in the budget papers it says that, it could not be found. There was absolutely no explanation. It is all smoke and mirrors; it is very, very tricky.

Ms Pike interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! The Minister for Education should not interject over the table in that manner.

Mr DIXON — It is incredible. Education is the government's no. 1 priority, yet it has only got nine lines in the whole budget speech. The government has

ripped \$83 million out of education, and that cannot be explained by anyone or found by anyone.

This education budget is lacking in vision. It is quite obvious it is not the no. 1 priority of this government. There are no new initiatives in it. It is a symptom of the malaise of a tired government and of a government that is totally out of ideas and not interested in education. The government goes through the spin and the rhetoric and the advertisements and the Shine campaign — all those sorts of things — but when it comes to the substance and actually putting meat on the bones of the plans this budget is sadly lacking in terms of education. As I said, it is spin; it is all about spin.

There are some particular examples I would like to pick out — for example, the Seymour regeneration project. It was announced in this budget that \$4.1 million would be spent on the Seymour regeneration project. The Seymour community has been waiting for this for a long while and is very excited about it, but unfortunately when you look at the budget paper — I am looking at page 42 of budget paper 1 — you see that the \$4.15 million is not going to be spent this financial year, which is fair enough, but you also see that it is not going to be spent in the next financial year either, which this budget provides expenditure for. It is in the never-never column under the heading 'Remaining expenditure' — \$4.15 million on the never-never. If this government has its way, the very earliest this school will receive this money is July next year. There is no commitment to expenditure this financial year or next financial year.

In Bayswater we have the Knox regeneration project. The current member for Bayswater came out and said about the \$4.5 million allocation that some of that money is going to be spent in this financial year but that the majority of it — \$2.8 million of that money — is in the never-never column. The 'Remaining expenditure' column is a very big column in this budget. There is no time frame for it, there is no commitment to it; there is just an amount there. It always goes back to the big announcement, 'We are spending all this money', but communities are never told when the money is actually going to be spent. I commend the member for Bayswater for pointing that out. I understand that the former member for Bayswater, Mr No Toll, said that the current member does not know what she is talking about. She does; she knows how to read a budget document. She found that the budget document says that \$2.8 million is in the never-never column.

Moving right along to regeneration, \$162 million was announced as the spending on regeneration. I want to talk about two regeneration projects. One of them is the

Bendigo regeneration project. Given the neglected state of the secondary colleges there, the reorganisation of secondary 9–10 colleges in Bendigo is a good thing, but that project is \$19 million over budget. In fact when you look at the total regeneration allocation there is nothing new there. These are ongoing projects, projects that have already been announced, it is about reannouncements and commitments of money. There is nothing new there; it is not a visionary sort of statement.

Let us look at the Heidelberg regeneration project, for example — and there is some real controversy about this. I worry, especially about the primary school students in the southern area down in Bellfield, West Ivanhoe and West Heidelberg. I think less than 50 per cent of households in that area have a car, and they are expected to go kilometres away to the furthest corner of that area to access a primary school. That is a real concern, and again, people there feel they have not been consulted. In fact the Ombudsman found that school council considerations cannot be said to have been fully informative under the government's guidelines. The government has not got that information from the community, and its decisions do not reflect what the community actually thinks. The government has no basis for coming out and saying that the community accepts this and thinks it is a great idea. That is what the Ombudsman said; it is not just what I say.

In terms of the specifics of the Heidelberg regeneration project, the community was expecting as a show of good faith that the project would move onto stage 2 funding, but even though it was led to believe that would be the case, there was no stage 2 funding. There was some extra funding for stage 1 because the costings were not done properly, and a number of asbestos issues have to be addressed, so more money has gone into stage 1; there has been no funding for stage 2.

Moving on to the issue of new schools in growth areas: that is again another bit of spin. There is funding for four new schools in growth areas, but when you look at it closely, there is funding for only one school; three of them are already under construction. As I explained, there are more funds for them, but there is only one new school. Look at our expanding suburbs and at the population growth, and listen to how much this government talks about it, yet only one brand new school is being built across the whole of Victoria in this coming financial year.

Obviously you need to buy land if you are to build new schools in growth areas. You would think with the expanding population, especially in the growth areas, and with the high price of land, now would be the time

to invest in land in those areas. But what has happened? About \$31 million of last year's budget was spent on buying land in growth areas; this year the budget allocates \$8 million. How is that going to keep up with the expansion in our growth suburbs and Victoria's growing population areas?

A good example of that is in the Pakenham–Officer growth corridor, where the lack of planning by this government over the last 10 years for secondary school education is evident. Primary schools out there are full, but there is only one government secondary college in the whole area. That is why a choice for parents in government education is not being provided.

Already more than 50 per cent of students of secondary school age go to non-government schools. There is no provision in this budget for land in that growth corridor. As I mentioned in my members statement this morning, the member for Gembrook has now backflipped and said a primary school is needed in that area; she has withdrawn her support for a new secondary college, unlike what the opposition has promised — that is, to buy land and build a new secondary school in the Officer area.

Another one of the government's centrepieces regarding education is the \$1.9 billion to rebuild, renovate and extend all Victorian schools by 2016. We do not know whether that means the start or the end of 2016, or the 2016–17 financial year. The figures are a bit rubbery! Schools are very excited about this. The rhetoric is fantastic but what does it actually mean?

It means that if you have had a few hundred thousand dollars spent on your school since 2000, you have been rebuilt, you have been renovated, and you have been extended. Schools which have received small amounts in the last 10 years are expecting a lot more, and they will not be receiving anything more until after 2016. That is the way it works. Added to that is the uncertainty of schools not knowing when they are going to receive money or how much they are going to receive. They have absolutely no idea. They get a vague tap on the shoulder, and somebody says, 'Get your plans ready. You are ready to go'. The one thing that frustrates schools — and they say this to me repeatedly — is the lack of transparency. They do not know what is going on.

There is no better example of the mismanagement of the building process by the government than the Building the Education Revolution (BER) program. Every project has gone over time, there have been cuts and there is no value for money — and this is from the limited information we can get out of this government.

There has been no choice. There has been no involvement of school communities; there has been no involvement of school principals. As I said, the lack of value in what they are getting is absolutely criminal.

Again, the government is using some of that federal money to evade its own responsibilities. For example, Tootgarook Primary School in my electorate is being rebuilt, but only \$1.7 million is coming from this government; the federal government is contributing funds through its BER. The Rye Primary School was forced to sign over the \$3 million it should have received so it could be redirected towards the neighbouring Tootgarook Primary School. The commonwealth has been bailing out the state's responsibilities for capital works.

Every day schools face the problem of maintenance issues. A brand new wing may have been built by the federal government, which is wonderful, but the everyday maintenance — the leaking roofs, the broken windows, the rotting floorboards — is a problem for so many of our schools. There is absolutely no mention of further maintenance funding for our schools in this budget.

Before I move on to talk about my electorate I mention that the government is talking a lot about its goals. In budget paper 3 it talks about one of its major policy decisions and directions — that is, by 2010, 90 per cent of students will complete year 12 or its equivalent. The government is way behind on that goal. We are only looking at 80 per cent completion at the moment. The government has said that is of extreme importance and is just one indicator that this government is badly failing.

Moving on to my electorate of Nepean, as I have said there is very little to talk about in terms of what this budget does for my electorate. The commentary in the local papers and in the local community groups reflects this. There is no expansion of bus services on the Mornington Peninsula; residents badly need express services from Rosebud to Frankston to cut down the 1½ hours travelling time. It is quicker to get to Melbourne from Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong and Traralgon than it is from Rosebud, and we need to address that. There is no extra funding for Rosebud Hospital or even for Frankston Hospital, which is the peninsula's nearest major hospital.

The Mornington Peninsula suffers from massive traffic congestion, not just in summer but all year round. Generally traffic on Point Nepean Road is at a standstill, but the possibility of an alternative route has not been addressed in any way, shape or form. The

amount of traffic using the Mornington Peninsula Freeway is also quite incredible, but it has no noise barriers. They seem to be used along the freeways in some of the more marginal seats, but absolutely nothing is happening on the Mornington Peninsula Freeway between Dromana and Rosebud, and that is a huge issue for the hundreds of people who live permanently along that freeway, which is carrying volumes of traffic which were never envisaged.

Beach renourishment is a major issue. As I have already mentioned twice in this place, Portsea Beach has disappeared and massive damage has been done to the diving industry; people who want to visit and recreate on Port Phillip Bay are being affected. Damage has also been done at Port Nepean National Park; the cliffs and sand dunes are falling into the sea. There has been an incredible amount of damage there over the past 12 months, and as winter approaches it will only get worse. It is more than just a matter of beach renourishment; something must be done urgently to stop a large part of Port Nepean actually falling into the bay.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! The member's time has expired, and the member for Yuroke will have the call when the bill is next before the chamber.

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

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

ABSENCE OF MINISTER

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling questions I advise the house that the Minister for Agriculture is absent from question time today. Any questions for the minister's portfolio will be answered by the Minister for Regional and Rural Development.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Children: protection

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier now apologise to those vulnerable children that his government has directly placed in situations where they have been physically and sexually assaulted, abused and even raped?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, which relates of course to the Ombudsman's report which was tabled in

Parliament today. I make it very clear that we take the protection of children and the protection of vulnerable children in our society very seriously indeed. We have provided, as I think the Leader of the Opposition knows, significant additional funding in this area in the last two budgets. We have implemented a number of significant system reforms, which, by the way, have been endorsed and publicly complimented by those who work in this area.

We have also put in place a range of other legislative mechanisms to protect children, particularly working children. Members of this house will remember the Working with Children Act that we put through in 2005 with tougher checks, which was opposed, by the way, by a number of members of this house.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member for Scoresby and the member for Warrandyte to cease interjecting in that manner.

Mr BRUMBY — The Ombudsman's report shows that on any given day of the week there are around 5000 children who are in care across the state. What he says in his report is that in the vast majority of these cases the children are well cared for.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Forest Hill will stop interjecting in that manner.

Mr BRUMBY — The fact is that the vast majority of carers — whether they are foster carers, whether they are relatives or whether they are agency staff — do an excellent job, a fantastic job, of caring for some of the most vulnerable and traumatised children in the community.

In his report the Ombudsman, in highlighting what is a minority of cases, a small number of cases, points — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Scoresby. I ask the member for Bass not to interject in that manner.

Mrs Fyffe interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Evelyn.

Mr BRUMBY — In a small number of those cases those children have been betrayed by those who have

been caring for them. That is exactly what the Ombudsman says.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Warrandyte.

Mr BRUMBY — The Ombudsman says those children have suffered abuse and neglect from parents who have betrayed the most basic of trusts. As I have said before in this house in relation to child protection, where a child is removed from a family this is the most difficult decision social workers or specialists in this area will face. The children are then placed in a form of care. In being placed in care, they are subject to the most stringent checks that are put in place, and what the Ombudsman has found is that in some cases those who have been providing that care have betrayed that trust. The Ombudsman himself says that the government has been taking positive steps in the area of policy reform.

Mr Baillieu — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. The Premier appears to be in denial — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The Premier is being relevant to the question as asked.

Mr BRUMBY — In relation to the recommendations that have been made by the Ombudsman, we obviously welcome his report and we are implementing — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Member for Scoresby

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Scoresby has been warned, and under standing order 124 I ask him to leave the chamber for 30 minutes.

Honourable member for Scoresby withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Children: protection

Questions resumed.

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — As I said in relation to the Ombudsman’s report, we will be implementing all but one of his recommendations. The minister today, on top of the additional funding and system reforms that have already been made, indicated that further in response to the Ombudsman’s report we will extend specialist training to all home-based carers, including kinship carers. We will lift the standard of reporting and the analysis of incidents. We will prioritise access to mental health services. We will extend carer payments until a child completes secondary school, rather than cutting payments off when they turn 18. We will also provide additional educational support for children. We will continue with the reforms, and we will make further changes — and we are committed to delivering a better system.

Aboriginals: employment

Ms RICHARDSON (Northcote) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the Labor government’s commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: can the Premier outline the steps the Labor government is taking to support indigenous employment?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I thank the member for Northcote for her question. This is a question which comes on National Sorry Day, a commemorative day of remembrance and respect for Aboriginal families and children who were forcibly separated under the policies of past governments. On behalf of the Victorian government, I restate our motion of support for the stolen generations, which was passed in 2000. Members will recall the motion. It states:

That this house acknowledges that there was a stolen generation of indigenous Australians forcibly removed from their families causing deep and ongoing hurt to the children removed, their families and — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member for Caulfield to cease interjecting in that manner. I warn the member for Hastings, and I advise him particularly that there will be no second warning.

Mr BRUMBY — This is the resolution passed by this house in 2000:

That this house acknowledges that there was a stolen generation of indigenous Australians forcibly removed from their families causing deep and ongoing hurt to the children removed, their families and indigenous communities and condemns any action which would threaten Australia’s international reputation or further set back the cause of reconciliation.

As members will recall, that motion was passed at that time with bipartisan support from the then Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of The Nationals and the then Premier. As all members would be aware, a fundamental objective of this government is to close the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Victorians.

We are all aware that our indigenous community faces a significant challenge, whether it be in terms of Aboriginal health, whether it be in terms of year 12 completion rates or whether it be in terms of youth unemployment. Nationally all of those issues have been highlighted more recently through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agenda. At the state level we operate through the Victorian indigenous affairs framework, which has set 5, 10 and 15-year targets for improving the lives of indigenous people. Victoria is the only state that reports on these outcomes every year in the Parliament.

We know that the work of the Victorian indigenous affairs framework, which enjoys bipartisan support, is delivering some important improvements. We are seeing improved birth weights among indigenous babies, and I was able to report on this at COAG; we are seeing increased participation in kindergarten for three-year-olds and four-year-olds; we are seeing increased school attendance at primary and secondary levels; and we are seeing improvements in literacy and numeracy at years 3, 5, 7 and 9. All of these things probably have shown more progress in recent years than we have seen in a long time. In addition we have committed to halving the gap in employment outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians over a decade and to close that gap by 2023. Again, there is strong bipartisan support for this objective.

I am therefore confident that all members will welcome the announcement that the government has made today through the Deputy Premier and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs that the government will commit \$33.7 million over the next four years to a new partnership with Aboriginal Victorians, one that is designed to create jobs and new economic opportunities and lead to a future which we hope will be firmly

focused on economic independence for Aboriginal people.

We are doing this through initiatives. There is \$5.2 million to engage young people in education and support them to transition to employment or further study. There is a further \$11.3 million over four years for increasing employment opportunities through Aboriginal employment brokers, through TAFE scholarships and through an Aboriginal employment resource centre. There is also \$4.1 million over four years for a partnership with the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry to provide Aboriginal businesses with support to develop and grow and, again, to provide access to business advisers, accredited business training and business management skills.

Across government too we are demonstrating our leadership as a government by increasing Aboriginal employment across all levels of the public sector. We are at 0.5 per cent today and our target is to increase to 1 per cent in the future.

I take this opportunity today to thank all members of the Victorian Aboriginal Economic Development Group. I particularly thank John Morse and Jason Eades for the great work they have done. I also thank all members of the group as well as the ministers on the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs, particularly the Deputy Premier and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, for their hard work on what is a new economic agenda.

Finally, I think all members of this house would want us to show demonstrable progress in closing the gap. As I said, there is strong bipartisan support across this Parliament for closing that gap. I believe we have made significant progress in recent years, particularly in health, early childhood education and school achievement. I believe the economic development strategy released today with additional funding of \$33.7 million, support programs for the Aboriginal community, employment and business brokers and the public sector target will usher in a new era of opportunity for Aboriginal people in our state.

Children: protection

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the Ombudsman's report, which has found that the Premier's government has placed children in environments where they have been physically and sexually assaulted, had limbs broken or been knocked unconscious, been physically assaulted or raped, been placed with adult 'friends' who

have then engaged them in sexual acts, and have reported their carers selling drugs to other children, and I ask: how did the Premier let this happen?

Ms Marshall interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Forest Hill.

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — As I indicated before, there have been significant increases in funding provided in this area in the period we have been in government. The Leader of the Opposition may well make political points about this, but the reality is that the funding levels today are immeasurably higher than they were in the 1990s, when funding in this area was cut back by more than 10 per cent per annum.

Ms Wooldridge interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Doncaster!

Mr BRUMBY — There is more funding, there are system reforms, there are working-with-children checks and there is rapidly increasing demand on the system. If members read the Ombudsman's report, they will see that the Ombudsman notes that we have seen a significant shift away from the old out-of-home care system that used to operate in our state. Members would do well to remember that that system involved large-scale group homes in the 1970s and 1980s — institutions which failed so miserably. The fact is that the system today is significantly better than the system it has replaced. It is not and never will be a perfect system.

Mr Burgess interjected.

Questions interrupted.

NAMING AND SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Member for Hastings

The SPEAKER — Order! Under standing order 124 the member for Hastings will leave the chamber for 30 minutes.

Mr Burgess interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I name the member for Hastings, and I ask the Leader of the House to take the appropriate action.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Energy and Resources) — I move:

That the member for Hastings be suspended from the service of the house for the remainder of the day's sitting.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable member for Hastings withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Children: protection

Questions resumed.

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — The reality is that the system today is an immeasurably better system than the one it has replaced. If members read the Ombudsman's report, they will see that he says the vast majority of those children are well cared for. Where they are not, where they are placed in someone's care and someone betrays the trust of those children — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Minister for Health! I ask the member for South-West Coast to stop interjecting in that manner.

Mr BRUMBY — All of the initiatives and measures that we have put in place are designed to produce a better system. Obviously I am personally sorry in any case where there is an individual child who is placed in the care of foster parents who betray that trust. Of course I would be sorry, as any member of this Parliament would and should be. We have increased resources, we have reformed the system and received endorsement for those reforms, and we have announced today that there will be further improvements as a result of the Ombudsman's report.

Police: numbers

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I refer to the Brumby Labor government's commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: will the minister outline to the house how the Brumby Labor government is continuing to make record investments in our police force to assist in keeping Victoria safe and say whether he is aware of any challenges and alternative policies?

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — Can I say that police across

this great state go about the business of making their communities safer, and we thank them very much for the work they do. When we come to the end of this year, we will have had in place nearly 2000 additional police since we first came to government, which is the biggest increase in police during the course of a decade we have ever seen in the history of the state.

As members would be aware, we have announced that in the next five years there will be the biggest increase, with 1966 additional front-line police. That is \$561 million over five years for 1700 police — blue-shirts; 74 million over four years to free up 200 police by employing civilians; and another \$38 million over four years to free up police call-takers by employing civilians.

The work of police continues. In June we will see transit police numbers reach 250. The transit unit sits alongside the operational response units, which the police commissioner has said he wants to increase with additional numbers. As part of that, he wants to use intelligence on the public transport network, making sure he has the intelligence to tackle crime and, where it is displaced, to follow up. He believes having that flexibility is vital for what he wants to do.

I am aware of a group in the community that has some alternative policies. This group proposes to spend \$200 million on protective services officers. This is a group that said there should be a cap of 150 and then turned around and said there should be more. It flip-flopped. What it said was — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to come back to the question as asked, and I ask for the cooperation of the opposition.

Mr CAMERON — As part of this alternative policy there is to be a reduction in government advertising. The government is aware of another alternative policy.

Mrs Shardey — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is obviously still debating the issue — —

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The minister was clearly talking about government business.

Mr CAMERON — The government has considered another alternative policy of this group. It is a \$340 million — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will come back to the question as asked.

Mr CAMERON — Yes, I will come back to the question as asked in relation to alternative policies and the government's consideration of those alternative policies, Speaker. There we have this \$340 million promise, which we have considered — —

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, to prevent this descending into farce, it seems to me, with respect, when we all know perfectly well that the minister is now referring to a policy advanced by the opposition in circumstances where, again with respect, under your direction the government is not allowed to attack opposition policy during question time, I ask you to call upon the minister to at least inform the house as to what is the organisation that has advanced this alternative policy. If it is that he refers to the opposition, then he obviously cannot proceed with it; if it is otherwise, then he can.

Mr Batchelor — On the point of order, Speaker, the minister was asked to outline to the house how the government is continuing to make record investments in our police force. In addition to that question, which he was answering, he was also asked if he was aware of any challenges to that, and he was also answering that through the issue of alternatives. In terms of the question he was specifically asked, he was answering both elements of it, and he should be allowed to continue.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister can respond to the question as asked without attacking opposition policy.

Mr CAMERON — In relation to this policy, which I do not attack, I simply say it is a flip-flop. We totally reject this flip-floppity approach, because we believe in record police numbers.

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, with respect, the minister is reducing this to farce. He is seeking to make a distinction which is nonsensical and in so doing he admits by the way he has just spoken that he is speaking about opposition policy. He should not be allowed to address the answer in that manner.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister has concluded his answer.

Children: protection

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the Ombudsman's report on out-of-home care, which catalogues the complete and

utter failure of this government to protect the state's most vulnerable children, and I ask: given that the Ombudsman previously warned the government in 2005 and in almost every annual report for the past decade, why did the Premier ignore these recommendations, which would have protected vulnerable children from sexual and physical assault, abuse and harm?

Ms Marshall interjected.

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Member for Forest Hill

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Forest Hill has been warned. Under standing order 124 I ask her to leave the chamber for 30 minutes.

Honourable member for Forest Hill withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Children: protection

Questions resumed.

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — The honourable member should read the report.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — She obviously has not read it. I refer the honourable member to pages 30 and 31 of the report, which talk about the reform directions taken by the government.

Mr K. Smith interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Hang on. She has asked a question, let me — —

Mr K. Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member for Bass to cooperate in the smooth running of question time. His constant interjecting is not acceptable.

Mr BRUMBY — In fact the Ombudsman goes to the question of reforms which have been made over recent years.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — That is not what he says.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Doncaster has asked her question. I ask her to cease interjecting so that the Premier can respond to it.

Mr BRUMBY — If you read the Ombudsman's report, you will see that it specifically refers to a number of the reforms that have been put in place by the government. It refers to the May 2009 reforms announced by the Minister for Community Services for out-of-home care services in a document entitled *Directions for Out-of-Home Care*. The report goes on to say:

It involves \$135 million in expenditure over four years, commencing from the 2009–10 budget and outlines seven specific reform directions ...

It then goes on to provide more detail of the reform priorities for 2009–10, and I will not take up the time of the house reading the whole page. The Ombudsman's report then goes on to conclusions, and it says in paragraph 133

The department is taking positive steps in the area of policy reform. In particular, I note the focus on placement prevention and early reunification strategies and the preference for kinship or permanent care placements to promote stability of care.

It then goes on to say:

It is too early to form an opinion on the effectiveness of the new policies and processes being implemented, particularly in light of resourcing issues. However, I intend to continue monitoring the progress of these reforms and the impact of additional resources ...

That is what the Ombudsman has said; he has said that reforms have been put in place. He outlines those reforms, acknowledges they involve additional funds and says it is too early to make a judgement about whether they are working. So the premise of the honourable member's question is not borne out by the Ombudsman's report.

Housing: government initiatives

Mr LUPTON (Pahran) — My question is to the Minister for Housing. I refer to the Brumby Labor government's commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: can the minister outline what steps the government is taking to ensure that Victorians have access to housing that is safe, affordable and secure?

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Housing) — I have pleasure in updating the house on progress in delivering our record housing commitment. As members of the

house would be aware, more than 3200 new homes for low-income Victorians are now under construction under the Nation Building program. On National Sorry Day, which is today, I am pleased to advise the house that the government recently committed to constructing 200 new homes for indigenous Victorians through this program that will be managed by our housing provider, Aboriginal Housing Victoria. This builds on our work with indigenous community housing organisations to secure the future of community-owned housing built through the former federal community housing investment program (CHIP).

There are over 500 CHIP properties owned by indigenous community housing organisations across Victoria. Those properties are secure in the autonomous management of the indigenous community. In every other state the handing back of these properties to state governments has been absorbed into the state housing portfolio, but this has not been the case in Victoria. In Victoria we have said we are committed to an outcome that ensures that these properties will remain under the ownership, control and management of indigenous housing organisations. All of the cooperatives scattered right across the state — and we have them in many regional settings — will be maintained by Aboriginal organisations themselves.

These projects are an excellent example of how this government has worked in cooperation with Aboriginal communities. The partnerships we have with Aboriginal people — and indeed the announcements that the Deputy Premier made today — attest to the result of this policy setting, whereby our government has truly got a partnership with and a respect for the autonomy of Aboriginal people and for their ability to run their own organisations.

I am also pleased to announce that only last week I was with the member for Prahran and the Deputy Premier when we made a very significant further announcement in our partnership with the Rudd federal government. The announcement was for funding of \$175 million for three housing estates, which in Prahran will deliver 188 new homes through an investment of \$62 million, which is the first stage of what is going to be the complete transformation of that Prahran housing estate over the next 10 years. This will be a magnificent redevelopment of that estate. At Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, there will be 152 new homes, which will involve an investment of \$43 million, and 207 new homes will be built at Richmond, with an investment of \$70 million.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Bass is warned.

Mr WYNNE — The renewal of these estates has never been more important. Our high-rise estates, as member of this house know, were built in the 1960s, primarily as worker housing. The investments we are making today are going to make a significant change not only to the lives of people who live there now but to future residents who are going to be moving to these three estates.

Earlier this month the member for Melbourne and I announced a landmark jobs agreement with Melbourne hospital networks, TAFE providers and our private sector partners in the historic redevelopment of the Carlton housing estate. This partnership will deliver job opportunities to some of our most vulnerable tenants and will include jobs working on the redevelopment itself and in some of the service provider organisations that are very close to the estate.

I do not need remind the house of the investment of the Brumby government and what we on this side of the house stand for. In Parliament we hear from the opposition about a housing crisis, but out in the community all we see is the flip-flop and a disgraceful position on social housing projects.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will confine his comments to government business.

Mr WYNNE — We were left a legacy on these estates when we came to government: 44 towers across inner Melbourne where, apart from basic maintenance on those estates, we were left with a smouldering wreck, because \$7 million was the total amount that was spent across all of those 44 towers over the entire period of the previous government. That is less than the \$9 million — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the Leader of The Nationals that that is not parliamentary behaviour.

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is obviously using question time to attack the opposition, and I ask you to have him return to answering the question.

The SPEAKER — Order! I believe the minister was describing the situation when the government was first elected in 1999 and thus could hardly be attacking the opposition. I do, however, suggest to the minister that he has been speaking for some time and needs to conclude his answer.

Mr WYNNE — Can I say in conclusion that the record speaks for itself. It is not disputed. Above and beyond basic maintenance, \$7 million was spent on those 44 towers — less than the \$9 million that was spent on renovating the former Premier's office. That is the commitment of those opposite to public and social housing. You have to look at the track record, and that is the track record — flip-flop, flip-flop and no commitment.

Snowy River: water licence review

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Water. As the New South Wales government has amended the Snowy water licence established by the three governments, without reaching agreement or accepting any amendments proposed by Victoria or following the agreed intergovernmental process, I ask: has the Victorian government taken any action against these clear breaches committed by the dysfunctional New South Wales Labor government?

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Water) — I thank the member for Gippsland East for his question, and I will choose my words very carefully. Firstly, I again thank the member for Gippsland East for his question. I think all members in this chamber, regardless of what party they come from, would recognise that he has been a tireless campaigner for the restoration of environmental flows into the stressed Snowy river system.

In 2002 the New South Wales and Victorian governments reached a historic agreement around practical measures that could be taken to restore water to the Snowy River. Under that agreement a series of agreements, activities and actions needed to occur. One of those was a review after five years of the Snowy Hydro licence that was to be initiated by the New South Wales government, and although late, it did initiate that Snowy Hydro licence review. As a consequence of that process, earlier this month the Minister for Water in New South Wales, the Honourable Phillip Costa, wrote to me seeking Victoria's approval for a number of changes to the operation of the Snowy Hydro licence.

I was pleased to receive Mr Costa's letter, because the receipt of his letter is, I believe, an acceptance by New South Wales of the fact that it does require the agreement of the Victorian government to make certain variations to the licence. There had been some doubt as to whether or not it recognised its legal obligation to have agreement from Victoria. The receipt of that letter, in my view, recognises the fact that the New South Wales government accepts the need to have the

approval of the Victorian government to make certain changes to the Snowy Hydro licence.

The New South Wales government is seeking a number of changes that concern the Victorian government. It seeks a change to the operating rules for releases of water into the Murrumbidgee River. We will reflect on that. It also seeks approval for Snowy Hydro to be able to take water only from the upper element of the thermocline of the water stored in the dams when it is released into the Snowy River. We naturally would have concerns about that. Taking water from one portion of the dam supply — the warmest portion only — can of course have an impact on the river. We want to reflect on what the practical impact of that would be and on whether or not that would threaten or undermine the biodiversity in the river.

We will carefully consider our views before we respond to those issues, but I believe it is accepted by New South Wales that it does require the permission of the Victorian government and the agreement of the Victorian government before certain changes to the Snowy Hydro licence can occur.

It is also the case that there is a water debt owed to Snowy Hydro that needs to be repaid before water releases above the minimum can occur in the Snowy River, and there has been some discussion as to whether or not that water debt can be forgiven. We are of the view that those issues can be worked through, and it would be beneficial for the Snowy River if some agreement could be reached between the different parties to forgive that debt so that more water could be returned more quickly to the Snowy River. We will reflect on those issues too and obviously have those discussions with the New South Wales government.

I thank the member for Gippsland East for his question. I will continue to work with all elements of the Victorian government to make sure that we can put forward the views of the Victorian government about how this river can be managed in a way which will see urgently needed water returned to it as quickly as possible. It has been difficult to work through some of these issues with the New South Wales government, but I believe that the recent letter that we have received from the New South Wales minister accepts certain fundamental premises that have been advanced by Victoria for some time, and we are pleased about that.

Time will tell as to whether we get the outcome we would want to see. In the meantime Victoria will continue to work with those communities along the Snowy River that are desperately concerned to see water returned not only in significant volumes and as

quickly as possible but in the most effective way to make sure that the biodiversity of the river is protected and enhanced.

Gaming: licenses

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — My question is to the Minister for Gaming. I refer the minister to the Brumby government's decision to transition Victoria's gaming industry to a venue-based model, and I ask the minister to outline to the house if there are any challenges facing the industry now that the initial allocation of electronic gaming machines is complete.

Mr ROBINSON (Minister for Gaming) — I thank the member for Narre Warren North for his important question on what is a very important industry in Victoria — an industry in which he understands more than 50 000 people are licensed to work. In terms of industries in Victoria, the gaming industry is a very significant employer in the state. The industry, as everyone knows, is going through some profound reforms. Reforms announced in 2008 allowed pubs and clubs to break free of the controls put on them by Tattersall's and Tabcorp, the longstanding duopoly — reforms that were broadly welcomed at the time.

I recall some commentary at the time, when Clubs Victoria, the Australian Hotels Association, the Club Managers Association and countless clubs themselves welcomed this profound reform. I recall that one commentary that stood out at the time was from the Numurkah Golf and Bowls Club, a very reputable club, which I know the member for Murray Valley holds in high regard. It said at the time:

... this government has demonstrated its commitment to put its community before corporate Australia, which is something the government can be proud of. This must have been — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask opposition members to come to order.

Mr ROBINSON — To continue the quote:

This must have been a hard decision for the current government but our board feel the right decision for all Victorians.

And we agree wholeheartedly with the Numurkah Golf and Bowls Club.

Mr K. Smith — What are they saying now?

Mr ROBINSON — I am going to come to what they say now, and I thank the member for his prompt.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Minister for Gaming to ignore interjections from the member for Bass.

Mr ROBINSON — Now the industry transition has proceeded further to the entitlements being allocated, something that we can say proceeded in exactly the fashion that the Parliament intended when the Parliament gave, I remind the house and members opposite, unanimous support to the bill that allowed for the transition. That is another way of saying that the opposition's fingerprints are all over this transition — and it is a bit late to start backing out.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the opposition once again for some cooperation. I also ask the minister not to invite interjections from the opposition.

Mr ROBINSON — At this stage of the transition phase we are now able to look at the response from clubs and pubs across the state. We can turn again to the Numurkah Golf and Bowls Club, which was quoted last week in the *Numurkah Leader* under the heading of 'Golf club secured'. The club manager, Mr Duffy, is reported to have had this to say:

The club will now commence planning and seek approval for the gaming room extension in preparation for 2012 and beyond ...

The article says he went on to say:

... with its place in the state gaming industry secured for the longer term, the Numurkah club will continue to build on recent substantial federal government grants and other resources to continue to develop its golf course, bowling greens, accommodation and members' amenities for this community.

It is a fantastic thing that a club like the Numurkah club can go ahead with confidence and invest. It is a great thing right across the state for the 50 000 Victorians who are employed in that industry who can look forward with great certainty and security to the next decade.

I have been asked about what the challenges are to the industry. There is a profound challenge for the industry going forward, and it relates to the certainty of policy — the policy environment going forward. That is because clubs like Numurkah right across the state want certainty with their forward investment plans.

Mr Mulder interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Polwarth is warned.

Mr ROBINSON — Can you imagine the damage that would be done to this industry if the government started flip-flopping with policy, flip-flopping backwards and forwards? For example, can you imagine the uncertainty if the government were to come out today and say, 'We have changed our mind on 27 500 entitlements, and we are going to cut 5000' and then come back the next day to flip-flop again and say, 'Actually, we have rethought that, we will stick with 27 500 entitlements'.

Equally can you imagine the uncertainty if the government's policy were to enter into meaningful negotiations to set a lower price for entry into the marketplace with entitlements and then some months later to flip-flop and flip-flop and say, 'Actually, we think the industry should pay three times what it now pays'? Can you imagine the effect on clubs like Numurkah and others all across the state? They would walk away from the industry in droves. Can you imagine the uncertainty if the government were to flip-flop its policy, to flip and flop and flip and flop — —

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is obviously debating the question. Like most other Labor members, he is not sure what hypothetical nonsense he is talking about, but I ask that he answer the question that he has been asked.

The SPEAKER — Order! The question clearly asked about challenges facing the industry. While being fairly dramatic, I think the minister was being relevant to the question. I suggest to the minister that he has been speaking for some time and that it is time to conclude his answer, even given the number of interruptions

Mr ROBINSON — I can say in conclusion that what the industry needs — —

Mr O'Brien interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Malvern will cease interjecting in that manner.

Mr ROBINSON — What industry operators need, whether it be in Numurkah or any other part of Victoria, is policy certainty, and that is what the Brumby government is giving them. They can go forward and invest in confidence. For the 50 000 people who ask of this place and the members in it one thing — that they make policy decisions and stick with them, that they do not go around flipping and flopping and flipping and flopping — we are getting on with the job of giving this industry certainty. That is what the 50 000 people in this important industry deserve, and that is what we will continue to deliver.

Children: protection

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to the findings of the Ombudsman that the government has placed children in out-of-home care where they have been physically and sexually assaulted, abused and harmed and to the Ombudsman's statement that:

It is unacceptable that these children were harmed when there was information available to indicate that their carers posed a risk to them.

I ask the Premier to explain to this chamber why he continues to defend and support the minister who is responsible for this gross incompetence on the part of his government?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — One of the mechanisms available to the government in screening carers is of course the working-with-children laws and checks which were put in place. By the way, the member asking this question opposed those laws at the second-reading stage.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — Yes, you did. These were laws that were put in place in this Parliament to protect children, and the Leader of The Nationals voted against them. That is the fact of the matter. The Ombudsman's report goes into all of the checks that are put in place in relation to the screening of carers. He refers to a screening process which involves a criminal record check, a medical assessment, a working-with-children check, a series of interviews, reference checks, a home and environment assessment and the carer providing a written account of their life history. In conclusion the Ombudsman's report says:

The processes for screening and assessing of foster carers are rigorous —

that is what it says, 'are rigorous' —

however, there is evidence that compliance with criminal record checking procedures can break down at times because of limited resources and/or failure to follow procedures.

By the way, of the 274 cases in which it was said that those checks had not been properly carried out, when all of those checks were applied in all of those cases the arrangements did not change because the circumstances had not changed. The checks are rigorous.

As I have said today in relation to previous questions, we have put in place significant additional funding, we have put in place a number of system reforms and we have put in place the working-with-children checks.

Basically we have agreed with the majority of the recommendations in this report, and obviously with those changes we will endeavour to see further improvements in the system so the best possible care can be provided to the most vulnerable children in our state.

Sport and recreation: government initiatives

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — My question is to the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs. I refer to the Brumby Labor government's commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: can the minister update the house on the Brumby government's investment in major sporting infrastructure, and is he aware of any challenges in this area?

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — I thank the member for Eltham for his question. As he points out, the Brumby government wants to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family. We also want it to be the best place for sport.

A few weeks ago Melbourne was crowned the world's ultimate sports city for the third time straight. We are the best in sport, and it is little wonder. Members need only look at the past month, with the blockbuster opening of AAMI Park, construction commencing on the new state athletics centre and the new home of the Victorian Institute of Sport at Albert Park, and the \$363 million redevelopment of Melbourne Park.

The Brumby government has announced many other important measures for Victorian sport, including \$14 million to go directly to grassroots sporting facilities and clubs, \$4 million to drought proof our local grounds, \$1.7 million to go to indigenous football programs and \$2 million for regionally significant sporting events. That amounts to close on \$450 million for Victorian sport, which is a record investment. After all of this, I was surprised to hear a member of this chamber describe that as 'very disappointing for sport and recreation' to the 21 followers of his Twitter account. I ask the member for Lowan and his extended family which part of the \$450 million is very disappointing.

I was asked about challenges. When you go to the website of the member for Lowan and click on the headline 'Policies', where does that take you — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to confine his comments to government business.

Mr MERLINO — Speaker, it takes you to a blank page. I kid you not! If you have no policies, at the very least — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will direct his comments to government business, or I will not hear him.

Mr MERLINO — What we can all do in this place is show our support for our major events and show our support for the sporting infrastructure that makes those major events possible.

I refer to an article in the *Sunday Herald Sun* of 16 May headed ‘Lib leader a no show’, in which it states in part that:

Ted Baillieu is under fire over his failure to attend a number of major events.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will not comment on that article.

Dr Napthine interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member for South-West Coast for some cooperation, so we can continue with question time.

Mr MERLINO — Victoria has a range of fantastic major sporting events, including the Australian Masters Golf Tournament, the Australian Formula One Grand Prix and the Australian Open tennis. Some of us go to those events and support this vibrant and much-loved industry — our major sporting events calendar.

I will conclude by commenting on the Australian Masters golf tournament and by referring to a few of the quotes about that event. ‘It’s been phenomenal’ — that was from Tiger Woods.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! While I acknowledge the house is fairly excited by Tiger Woods, I suggest the Speaker is not. I ask the minister to come back to the table and for the cooperation of all members to allow him to continue with his response to the question.

Mr MERLINO — The runner-up, Greg Chalmers, said, ‘I have never experienced anything like this in Australia’.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Members should come to order. I ask the minister to conclude his answer.

Mr MERLINO — I have just two more quotes, Speaker, and I return to economic matters. Referring to the Australian Masters event, the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry said it:

... highlights that major events is becoming domestically and internationally regarded as the icon of Melbourne.

I have one last quote, which is that this is:

... not an international tournament.

Where is the evidence that \$19 million is going to flow to Victoria?

...

It’s hard to believe that the Victorian public would think that this is a good idea.

The Leader of the Opposition said that.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister has concluded his answer, and the time set down for questions without notice has expired.

APPROPRIATION (2010/2011) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — As members would know, this year’s budget and the opposition’s response to it is yet another signal of the ocean of difference between Labor’s vision and the coalition’s policy vacuum. The Labor vision is about the long term; it is about investing in the future, investing in communities and investing in services. It is a vision that has certainly paid off, standing us in good stead as Victorians weather the global financial crisis and emerge ready to face the future.

The question Victorians must ask themselves in the next six months is: what kind of leadership do we need to steer us confidently into the future? After all, responsible, accountable government is not about talking Victoria down, nor is it about serving up half-baked homework on a scrap of paper you could not possibly fund even if you knew how.

Responsible, accountable government is about having fresh ideas and a vision of what you want to achieve, being sure to consider all points of view so you can get the best results, carefully mapping out how you will go about it and then working your guts out until you get

there. Those opposite will be very disappointed to hear there are no shortcuts in all of this. For example, it does not matter how glossy your brochure is if none of your ideas is new. More police on the beat is a novel suggestion from a party with a fetish for slashing police numbers, while in contrast Labor has made record increases since coming to office, with this year's budget committing to deliver a further 1966 front-line police.

Also included is the abolition of suspended sentences and the banning of the sale of knives to minors. The fact is that these guys must have been reading the newspapers. The list goes on, with an existing Labor approach to predate each and every one of these commitments.

Where then does the tangible difference lie? It lies in the fact that all the coalition has is a show bag of replicas, a fact that sounded in the deafening silence issuing from the other side as over \$130 million was announced in this year's budget to give Victorians faster access to justice and complement our investment in keeping Victoria safe.

Central to this is Victoria Legal Aid, which will receive a further \$49.85 million over two years. That totals \$68 million each year for the next two years; more Victorians will get the support they need when dealing with legal problems. Obviously not all members of the house have such a strong interest in supporting legal aid, but Labor believes that it is an absolutely fundamental measure of any community — that is, vulnerable and disadvantaged, in particular, have access to good legal advice and assistance.

Meanwhile \$64.3 million over five years will further reduce delays in our courts, with extra resources leading to the appointment of a new judge in the Court of Appeal, a new judge in the Supreme Court, two initial trial judges and two sexual assault list coordinators in the County Court, an additional magistrate in the Magistrates Court and an additional magistrate in the Children's Court. That builds on Labor's massive investment of over \$3.5 billion in the courts since coming to office — an investment that is certainly bearing fruit. Clearance rates — a key indicator of performance — are higher than ever, with Victoria having the second-highest clearance rate in the nation overall and our Supreme Court the highest rate of any superior court.

Equally vital is the \$2 million Legal Services Masterplan, which will assess the needs of our growing population to provide a future plan for the Supreme Court and courts in Wangaratta, Shepparton and Bendigo, and to respond to the need in growth areas

such as Whittlesea, Werribee and Dandenong. In line with our Next Generation Courts project these courts will need to be flexible, multijurisdictional and able to respond to the range of programs that now exist to resolve disputes as early and as appropriately as possible and to intervene to tackle the causes of crime.

Meanwhile a further \$2 million will support the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal's expansion of services into regional areas, reflecting the government's determination to bring greater access to justice to all Victorians regardless of where they live.

Importantly, \$11.2 million over four years will fund a Children's Court child protection mediation pilot project. Clearly, every Victorian child deserves a safe and happy home environment. Sadly, however, this is not every child's reality, and that sad reality can be further entrenched when cases involving children are more bitterly fought and argued than in any other jurisdiction because a family unit is at stake. The adversarial nature of these cases ultimately does further damage to already vulnerable children.

This is why, then, the government is now pushing for a more collaborative approach, with the budget funding better training, dedicated off-site conferencing and a greater focus on reaching the best outcome for the child. These investments come in addition to our significant allocations to Victoria Police, as well as to community corrections programs which stop offenders from being drawn further into the cycle of crime.

This year's budget, then, is really about managing pressure on our courts as we keep our communities safe, about recognising the legal needs of Victorians here and now and about planning for their very important needs in the future. It is about investing in the legal process, not just at one end but at all points along the spectrum, so that crime is deterred, so that crime is detected, so that crime is prevented from being repeated and indeed so that lives can actually get back on track.

This investment builds on the success of initiatives in our courts which work to resolve disputes as early, and therefore as affordably, as possible and which therefore free up more court time and taxpayer funds. It certainly builds on initiatives which use courts as a valuable checkpoint at which cycles of offending can be broken. I think that is important when you are talking about the justice system.

The justice system and our courts should be used as a positive intervention in people's lives where that is possible. If you look at the success of our Koori Courts, the Drug Court and the Neighbourhood Justice Centre,

to programs like the Assessment and Referral Court, funded through last year's budget and operational since last month, you see that certainly through those initiatives we are able to identify the underlying causes of offending behaviour.

In just one example of how programs such as this can break the cycle of offending, I can relate the story of Eric, a long-term but low-level offender referred to the court integrated services program when applying for bail on shop theft charges. Eric was homeless, had no income benefits, had a 30-year history of drug and alcohol misuse and a history of long-term institutionalisation. Through the CISP program, Eric was able to secure short-term housing and a referral for assistance in obtaining long-term housing; referral to treatment for his drug dependency; and, after a full neuropsychological assessment, was found to have had an acquired brain injury — something previously undiagnosed and for which he was now able to receive support.

Through this support Eric was able to complete bail successfully for the first time in his long history of offending. He served a sentence in the community and has not returned to prison or reoffended since December 2006. Without programs like this, individuals like Eric would go untreated, undiagnosed and unchanged, circling endlessly through the revolving door of offending and alienation, with the community the real loser in the equation.

If you are truly serious about stopping crime, you have to be smart as well as tough, and you have to plan for the long term. Addressing the causes of crime and stopping it from being repeated are the best things you can do for victims and the best thing you can do for the community. This means you cannot just treat courts as a cog in a machine — offenders punching in their cards before a judge duly hands them a ticket and sends them to prison. Yet sadly this is what many members opposite want to do.

I can just see that familiar call for mandatory sentencing hovering unspoken over their heads; the lazy notion embraced by those who do not have the energy to engage with ideas that get results. It does not matter what you call it: mandatory sentencing or minatory mandatory terms, the fact is it does not work. One of the crucial things to remember about mandatory sentencing, apart from the small matter of eroding one of the pillars of a democratic society, is that mandatory sentencing just does not work. Time and again it has been proven instead to decrease the number of guilty pleas, putting more victims through trauma and chewing up more court time. Nor does mandatory

sentencing do anything to stop reoffending, shuffling offenders in and out of a revolving door without any attempt to tackle the causes of crime.

It is timely, then, to remind all members — though some more than others — that the principles of the Sentencing Act are not limited to punishment but extend to prevention, deterrence, rehabilitation, and denouncement by the courts, on behalf of the community, of wrongdoing. If punishment is your only objective, the result will simply be the construction of more prisons and the expenditure of more money on people so institutionalised, disenfranchised and disillusioned that they will never be able to contribute to society again. Instead we need to make this contribution possible, and in the land of the fair go it would be reasonable to assume that any Australian who makes a mistake and pays for it is entitled to a second chance, to set things right.

Obviously there are hardened criminals within our population who have committed appalling crimes, who blew their second chance a long time ago, and for whom long-term imprisonment is the only decent option. For others however, criminal acts are a point on a trajectory of disadvantage, bad choices or disengagement that does not have to be completed. People of all political and legal backgrounds are recognising the destructive consequences of drawing people further into a cycle of crime and imprisonment when there are other more constructive options.

In a recent *Lateline* interview, the New South Wales Director of Public Prosecutions, Nicholas Cowdery, compared the lock 'em up and throw away the key approach, which has New South Wales prison rates at almost double the rate of those in Victoria, despite our low crime rate. He noted:

They must be doing something right in Victoria; if only we could learn and apply the lessons here.

As if that were not vindication enough, Greg Smith, the New South Wales shadow Attorney-General, made a similar cogent comparison with Victoria and concluded that:

We have come to a point in time when the theory of 'lock them up and throw away the key' just doesn't work.

What does work then? What works is investment in legal information, advice and representation. What works is investment in front-line policing as well as in community corrections down the track. What works is investment in court resources, programs and infrastructure to reduce delay and increase flexibility of

response, such as through our Next Generation Courts program.

What works is investment in supporting the vulnerable, such as children in need of protection, and in taking access to justice to all Victorians, regardless of where they live. What works is investment along all points of the spectrum that actually prevents crime, rather than just punishes it after the damage has been done. What works is having a plan for the long term, and this year's state budget is part of that very important plan — a plan that signals yet again that Labor is the one to lead Victoria into the future.

This is a very good budget for justice. It is a very good budget for the Attorney-General's portfolio. It is a very good budget for the courts. It is a very good budget for Victoria Legal Aid. Indeed, it is a very good budget for the Children's Court. I commend the 2010–11 budget to the house.

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — I am pleased to make a presentation on this year's May budget. Unlike the Attorney-General, I do not believe this is a good budget for the areas I am responsible for, which are local government and Aboriginal affairs. As the local member for Shepparton, I would also like to make some comments about my electorate as well.

It is appalling that this government has been in power for 11 years, has had over \$300 billion in revenue, and yet has still not been able to fix a number of problems happening right across a number of portfolios. On the issue of local government, I noted there were no press releases from the minister. This is not because the minister is lazy — I know there is no joy in this budget for local government. The Brumby government continues to shift costs and responsibilities onto local government, and this has caused many councils to be at financial risk.

About 18 to 20 councils, mainly in rural areas, are at the moment and will be into the future under huge financial constraint because of the burdening of responsibilities without appropriate funding from this government. A number of these country councils cover large geographic areas and have small populations, which means they have limited revenue. Because the government continues to increase their responsibilities, while not giving them appropriate funding, they have to raise their revenue from rates. We have a number of communities doing it tough because of drought, the bushfires and the locust plague that is eating through many of their crops.

It is also very difficult for councils, particularly in country areas, to maintain their public assets: their public buildings, roads, bridges, drainage, waste management, public lighting, sports grounds, parks, pools and club rooms. It is difficult for them to provide the very basic services that the community needs, such as human services, kindergartens and public libraries; local government provides about 100 services on behalf of the state government.

In 2003 the MAV (Municipal Association of Victoria) stipulated that the cost shifting on to local government was at about \$40 million. It has recently stated that it will cost councils an average of 4 per cent more of their rates to deliver the same level of services and capital works as last year. This is a huge increase for local councils. Those that do not have the ability to raise their rates — because it would put their residents under financial stress — are calling on the government to increase revenue to them, and that is just not happening.

The state government has also shifted a huge raft of responsibilities onto local government. They include the recently introduced landfill levy, where some councils will have to raise their rates by 1 per cent to cover that shortfall; the management of roadside weeds; neighbourhood safer places (NSPs); and social and public housing. I will go to those in detail. In regard to roadside weeds, last year the government gave \$20 million over four years. That sounds like a lot of money, but we must realise there are 79 councils with hundreds of kilometres of roads and that that funding also goes to the Department of Primary Industries to manage weeds and feral animals such as through fox programs and the like.

The councils were also saying they were not sure whose responsibility it was. I know that for the last four or five years there has been conflicting legislation dealing with whose responsibility it is to manage roadside weeds, whether it is the responsibility of the adjoining landowner, the state government or the local council. The government said it would sit down with councils and the MAV and provide advice about whose responsibility it is. That still has not happened, and all involved are still waiting to find out.

On the issue of neighbourhood safer places (NSPs), the bushfires royal commission recommended in its interim report that the state should identify, establish and advertise designated neighbourhood safer places. The Brumby government immediately passed that on to local councils without providing the necessary support. It took months to get the information about who is responsible for the maintenance of neighbourhood safer places and who will incur public liability if anyone has

an incident in those places. Solutions on those sorts of issues have just recently been worked out.

Last year \$500 000 was allocated in the budget and another \$500 000 has been allocated in this year's budget, but the MAV, which is a local government peak body, has said it needs \$12 million over two years to fulfil this responsibility. Again, it falls back on those councils, and particularly on those councils in high fire-risk areas, which have spent a lot of money trying to support and help their communities recover from the fires. It is interesting to note that some councils have five or more NSPs in their municipality. The MAV has calculated that it will cost up to \$40 000 a year to maintain those NSPs. If a municipality has five neighbourhood safer places, it means it could cost it \$200 000 a year to maintain those neighbourhood safer places.

At a PAEC (Public Accounts and Estimates Committee) meeting last week the Minister for Local Government, who is now at the table, confirmed that there are only 77 neighbourhood safer places around the state. The Premier said yesterday he believed there were 81. Over 500 have been assessed, but they do not comply with the guidelines that were applied. In New South Wales, which started a similar process at about the same time as Victoria, over 700 neighbourhood safer places have been designated. It had a similar time frame to Victoria and similar guidelines. People may ask why New South Wales has more neighbourhood safer places than Victoria. The reason could be that the process of designating those NSPs is different in New South Wales, where local emergency management committees have identified those places. Those committees are composed of representatives from all state emergency service organisations, with a council representative as well. They are the ones who have designated and identified those NSPs.

On the issue of social and public housing, last year the government introduced legislation stating that a council may grant a rebate or concession to a registered agency. There was no consultation with councils. Councils have no power in respect of where those homes are allocated. Of course we need more public housing, more affordable housing and more social housing in our communities, but again there is a need to make sure that the community knows where those houses will be placed and where is the best place to put them.

There is an increase in this budget for the police. Because of the lack of police numbers over the years, many councils are having to spend a high proportion of their budgets on putting in security cameras and hiring security officers and guards in their CBDs to protect

their communities. This is because of the failure of this government to put police officers in the places where they are most needed.

On the issue of Aboriginal affairs, as the opposition spokesperson on Aboriginal affairs, I acknowledge that today is the second anniversary of National Sorry Day. The government continues to talk about bipartisan agreement on the issues in indigenous affairs. I notice there was a launch at lunchtime today in Queen's Hall of the indigenous affairs framework. I think that is a good idea, and the government has asked us to welcome that. But I also alert the government to the fact that it did not advise the opposition of that launch or ask it to attend. I had been at a parliamentary committee meeting, and as I walked through the hall I found a number of people there. I picked up a copy of *Improving the Lives of Indigenous Victorians — Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework*. If the government wants bipartisan support on issues, it needs to make sure the coalition is advised of these sorts of initiatives so that we can at least be part of such events. The government has also brought in a respect agenda, and I think it is saying a lot about this government that it does not invite the coalition to be part of the launch of an Aboriginal affairs framework to better the Aboriginal community.

As I said, the Labor government has been in power for almost 11 years. It has had \$300 billion of revenue, and it has done little to improve the lives of our indigenous community. It is not just about money. We do not need to throw money at these sorts of areas. What we need to do is to make sure that the programs are put in place to deal with health, education, the juvenile justice system and all facets of the lives of indigenous people. It is not just about money; it is about making sure that the programs work and that they have positive outcomes. We must make sure that any programs put in place are meaningful and are very positive for the community.

The Auditor-General criticised the lack of oversight by government departments and talked about incomplete or inaccurate data and a lack of communication. You do not know whether something is working if you cannot model it and compare it to determine whether or not it is. The government has allocated funding in this year's budget for governance and training, and that is a good idea. There was no funding for Reconciliation Victoria because the government removed the funding from the board at last year's budget. However, I see that in this year's budget there is no extra funding from Stolen Generations Victoria, having lost its funding last year. The board was sacked because of governance issues. The board lost funding because of governance issues, and Stolen Generations Victoria was not able to

continue. It is a private entity, but it was not able to continue. An amount of \$6.2 million was allocated in last year's budget for Stolen Generations Victoria, and we do not know where it is. It is not in this year's budget. There is a new entity called Connecting Home Ltd, which we understand is to continue that work, but we do not know what that is.

Mr Wynne — You know about it, you were briefed about it.

Mrs POWELL — We were not briefed about what the name of it is. We found out at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings, where the minister actually said there was a new entity in place. There has been no public comment about this new entity or who is on it. Again, we say there must be accountability about where that \$6.2 million is going to make sure that funding is going to programs that benefit the stolen generations. I understand this new entity will continue the work of Stolen Generations Victoria, but again, we need to know publicly who is on that board, where that money is going.

Mr Weller interjected.

Mrs POWELL — As the member for Rodney says, the process needs to be open and transparent. There is money in the budget to deal with governance issues and with training. We also need to make sure that everything about the public money is open and transparent, that it is used in the best place and that it is used in the manner in which it was meant to be used. We are not saying anything about this new entity. We know nothing about the new entity; we do not know who is on the board. There has been no public commentary about that. When we are talking about \$6.2 million of public money, we must be told —

Mr Wynne — What are you alleging?

Mrs POWELL — The minister asks me what we are alleging. We are not alleging anything. We are saying we would like to see where this money has gone, and we would just like to see something in the budget about where this money is.

There are no allegations; what we want to do is make sure that a group like Stolen Generations Victoria, or any other group, does not get into trouble again because it is not getting support from this government by providing oversight of what is happening on the board.

On registered Aboriginal parties — I had better get on to something different because my time is finishing — the minister has also acknowledged that only 56 per cent of the state is covered by such parties. What is

happening now is that that situation is causing long delays and increased costs to developers. Councils are telling me that some developers are getting very nervous and very angry at the delays and the costs to developments. Developers are losing contractors because there are huge delays and contractors are moving on to other areas. This issue is dividing the indigenous communities because there are sometimes two or three clans or groups in each area and only one in any of those areas has been designated as the registered Aboriginal party. This is causing huge division in our Aboriginal community.

I could go on for ages about Aboriginal affairs and about needing to make sure that the outcomes are better. Hopefully the announcement today will go some way towards making sure that the health outcomes and the education outcomes are going to be improved and that the problem of Aboriginals being overrepresented in our judicial system is going to be rectified.

In my local area the Shepparton court complex is an outdated service and we have been calling for a new court complex for many years. There is \$2 million in the budget for a master plan to look at the needs of the court complexes in Shepparton, Wangaratta, Bendigo and also of the Supreme Court. The Attorney-General has already said, as reported in the *Shepparton News*:

All Victorian courts have been assessed and a strategy planned for future use and the Shepparton court has been identified as a priority.

It is a huge burden on our community that we do not have a facility that will take us into the next generation.

The Shepparton district needs more police and more paramedics. We need a rail upgrade, and our hospital needs to be upgraded. There are so many issues that country Victorians needed addressed in this budget. They have been let down by this government. We hear there is going to be an initiative in June. We hope that will look at the budget needs, the visionary needs and the long-term needs of country Victoria. When it comes to meeting the needs of country Victorians, this May budget is an absolute disgrace.

Ms BEATTIE (Yuroke) — Before I begin my contribution I would like to comment on the contributions to the debate made by the last two speakers: the Attorney-General and the member for Shepparton. What we heard from the Attorney-General was a speech full of vision. It was a grand speech, a broad speech that talked about the future of his portfolio and how that related to the budget. What we heard from the member from Shepparton was a speech full of hypocrisy and hyperbole. It was hypocrisy when the

member touched on local government and talked about its inability to raise rates to pay for different programs. May I remind the house that the member for Shepparton was a commissioner who was part of the amalgamation of councils that imposed a rate freeze on councils. Those two speeches were in stark contrast, and I congratulate the Attorney-General on his speech.

There are broadly about seven areas I want to talk on, but the first is about the economics of Victoria. Victoria has shown strong economic leadership. That shows that our budget and our vision is heading in the right direction, that borrowings are going down and that the jobs rate is going up. All of this is being achieved while maintaining the AAA credit rating which has been a hallmark of the Bracks and Brumby Labor governments. That important credit rating has helped Victoria to lead the way in the worldwide recovery from the global financial crisis and helped to secure the jobs and the lives of many Victorian families — and there is nothing more important to people than having a job.

Of course there is a big infrastructure program, which I will talk about a little bit later. That infrastructure program will go towards creating 30 000 Victorian jobs in the next financial year. I will talk about some of those infrastructure projects a little later on, but I want to talk about WorkCover for a moment, because WorkCover is very important for Victorian businesses and businesses contemplating coming to Victoria. We have seen record growth in this state, and I think the WorkCover scheme is one of the reasons for that. Victorian businesses will be about \$240 million better off over the next five years thanks to a 3.5 per cent cut in WorkCover premiums. Victoria has the very best WorkCover scheme in Australia. It offers generous benefits for injured workers but also lower premiums for employers. WorkCover premiums in Victoria are now at a historic all-time low.

There are many areas like car manufacturing where having low WorkCover premiums is important. I have a Ford plant nearby in my area, as do many other members in this house. The member for Lara has a very important Ford facility in his area, and he will know how important it is to have low WorkCover premiums. Other states are reducing their benefits and raising premiums, but here in Victoria we are lowering premiums. Not only that, we have an excellent claims management system and an excellent return-to-work system for injured workers, both of which are very important for the future.

I would like now to touch on education. Education is the Labor government's no 1 priority, not just in words

but in deeds as well. In partnership with the federal government, which has done a lot with commonwealth funding through the Building the Education Revolution program, our schools will continue to thrive and shine in the future.

In my area \$9 million was granted to Mount Ridley P-12 College for stages 4 and 5. Mount Ridley college is a very new school and will benefit from that injection of \$9 million. It is in one of the growth areas, and so it is important to have that funding available for a P-12 school. I must say that at the last election, the Liberal Party was not even going to build Mount Ridley college. It wanted to build a secondary college in an area where there were not enough children to sustain one. That just goes to prove once again that Labor got it right, while the Liberals flip-flopped all the way and got it wrong again.

Another school building program I would like to talk about is at Glenroy Specialist School. The budget has \$4 million in further funding to build a replacement school, which is a most important announcement.

Another area I would like to comment on is funding to support children with disabilities, which is a very important consideration. An extra \$38.4 million has been allocated over four years to increase funding for early childhood intervention services — that is, to support families of children with a disability or developmental delay before they reach school age through providing services such as speech therapy and physiotherapy.

The budget contains \$9.2 million over four years for a new Victorian deaf education institute in Melbourne to support and train teachers working with deaf students in schools across Victoria. There is another \$4.4 million to establish, in partnership with specialist schools, satellite classrooms at local primary and secondary schools. All those are very important. I congratulate the Minister for Education and the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development on achieving that massive \$108.6 million package to provide for children and young people with a disability.

I would now like to talk about a subject which is very near and dear to my heart: not supporting the baby boomers, but supporting the baby boom that is occurring in Victoria. The creation of more kindergarten places in a growth area like my electorate is very important; the budget has \$63.1 million for 3590 kindergarten places and \$14 million for building and expanding kindergartens and children's centres. We all know how important it is that children receive that early learning; there is plenty of evidence to suggest that early learning is the key to learning well

later in life. There is also \$3.5 million over three years for early childhood development workforce initiatives, and we all know how important that is.

I would like to turn to health issues. I was fortunate enough to be with the Minister for Health at the Northern Hospital a fortnight ago and to watch a very vivid demonstration of how funding can save people's lives. The minister was there to announce \$7.4 million for two additional catheterisation laboratories at the Northern Hospital. We saw the medical technicians doing a non-invasive demonstration of that, which was amazing to see.

We know about the well-publicised funding of nearly \$70 million for the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre. I remember seeing the Premier looking quite sheepish when Olivia Newton-John was singing to him, but I suppose it was her way of showing how appreciative she was. There is also \$10 million in the budget to redevelop allied health facilities at Royal Melbourne Hospital, and \$5 million to support increased surgical capacity.

I also have to say that although it is not a matter for this budget, to drive down Flemington Road every morning and watch the new children's hospital rising — it is now completely aboveground — and know that it is going to attract the very best health professionals and the best surgeons to Victoria is a wonderful thing. It will be great for this state.

There are a couple of other things that the Attorney-General touched on and about which I would like to talk at this stage. He put very well his vision for what should be done with his portfolio. The Brumby Labor government is going to invest \$98.1 million to establish a new centre for the state's elite crime-fighting units, including the homicide squad, the fraud squad, the drug squad, the sexual crimes unit and the Purana task force, and provide a further \$9.7 million to upgrade or build new police stations.

Also in the budget there is another \$22 million to employ 55 youth workers to work on the ground to change the behaviour — this is what the Attorney-General talked about in his speech: changing the behaviour of people who are taking their first steps towards a life of crime — of young Victorians carrying knives and to implement a bail pilot project.

I will not forget some of the accusations that members opposite flung at the government in this house at the time the Koori courts were introduced. There is a Koori court in Broadmeadows, and I have to say it works very successfully; it is a great model and a great addition to

the state's legal system. There is also \$11.2 million over four years for the Children's Court, to fund a pilot of new mediation in child protection cases; mediation is the way to go.

Another thing that is not in this state budget but which shows how the Brumby Labor government plans for the future is the Coolaroo station on the Craigieburn line. That was planned for a few years ago and will open in early June.

First home buyers will benefit from this budget. The government will continue with its first home buyers grant for all properties valued up to \$750 000. Members know that the Liberal Party would have liked to have seen millionaires get that first home buyers grant, but we do not think that is necessary.

There is money in the budget for multicultural affairs and a great deal of money for cultural precincts. The ones that are up and running are going very well.

All in all, this is a great budget. The centrepiece of the budget is the respect agenda. Yesterday in debate the Brumby Labor government was criticised for planning for future decades. I think it is a good thing to plan for future decades. This is a budget that is going to take us into the future. The infrastructure spend will guarantee jobs into the future, and we all know that that lies at the very heart of the wellbeing of not only this state but also individuals and families in Victoria.

The 2010–11 state budget underpins the fact that Victoria is a great place to live, work, raise a family, grow old, have a job, invest, and invest in the future. I commend the budget to the house.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — This budget is a typical Labor budget — high taxing, high debt, high spending, low results. I will not go over the figures that the shadow Treasurer, the member for Scoresby, provided in comprehensive detail, but if you take, for example, the increase in stamp duty revenue since the change of government, the stamp duty take alone will have gone from \$1 billion in 1998–99 to a projected \$4.3 billion in 2013–14. The government has deliberately relied on bracket creep pushing properties into higher and higher tax brackets in order to ratchet up property taxes at a rate far in excess of the rate of inflation in Victoria. Similarly with payroll tax, despite the 0.05 per cent cut in the rate in the dollar, the payroll tax take is continuing to rise as more and more small businesses are pushed above the payroll tax threshold.

In relation to debt, the debt rollercoaster chart produced by the member for Scoresby shows that by the end of the forward estimates period net state debt in dollar

terms is due to be virtually back at the levels it was when the Kennett government came to office after the last disastrous Labor government in Victoria. Even though in real terms the numbers are somewhat lower, the fact is incontrovertible that the government's current rate of increase in debt is unsustainable. The government cannot claim that this is a policy response to the global financial situation, because it embarked upon this huge debt-funded splurge back in the 2006 budget. If it keeps increasing debt at the rate it is currently going, it will not take long before the state's AAA credit rating is at risk.

Even this government is purporting to rein in future growth in spending, but the trouble is that the consequence is that the value of real capital stock in Victoria, which the government has made such a benchmark, and which it is boasting it is boosting, is set to fall over the forward estimates period and to be lower in 2013–14 than it was in 2009–10, as set out on page 48 of budget paper 2.

Of course the price we pay for ever-increasing debt is ever-increasing interest bills. The state's public sector interest bill is expected to increase from around \$1 billion in 2007–08 to over \$3 billion in 2013–14; that is a trebling of our interest bill. Of course the more you spend on interest, the less you have available for vital services, be it law and order, health, education or public transport.

This is a high-spending budget. As always with Labor, its primary boast is about how many dollars are spent; it seldom boasts about the results that have been achieved or are to be achieved with the money that is spent. That is in stark contrast to a private household, which puts the emphasis on what it is able to achieve within its budget and on the value for money it has been able to achieve in what it has spent those funds on. With government advertising ever increasing, Victorians must be sick and tired of being earbashed with self-promoting government spiels just about every time they turn on the radio.

Even more daunting is the amount that is being wasted. It is easy to spend lots of money if you waste lots of money. Again the member for Scoresby has produced a comprehensive list of various project blow-outs under the Bracks and Brumby governments. Most of them hit taxpayers; others hit Victorians in other respects. Examples include myki, regional fast rail, the South Morang railway extension, the channel deepening project, the M1 upgrade, the Royal Children's Hospital, HealthSMART, the synchrotron, the State Library redevelopment, the Yarra precinct arts integration project, the criminal justice enhancement program,

Southern Cross railway station and Project Rosetta. In total the figure approaches \$11 billion. That is not to mention other bumbles by the Attorney-General such as the integrated courts management system, which continues not only to be over budget but also to fail to deliver results in improving our court system. The Brumby government, in conjunction with the Rudd federal government, is also spending money like there is no tomorrow in terms of the waste that is coming to light over the schools building program.

For all the high taxing, the high debt and high spending Victorians are getting very few results from the budget. Trains will still be late because there is no adequate provision in the budget for the basic infrastructure improvements and upgrades that are needed to repair the damage that the government has allowed to occur over the past decade. Court waiting lists will continue to bulge. Victoria will continue to have the longest criminal court waiting lists in Australia at every jurisdictional level — for Supreme Court appeals, County Court trials, the Magistrates Court and the Children's Court. Public transport will continue to be unsafe at night for many commuters because the Brumby government is not prepared to match the coalition's commitment to put protective services officers on railway stations.

Hospital waiting lists will remain at unacceptable lengths because there are no arrangements for the rapid provision of additional hospital beds. I will take just one example, which is in fact the only locally based item in the budget that is relevant to my electorate of Box Hill. The funding announced regarding Box Hill Hospital is described in budget information paper 2, page 8, as being for a 'new emergency and surgery block'. Before the 2006 election residents of the eastern suburbs were told this project would be a \$650 million super-hospital. Then, as the delays grew, the cost blew out to somewhere upwards of \$850 million. Late last year the government committed only \$407.5 million. At that time it announced what would effectively be half a hospital, at best. The budget papers have now downgraded it further to simply a hospital block.

The government boasts that it will treat 7000 extra patients, but this will barely keep up with demand growth between now and 2015, when it is due for completion. It is going to struggle to retrofit existing hospital buildings up to 50 years old. Goodness knows how that is going to be done, given the IT challenges, issues about infection control and the labyrinthine corridors of the hospital. That is the outcome that is seen on the ground for all of the government's boasting about what it is doing.

There is a fundamental threat emerging since the budget was handed down just a few weeks ago. The government boasted about, and predicated the budget on, a rebound in the Victorian economy. Even on what it was projecting, that was largely driven by population growth, which is primarily a policy setting emanating from the commonwealth government and based on the expectations of a resilient national economy, which is primarily thanks to former Prime Minister John Howard and former federal Treasurer Peter Costello; and also I must say with significant contributions from the Hawke and Keating governments but certainly not from the Rudd government.

In just a few short weeks since the budget's presentation all that has been put at risk. In part this is due to international concerns, which one hopes are short lasting but which give yet another clear indication of the dangers of ever-increasing debt levels. However, in part the threat to the Victorian budget is due to the huge self-inflicted damage being done to the national economy by the lunatic decision of the federal government to seek to impose a 40 per cent retroactive super-tax on all profits in the mining industry in excess of the long-term bond rate.

That creates sovereign risk issues of immense proportions. It has turned Australia from a perceived haven of stability into a no-go zone within 48 hours; it has seen our Prime Minister making a xenophobic attack on foreigners, and it is raising the question of who is going to be next in the federal government's desperate grab for cash. What about labour hire firms, for example? The government could claim that all taxpayers are entitled to a fair return on the education, skills and development of resources paid for through the education budget.

In short we have seen our Prime Minister, in just three short years, go from 'Kevin07' to 'Kevin Chavez'. That is posing a huge threat to all Australians not least of all to Victoria and the Victorian government budget. So what has been the reaction of the state government to that threat? It was clear this morning that at least the Premier has been reading his briefing papers since he came back from overseas; and that he has been clearly warned by Victorian officials of the problems, because today's *Age* at page 8 reports the Premier as saying:

The two areas that are put to me as needing some fine tuning are firstly in relation to any element of retrospectivity and, secondly, if the 6 per cent rate is the right rate or should it be a higher rate. I suspect there will need to be some movement in that area

He may use a euphemism like 'finetuning', but the whole concept of a massive retroactive tax was mad

beyond belief in the first place. However, on top of what the Premier has been briefed on, there is a second key reason why the Brumby government needs to stand up vigorously against what the commonwealth government is doing, because it is a direct attack on state government finances.

Traditionally revenue from onshore minerals and resources has been a state government revenue source. The point was put very clearly by the commonwealth deputy opposition leader Julie Bishop on MTR radio yesterday: the commonwealth should not be taking over yet another state government revenue source. Yet the Prime Minister says he is going to cap state royalties basically at current levels, and the federal government is going to pocket any excess taxing capacity. If the federal government can do that with royalties, it can decide in future to cap stamp duty or land tax or vehicle registration or gaming machine revenue at current levels, and then impose higher federal taxes itself in any of those areas.

This raises a fundamental question about whether the states have a future under the federation. This is not a question of states' rights; it is a question of which level of government is best able to deliver services and is best placed to make the laws that are going to apply in different parts of the nation. If you conclude that it is better for states to deliver various services and make various laws, then the states need the funding autonomy to do so. As the jargon says, it is a question of vertical fiscal inequality. The GST made a dramatic improvement in that situation but now all of that is at risk of being undone and being made far worse by a financially profligate commonwealth government that is desperate to grab revenue from any source it can.

The commonwealth super-tax is not just a tax at super rates, it is a tax on superannuation. It is a huge hit on the superannuation savings of ordinary Australians. Estimates by various analysts suggest it will wipe between 20 and 30 per cent off the value of Australian mining and energy companies, which in turn represent some 25 to 35 per cent of Australian listed equities. The upshot is that between 5 and 10 per cent of the Australian equities component of superannuation savings is being seized by the commonwealth government.

That has a significant flow-through effect on state government funds under management by the finance minister, funds being managed on defined benefits schemes where the Victorian taxpayer has to make up any shortfall. It also includes funds invested to pay the benefits of Victorians injured in motor accidents or the workplace.

All up, on conservative assumptions Victorian taxpayers, motorists and employers could be hit with some \$400 million as the cost of the Rudd government super-tax. So the state government should be standing up to defend not only the interests of Victorians as a whole but the interests of the Victorian government budget. We cannot have the huff and puff and tough talk followed by a folding and failure to act by the Premier, as we saw over health, which paved the way for the commonwealth government to take further chunks out of the state GST revenue whenever it feels like it. The Premier needs to be very firm in joining other state premiers in telling Mr Rudd that he cannot destroy state finances the way his super-tax policy would do.

As I said at the outset, this budget delivers poor results in many areas, not least of all in the Attorney-General's portfolio, where the claimed extra funding for Victoria Legal Aid simply continues for two more years the stopgap single year's funding from last year's budget without any real increase, and where the six extra judges and magistrates will barely represent a 3 per cent increase in the size of the judiciary — a very small proportion compared with soaring crime rates. In other words, this budget fails to deliver yet again.

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — I am very pleased to rise to support the budget and to congratulate the Treasurer, John Lenders, on the budget he has brought down this year. I think it is a fair and responsible budget which addresses the whole range of the community in Victoria.

I was a little entertained when listening to the member for Box Hill. In his many complaints about the budget he managed to outline all the new projects that the government has undertaken in the last few years. Listening to that very long list of new projects that the government has undertaken should remind people of the very proactive stance this government has taken in looking after the people of Victoria.

In looking at the budget this year the most obvious area of interest to many people is the continuing improvements in health that this government has been involved with. If I think of my own personal experience, when I was first elected to this house, the Labor Party was in opposition. In my electorate I was continually visited by people complaining about the health system. Their complaints were about a whole range of things, such as dirty hospitals and difficulty in getting treatment. That has changed dramatically in the years that we have been in government, which says a great deal about the proactive policies of the Labor government.

Turning to the new agreement between the state and the federal government, for my residents some of the changes will be significant. In particular I refer to the Parkville Comprehensive Cancer Centre, which will be Victoria's first comprehensive fully integrated cancer centre. The centre will be a treatment centre but it will also be an excellent research facility.

In addition the Sunshine Hospital is a huge development which this government started undertaking in the budget before last. This project has helped to repair the neglect of the western suburbs by previous governments. This budget has allocated money for stage 3 of that project, which relates specifically to inpatient beds, ambulatory facilities, same-day medical chairs, outpatient clinics and support services. The hospital that most of my constituents use is the Royal Melbourne Hospital, which received significant funding for redevelopment of allied health facilities.

As a former librarian I am always particularly keen to see what money is allocated in the budget to support our library system. I am very glad to see that this year there is extra money for the State Library of Victoria — \$2.4 million over two years — and \$3 million over one year for the Living Libraries program. Before I was elected to Parliament I worked as a librarian. I recall that we had to go through that appalling compulsory competitive tendering process which was imposed on local councils by the previous government. That program collapsed because it was unworkable. At that time I can remember Liberal members, including the then Premier, telling us that we did not need to keep libraries open for extra hours because people would not use them any more as they would be using their computers. If you look at the value of libraries in supporting people with online and offline services, you know that that was factually incorrect.

I go to the State Library of Victoria frequently, quite often at the weekend, and it is always packed with people using its resources, both online and offline. I am sure there are some more recent figures available, but the ones I have show that in the 2007–08 year 1.5 million people visited the state library and nearly 8 million people visited it online. That shows what a significant state body the state library is. Many people depend on the state library, and its users tend to be the less financially well off members of the community, so it does provide an essential service. I encourage people who have not been to the state library to have a look at the many facilities the library has and the many ways in which it can assist people, either by visiting the library in person or going online.

The Living Library program also supports municipal libraries. If you go to any municipal library you will find people of all ages being involved very heavily in the activities provided, such as searching for recreational reading, using the databases or seeking assistance from librarians. Computerisation and the use of computers in libraries has probably made librarians even more necessary, as many people need assistance in being guided through the vast facility, the internet. I was very pleased to see that the federal government under Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard is conducting a review of library training and library professionals, because as the internet becomes more complicated and it becomes more difficult to find information that is required or that is valid and can be trusted, the work of librarians will become more necessary.

I am also very pleased to see \$7.5 million for Scienceworks, a great museum in the western suburbs, and another museum that the people of Victoria have really taken to. Last year Scienceworks had almost 500 000 visitors. Scienceworks is a facility that is a really good example of how old, historical buildings that are no longer useful for the purpose for which they were built can be used for a significant community purpose. In the years that it has been open Scienceworks has developed as a facility that people come from all over Victoria to see and even from interstate. The staff at Scienceworks are very highly qualified staff who provide great learning experiences, not only for young people but for people of all ages. I look forward to that work continuing. I know the member for Williamstown is also very supportive of the Scienceworks program, and we wish Scienceworks and Museum Victoria all the best in the future for their work and their programs.

Victoria has one of the best museum systems in the Southern Hemisphere. I know that many members in this place attend special events at museums, either in Carlton or in Footscray. The work that is done at those places for people is readily available, and most of it free for the community. Visiting a museum is a joyful experience for many people and one that any state government can be very proud of supporting.

I turn to my own electorate and the benefit for my residents from this year's budget. Firstly, I want to mention Ascot Vale Special School, which has received \$300 000 for the refurbishment of learning areas. The Ascot Vale Special School was started in 1980, and it deals with students between 5 and 18 years of age. I have extremely high regard for this school. I have visited the school on many occasions, and in the last two years the school has been actively involved in the

Premier's Reading Challenge, much to the enjoyment of the students who attend it. Some of those students have made huge efforts to be part of that program. The principal, Bev Fegan, and staff are delightful people who work extremely well to assist children who sometimes do not find things as easy as they are for other students to be able to achieve as much they can and to shine. Some of those students have visited this Parliament, and invariably I have found them to be delightful children to work with. They are well behaved and very excited about having the opportunity to participate in a broader education program. I look forward to that money being spent for them fairly quickly.

Another important item in the budget for my electorate relates to improvement to rail services. The Craigieburn line is heavily used by residents in my electorate, and it is a very efficient service. I use that service frequently, and I have to say that I have very few problems in terms of the claims made by the member for Box Hill. About three years ago we staffed Moonee Ponds station for 4 hours a day during the peak period in the morning, but under this budget Moonee Ponds is one of the stations that will be upgraded, having staff on a permanent basis. Moonee Ponds is quite a significant station. A number of buses run from there, and the station is right in the heart of the famous Moonee Ponds shopping centre in Puckle Street. I know that my residents will be very pleased to have their station manned on a permanent basis.

There are other improvements in my electorate on that railway line, including money for Metro Trains to staff Strathmore and Glenbervie railway stations for 4 hours each day during peak times. Kensington railway station, which is slightly out of my electorate but still on the Craigieburn line, will also benefit from that work. People in my electorate are huge public transport users, not only of the train but also of the very efficient bus network. The SmartBus system has some of the highest usage in the state, and there is the excellent tramway system which runs down Mount Alexander Road. I think we are lucky in that regard, and I congratulate the government on the many improvements.

I used to go to school on the train from Camberwell to Ringwood East, and when I reflect on the trains now, the frequency of train services is so different to what it was then. I think people forget that 15 years ago trains did not run all that often — when they did run — whereas now, especially during peak service times but even in off-peak service times, trains run very frequently. I know my residents are keen on public transport, especially my senior residents who get free travel on Sundays with their Seniors Card. They make

full use of that on the train line, the SmartBus and the other services.

The other thing that is particularly important in my electorate, because I do have an older electorate, is the support for senior Victorians. There are two things I would like to quickly mention on that. One is the announcement last week of the improved taxi ranks at Alexandra Avenue, which is just near the Moonee Valley Racecourse, and at 506 Mount Alexander Road, Moonee Ponds, which I think will make taxi ranks much easier for people, particularly older people, to access. Secondly, there is the significant increase in home and community care packages. As people know, if people can stay in their homes rather than go into aged-care facilities, they do extremely well. I have many people in my electorate who can live in their home as long as they have enough support systems to be able to do so, perhaps in the way of gardening services, transport to medical appointments, personal care from time to time and other assistance. Any funding for home and community care services is very relevant for my community.

There is also the increase in the number of personal alarms. For older people or people with a disability who live by themselves, knowing that they have an alarm service that will be answered straightaway gives them that security to remain in their own homes.

The Victorian Seniors Card is very popular in my electorate. I do an annual local seniors guide, and we have many businesses in the area participating in that and many people using it. We add improvements to that on the website to better inform Victorian Seniors Card holders about discounts and special offers. I have people come and ask me if a special shop has Seniors Card offers, or sometimes they will come and tell me of a shop they have found that is not in the guide, so I can include it in the next one. It is certainly something that my older community is very keen on.

The problem for young people in my electorate is that houses are getting more and more expensive. The continuation of the first home buyers grant is significant for young people who have been brought up in Essendon and wish to stay there. That has become extremely difficult because of the increasing value of homes in the area. That grant from the government does give them a bit of a start, does help them along their way and does mean that for many of them the chances of remaining in the suburb where their family and friends are and where they went to school are much higher.

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

Mrs MADDIGAN — When I look at this budget I see a great many things in it for members of my community and indeed for the community across Victoria, including the community of the member for Bulleen, who is here waiting to speak enthusiastically about the budget.

I am not quite sure if there is a significant increase in funding for bocce, as the member for Bulleen has asked me. I am more than happy to check for him and get back to him if there is any funding available for bocce. I can understand that the Liberal Party would be seeking funding, because the Labor Party will beat them very strongly when we meet again later this year.

However, returning to the budget bill, may I say that it is a great budget. I certainly have had a very positive response from people in my electorate about it. I look forward to the new proposals for my electorate and across Victoria, and I think that most Victorians — apart from the opposition — are very happy with the 2010 state budget.

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — I am extremely happy because this will be the last budget that the Labor Party will bring into this house. I was sitting here listening to the member for Yuroke, and she spoke about a flip-flop. Can I just remind her about the Labor government's flip-flops? The Scoresby tollway, the desalination plant, the use of protective services officers and of course suspended sentencing are just a few issues on which it has changed its position. Labor government members change according to whether they are in opposition, coming up to an election or in government; they have made flip-flopping into an art form.

The member for Yuroke is also the parliamentary secretary for multicultural affairs, so I was surprised that she did not mention anything about this very important portfolio. If the budget was good for multicultural affairs, why was she not able to tell the house what part of the budget was good for multicultural affairs? The reality is there is nothing in this budget that makes a real impact in this very important area.

We have had 11 years of a lazy and incompetent government, with masters of spin and cover-ups, and a government that has forgotten why it was elected. We had years of prosperity, thanks to the Kennett and Howard years, and this government should have secured our future needs. What we got was a government that borrowed more and delivered less.

Let us look at the budget papers for 1998–99 and the projections for 2013–14. We find that stamp duty will increase to about \$4.3 billion, whilst land tax will go up to \$1.45 billion in 2012–13 and to \$1.4 billion in 2013–14. Even though it has the money and the power, we are getting very little back from this government. In fact if we look at violent crime in Victoria, we see that in 1999–2000 we had 31 000 incidents of crimes against the person; in 2008–09 the number of incidents of crimes against the person has reached nearly 45 000.

Here we have a government which has been in office for 11 long years; it has the money, it has the power, but unfortunately it has delivered very little for Victorians. We have an arrogant Premier, who has no mandate, leading an arrogant government. This government has forgotten why it was elected and that it holds office to govern for all Victorians and not simply to look after the interests of its particular factions or supporters.

Victorians might forgive a government which makes honest mistakes and which takes responsibility for its actions, but I know Victorians will not forgive or forget a government that ignores the fundamental principles of democracy and accountability. Ministers must be held accountable and be responsible not only for their own actions but for the actions of their departments. Here in Victoria we have had 11 years of secret agendas, massive blow-outs, cover-ups and no vision. Any public servant who dares to speak out is either sacked or gagged and threatened with being sacked. It is frightening, but it is typical of the Australian Labor Party in this state.

Let us have a look at what is in this budget for the Bulleen electorate. There is absolutely nothing new for Bulleen residents; there is nothing substantial in this year's budget. I am glad to see the Minister for Roads and Ports is in the house, because I will refer to him. There was no relief in the budget for residents of the city of Manningham, who are already burdened by rising interest rates, increasing council rates and increasing fuel prices, to name a few increases. The request for traffic lights at both the intersection of Bulleen Road and Golden Way and the intersection of Fitzsimons Lane and Porter Street have again been ignored by the minister and his government. The upgrades of Templestowe Road and King Street have been put on the never-never list. I have asked the minister so many times in this house to provide some funding for safety reasons: to make sure no-one is seriously hurt or killed at those two very dangerous intersections. They are the worst intersections in the electorate of Bulleen. I have been advised by the council that the total cost of installing traffic lights at

the two intersections would be about \$1 million. I have raised this on numerous occasions, and I think the minister knows I have, but in 11 years no money has been put aside to assist people to cross these intersections safely.

Schools have also been neglected. Apart from the \$1.8 million sweetener for the forced closure of Manningham Park Primary School, local schools have missed out. Here we have a Labor Party which came to government promising no school closures, and yet in my own electorate it has closed a school. It has called it an amalgamation, but it forced the closure of the school. It forced the hand of the principal, and it forced the hand of the school council and the parents. There were no other options provided, and the school is now closed. I hope the school premises will continue to be used by the Bulleen special school, because it needs those facilities — and I will fight to make sure it keeps them. I will make sure the government does not sell the property to get the money it desperately needs.

The government's public transport policy lacks imagination and shows that the government lacks any ideas or long-term vision for Manningham residents. The government has had to provide extra buses, but that is something it had to do and should have done about six years ago. This is a government that is operating in slow motion, which is enjoying the fruits of office but doing very little for Victorians. After 11 long and dark years of neglect by this government there has been no change for Manningham residents. An article published in the local *Manningham Leader* last week under the heading 'Nothing new for us' states:

Even with the election looming, no sweeteners came for Manningham in the state budget.

It missed on new funding in the 2010–11 budget released last week, so residents must now wait and hope a slice from statewide initiatives will 'trickle down'.

After 11 long years there has been no new money for the residents of Manningham. How long do they have to wait?

Another issue that is very important, especially for the Minister for Roads and Ports, is the north-eastern freeway link. There was no money in this year's budget for the north-eastern link feasibility study, which was something the government promised. You would have expected there to be some money for a study if this government were serious about listening to the residents and the local community. The fear I have is that it will go ahead without any community consultation and without any environmental or feasibility study. The government will just go ahead

with the project. The residents, both in my electorate and in the Ivanhoe electorate, are worried that their wellbeing and their lifestyles will be put in danger simply because this government cannot be trusted.

I do not trust this Labor government, especially the ALP candidate for Ivanhoe. The current member for Ivanhoe, who is a good member, was dumped and the government put in his place a mushroom who simply does what the government tells him to do. In fact the Labor candidate for Ivanhoe has come out in support of a freeway going through my electorate of Bulleen. I advise him that I will fight that proposal, because the residents in my electorate do not deserve to have an above-ground freeway going through Bulleen Road and going through parks. It is not required.

In 2009 an article in the *Heidelberg Leader* stated that residents were so concerned that they had formed local action groups. The article states:

Local action groups are uniting to oppose state government plans to build a freeway link through Banyule.

...

The groups say improving transport and the rail freight network would be cheaper and cleaner ways to ease Melbourne's transport woes than building a freeway through public land.

Ms Ware said the planned 9 kilometre tunnel — to go underground south of Lower Plenty Road and connect to the Eastern Freeway near Bulleen Road — would have 'devastating effects on our communities'.

She pointed to EastLink's 1.6 kilometre tunnel beneath Mullum-Mullum Creek near Mitcham — and the 12-storey ventilation stacks that came with it.

'Along Bulleen Road, that's where all the private schools have their sporting grounds', she said.

'How would parents feel if kids exercised along an elevated freeway or in the vicinity of the vent stacks with all the pollution coming out?'

The residents are concerned. The one thing I have asked the minister and the government to do is to make sure they consult the community, to make sure there is an open and transparent consultation process. The government promised \$5 million to undertake a feasibility study, but that is not in this year's budget. When is it going to allocate the money? When is the study going to take place? When is the government going to involve the communities in the city of Banyule and in the Ivanhoe and Bulleen electorates to make sure it listens to the concerns of local residents?

I turn briefly to the area of multicultural affairs. I find it amazing that a party that claims to support this very

important area, year in and year out does very little. The government believes it is doing a great job if it simply runs a media campaign once in four years highlighting the advantages of our cultural diversity. It hands out small amounts of money, but that lacks any transparency. It reannounces projects that take up to 10 years to deliver, and that includes the Melbourne cultural precinct project. It is a great project, but it has taken the government so many years, and people are still waiting.

The government runs programs for refugees that are ad hoc with no ability to measure their effectiveness, reacts to media reports rather than being proactive and plans media stunts and photo opportunities, but it ignores the needs of our youth, our elderly, our newly arrived migrants, overseas students and overseas markets. Even the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, which normally supports the government, has come out with a press release saying the government has not put enough money into multicultural arts. A press release dated 5 May refers to Mr Afra, who is the chair of the ECCV, and states:

'Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV) does a fabulous job helping talented migrants and refugees find a positive avenue into broader society, but for too long they have had to struggle along with minimal resources and departmental funding', Mr Afra said.

'The continued failure to address this shortfall in human investment is particularly disappointing if Victoria expects to maintain its place as Australia's home of the arts and culture.'

The ECCV has criticised the government for doing very little in the area of multicultural affairs.

I turn quickly to international students. The government has set up the International Student Care Service, but how long did it take it to set it up? The opposition warned the government two and a half years ago about the problems that overseas students were facing in Victoria. The government ignored our advice and our fears. Then, after three years of constant media stories and criticism from overseas officials, the government decided to act.

It has established this international student care service and has provided half a million dollars in 2009–10, but that comes down to \$0.3 million for 2010–11. Here our international student sector provides billions of dollars to the Victorian economy, yet we now see a decrease in funding for this care service. If the government were serious, it would make sure that the funding was available to assist our international students and that the funding would increase.

The government also put out a press release to say that the refugee support program is new; but it is not new, it has been going for some years. The government promised \$17.7 million in 2008–09, and in 2009–10 it promised an extra \$2 million, which totals \$19.7 million. In this year's budget it promised \$1.6 million. The questions I have for the minister are as follows. Has the \$19.7 million been spent? What has happened to the \$19.7 million? Where are the outcomes? Have the project's objectives been achieved? There is no mention in the budget papers of whether the \$19.7 million that the government promised to spend over a number of years has been spent and whether this \$1.6 million is new money or just the old money under a new name.

In the area of innovation I found it amazing that the Minister for Innovation was not able to put out one single press release on his portfolio after the budget. It is no wonder that they call Minister Jennings the part-time Minister for Innovation. There is absolutely nothing in this budget for innovation, there is nothing in this budget for multicultural affairs, and there is nothing in this budget for my electorate of Bulleen. Labor has been in government for 11 long and dark years, and that is about to come to an end.

Mr NOONAN (Williamstown) — It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak in support of the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill. Acting Speaker, you will recall that last year's budget, which was delivered by the Treasurer in this place on 5 May, was all about securing 35 000 jobs, rebuilding the lives of bushfire-affected communities and positioning the Victorian economy to be 'recovery ready'. It was undoubtedly, as the Treasurer said in his speech, one of the most important budgets in Victoria's recent history. At the time, jobs were under threat, business confidence was plummeting, private investment was in decline, and demand for goods and services was trending down. Everyone was captured by the global financial crisis.

Tough times require tough decisions; tough times also require decisive leadership — and that decisive leadership was delivered by the Premier and the Treasurer in the form of the 2009–10 budget. The centrepiece of last year's budget was the \$11.5 billion joint state and commonwealth infrastructure funding — the biggest infrastructure program in this state's history, which is delivering transformational projects. These projects include the \$1.9 billion Victorian schools plan, the \$38 billion Victorian transport plan, and the multibillion-dollar investments in our health system, social services, water infrastructure, and a record investment in policing.

The 2009–10 budget was delivered with modest borrowings, ensuring that the state would retain its greatly prized AAA credit rating. As part of last year's budget, the Treasurer also forecasted relatively weak growth in the economy, with a 0.5 per cent increase in the 2009–10 financial year, and then a 0.25 per cent increase in the 2010–11 year, rising to 2.25 per cent in the 2010–11 period. As we have come to realise, these forecasts were all relatively conservative, and they have been adjusted up as part of this year's budget.

In response to the speech by the Treasurer, the shadow Treasurer, the member for Scoresby, had a number of interesting things to say about last year's budget. In fact, I was in the house for his budget response on 7 May. It was delivered with great passion, as is usually the case with the member for Scoresby, and it was greeted with much cheering from opposition members. I must say it was a very long speech — about 45 minutes, as I recall — but it was a speech that has haunted the shadow Treasurer ever since. I, for one, will never forget his 'house of cards' budget response.

Here are a couple of quotes from that speech, the first being about jobs:

This budget was supposed to be about jobs. It is, but it is about jobs being lost, not protected. Unemployment will reach 7.75 per cent, which means at least 70 000 Victorians will lose their jobs.

How wrong he was! We now know that almost 100 000 Victorian jobs were created over the past 12 months, and Victoria generated 92 per cent of all full-time jobs created in Australia over the past year.

He did not stop there. The shadow Treasurer also said:

Everyone else is in recession but apparently not Victoria. The economic indicators contained in the budget are optimistic in the extreme and are predicated on Victoria not entering recession and benefiting from a fast recovery. The figures just do not stack up.

The shadow Treasurer was again wrong.

The shadow Treasurer also predicted that Victoria would lose its treasured AAA credit rating in May last year, but what we now know is Victoria was the only state to have a surplus this year and has retained its AAA credit rating. All of this is a terrible look for the opposition, which prides itself on its economic credentials. It simply hates being outdone by the Brumby Labor government on economic management.

This year's state budget is all about standing up for families and building a healthier future. It promises to secure a further 30 000 jobs through additional

investments in infrastructure. Importantly, it is a budget for all Victorians.

Let me start with the record \$4 billion boost to Victoria's hospital and health system. This substantial investment in our health system will result in more Victorians receiving the health care they need. It means more hospitals, more doctors, more nurses, more ambulance services and extra hospital beds. It is worth pointing out that since Labor came to government in 1999, nursing numbers in our public health system have increased, from 21 000 to the better part of 30 000. There has also been a 75 per cent increase in hospital doctors, from 4000 to the better part of 7350; and in terms of ambulance paramedics, a 92 per cent increase.

This budget also delivers more capital for our hospitals. A total of \$2.3 billion has been allocated to important health infrastructure projects across Melbourne and importantly, country Victoria. That takes the government's investment in hospitals to some \$7.5 billion since coming to office in 1999. Key features of this budget include \$473 million for the Bendigo hospital, \$407.5 million for the redevelopment of the Box Hill Hospital, and \$426.1 million for the Parkville Comprehensive Cancer Centre — all stunning investments.

I want to talk briefly about the \$90.5 million allocated for the third and final stage of the Sunshine Hospital development, which was a 2006 election commitment by this government. This is the third stage of a \$184 million project — another transformational project and an extremely important project for the people of Melbourne's west. This latest investment will deliver a new four-level inpatient building with ambulatory facilities, a special care nursery and clinical support services. Upon completion the building will have 128 inpatient beds, and 30 day medical and chemotherapy chairs. All in all it will enable about 22 000 additional patients to be treated at the hospital every year, and many of those patients will come from the Williamstown electorate.

Before moving on, it is worth pointing out that Western Health, which incorporates Sunshine Hospital, Western General Hospital in Footscray and Williamstown Hospital, has received increased funding from the state government; in fact funding has more than doubled across the Western Health network since 1999.

I will move on to education, schools and early childhood development, where features of this budget include 3590 extra kindergarten places and more funding for capital works for our early childhood centres. Funding has also been provided to complete the

state government's 2006 election commitment to rebuild, renovate or extend over 500 schools in this term of office. It has been well documented that this budget will surpass that commitment by taking the total number of schools funded to 553.

One of the schools that has featured prominently in this and previous budgets as part of the Altona bayside regeneration project is the Bayside P-12 College. As part of the 2010 budget it has received \$10 million to complete stage 2 of the senior campus redevelopment. This figure on its own is substantial, but if you add the \$11.1 million the school received in last year's budget for stage 1, plus the combined \$11.2 million from the 2007 and 2008 budgets to rebuild the Altona North campus, not to mention the additional money from the commonwealth, then you might begin to understand why the college's community is a little overwhelmed by the good news at the moment.

The *Hobsons Bay Leader* reported the latest funding announcement and quoted college principal Michael Kerin as being 'over the moon'. He also said, 'We are very happy and very lucky'. The college will now be able to complete their senior campus and add a new library, classrooms, and art and drama rooms. A new administration block and a small amphitheatre will also be added. Stage 1 works are scheduled to be completed by term 1 in 2011 and will include a new arts, science and maths wing. The college's P-9 campus at Altona North is also progressing very well, with stage 2 set for completion in the second half of this year.

I am extremely proud of the investments this government has made at both Bayside College and Williamstown High School. I want to place on the record my congratulations to Bayside College principal Mike Kerin; college president Steve Kingshott; members of the college council; and campus principals Rob Evans, Greg Pond, Milan Matejin and Ian Graymore, for the work they do in providing students at Bayside College with every opportunity to succeed.

I move on to the transport portfolio. This budget delivers \$5.8 billion to build new railway lines, as well as to deliver trams, trains and new train stations. This budget brings to book the \$4.3 billion regional rail link project, the biggest addition to the rail network since the city loop. This is another transformational project for Melbourne's western suburbs; it will be an outstanding boost in many ways for the people of the western suburbs of Melbourne and for all Victorians. It is projected that this project will secure at least 2800 jobs during construction and provide capacity upon completion for more than 9000 extra passengers

every hour on our rail network. That will free up capacity on both the Werribee and Williamstown lines.

The project will create up to 50 kilometres of new track between Werribee and Southern Cross station, and upon completion of the project passengers travelling from Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo will be able to travel all the way from their point of origin to the central business district without being entangled in the metropolitan rail network. As I understand it, work is currently being undertaken on the concept design for this project, with final decisions on the alignments, and location and configurations for new stations to be determined at some stage later this year. I very much look forward to watching progress on this important rail project.

Before I move on, I also want place on the record my support for the initiative to upgrade 20 metropolitan train stations to premium status, and the move by Metro Trains Melbourne, Melbourne's rail operator, to staff more railway stations during peak times, one of those being Spotswood station.

As valuable as the government's investments have been, and continue to be, in large infrastructure projects, it is the government's sustained commitment to assist disadvantaged Victorians that continues to shine through in this budget. The Premier often states that we cannot be the best state if we are not the fairest. We collectively enter our sixth year of A Fairer Victoria with a \$1.35 billion contribution in the state budget, and it is pleasing to see the Minister for Mental Health, who is also the Minister for Community Services, at the table.

With this year's A Fairer Victoria, the state Labor government has now invested \$6.4 billion since the statement was launched in 2005 to assist the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the community — and we are getting results. I recently had the good fortune to attend a function that marked the release of this year's *A Fairer Victoria*; it was held in Parliament House on 6 May.

Cath Smith, the CEO of the Victorian Council of Social Services, spoke at the launch; she chose to stop and reflect on the gains that had been achieved by her sector in partnership with the state government since A Fairer Victoria was launched in 2005. Cath's speech gave a stirring endorsement of the policy direction and leadership of this government and reminded us all of the ongoing need to invest heavily in this space. I later obtained a copy of Cath's speech and wish to place on the record a couple of her observations about the

government's commitment to help disadvantaged and vulnerable Victorians. Cath stated:

Not many governments respect the right to advocate and really listen to what community organisations have to say. But this government does work incredibly hard and, most of the time, does get it right and keeps trying to get it right.

There are literally billions of dollars and thousands of programs supported by this government that if they were purely 'driven by the dollar' they wouldn't have spent over the last five years of A Fairer Victoria.

I want to thank Cath Smith and the 462 members of the Victorian Council of Social Service for the work they do, day in and day out, to support people in our community. Cath reminds us that collectively we can all make a difference to the quality of life of those in our community who are doing it the hardest.

I am certainly proud of Labor's contribution in government to supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged people. It is the very reason that I joined the Labor Party. A Fairer Victoria certainly delivers on Labor's principles and values.

In the brief time I have left to speak in this debate I just want to acknowledge Scienceworks, which was also acknowledged by the member for Essendon. It is located in Spotswood and is part of my electorate. It was allocated \$7.5 million in this budget to replace its air conditioning unit and to undertake remedial works to the adjacent land.

Since its opening 18 years ago by a Labor government Scienceworks has steadily grown in popularity, attracting people of all ages to a wide variety of exhibitions focusing on science and technology. In 2009 more than 530 000 people visited exhibitions, planetarium shows, performances and educational programs at the science museum. I must admit that my family frequents Scienceworks all the time. It is absolutely terrific for families with young children.

In a period when some museums have not been able to stand on their own two feet, so to speak, Scienceworks has certainly bucked the trend, which is a credit to Genevieve Fahey, Dr Patrick Greene and the hardworking team of paid employees and loyal volunteers who support Scienceworks. They can be justifiably pleased with their win from this year's state budget, and I look forward to working with them on their plans in the future.

Just finally, let me place on record my thanks to the Treasurer for delivering another well-balanced budget that delivers for the people of Victoria.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — I rise to speak on this year's budget and welcome the opportunity to come at it from four fronts. One of course is as representative of my great electorate of Lowan in western Victoria. I also want to comment on the budget in my role as shadow minister for sport and recreation, youth affairs and veterans affairs.

Before the member for Williamstown leaves the chamber, I also have a quote from the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS). In a media release dated 29 April, it stated:

For too long the government has ignored the importance of youth services — in last year's state budget, youth affairs funding decreased by 7.9 per cent in real terms.

It was looking for greater investment in early intervention generalist youth services and also in improving access to vocational education and training for our young people. I agree that VCOSS made some comments that were positive in relation to the provision of 55 youth workers as part of the initiative to try to deal with those people at the crisis end, but like a lot of youth services — and the member for Williamstown spoke about vulnerable people, particularly vulnerable youth — they have been overlooked again by this government, and later in my speech I will speak about that.

First of all I want to speak on this budget from the point of view of the Lowan electorate. When we looked at the budget and trawled through it on budget day and a couple of days afterwards we saw there was very little in it. It was a very disappointing budget from the point of view of western Victoria.

All that we could see in it were rehashed promises from previous budgets and an enormous amount of rhetoric. As we know, education is vital for the continuing development of young people, for country communities, for communities in general, for Victoria and also for Australia. But across my electorate of Lowan, which is the largest in the state, there are 63 schools. Many of those school communities and school councils have been bitterly disappointed by the Brumby government because they believe it has turned its back on them.

The Horsham Special Developmental School has been a great project of mine, as has the Horsham College. Linked together, they were told they were at the top of the list, but unfortunately they did not rate a mention in the budget. Baimbridge College at Hamilton and Kaniva College were also disappointed not to receive assistance in this budget. I will say, though, that there is some money for the Rainbow school, and also the

budget allocates money for State Emergency Service equipment in Dimboola, Nhill and Horsham.

There is also a new hospital to be built in Coleraine. The community of Coleraine and also the Western District Health Service welcome this money to be spent on the new hospital. We know that the Coleraine hospital is linked in with the Western District Health Service, which also covers Peshurst and the great little township of Merino.

Merino had a bush nursing centre a couple of years ago, and it amalgamated under the umbrella of the Western District Health Service. It received some federal funding to build a new centre at Merino, and we are all waiting for it to go through the process of planning approval, and hopefully that will be done soon and the facility can be built there. It will be a great boost to the Merino community.

Overall the health system is struggling. More support is needed to attract and retain doctors and allied health staff. We are under enormous pressure from other states, and Victoria has a lot to do in making sure that it continues to retain its doctors and allied health staff.

The Edenhope hospital is extremely disappointed not to be funded in this budget. It is one of the smaller hospitals in my area. There are many hospitals and many campuses in my electorate. They do a great job out at Edenhope, and they were disappointed that they did not get recognised in this budget.

The other area I want to talk about is ambulance services. In Horsham we have been promised a new facility — and promised and promised and promised. Again the rhetoric is there, but we do not see any action. We want to see the construction of that new facility, and we want it soon. We also want to allow for extra staff. If the building that the ambulance service operates out of in Horsham was privately owned, it would be condemned by WorkSafe. It is full of white ants, and there are no facilities for women. Importantly, a new facility is obviously needed. We hope that when we get to that stage we can get extra staff, because we need extra staff to deal not only with patients in acute care, heart attack patients and so on but also with mental health patients who sometimes have to be transferred to Ballarat.

The cost of hospitals using ambulances is a question I have to raise again. I have examples of where the hospitals that are 150 or 100 kilometres away from Horsham have to transfer patients down there. It is an enormous cost to those small hospitals. Something needs to be done to take the burden of ambulance

transfers off the back of these small hospitals. I am also strongly supporting the investigation of ambulance services that is needed. I know the request has been put in by the Leader of The Nationals for the Auditor-General to investigate a series of recent ambulance bungles in rural and regional Victoria. There is definitely something wrong.

I believe the ambulance system has declined in rural and regional Victoria since the merger of Rural Ambulance Victoria and the Metropolitan Ambulance Service. That happened in July 2008, and I think we have seen a backward step since then. Make no mistake, Acting Speaker, Victorians, and particularly western Victorians, have a high regard for the tremendous work done by our trained ambulance personnel, but the inadequate provision that is made for them in terms of equipment and officers is of major concern to us in western Victoria.

However, I do welcome in the budget the increase in the first home buyers grants and particularly the encouragement in the budget for people to build in rural and regional Victoria. We know that Melbourne's housing prices have gone up 28 per cent in the last 12 months. We know Melbourne's population is increasing by about 110 000 people per annum. That is unsustainable. We have even seen at this stage that water has had to be stolen from northern Victoria to supply water to the metropolitan area. But importantly we need to make sure that a bit of that attraction of population numbers goes into country Victoria. We are seeing it happen; some centres are increasing in population, but this home first buyers grant, particularly for rural and regional Victoria, is welcomed, and I hope many people will take up the opportunity.

Unfortunately when I look through the budget I see that rural and regional Victoria has been deprived of new road funding. As we all know, if you fix country roads, you save country lives. Funding for the Henty, the Wimmera and the Glenelg highways is totally the responsibility of the state government. They are in a poor state, particularly the Glenelg Highway between Coleraine and Casterton. Some work has been started there, but it is in a poor state. All of these roads carry not only commuter traffic but a lot of freight, and there is increasing freight demand. These roads need to be improved.

Lowan has a strong reliance on the agriculture sector not only for economic activity but importantly for employment. But this sector has also been snubbed by this budget. The early cut in drought funding was a major blow to country Victorians. The locust plagues and also mice are causing a lot of concern. When I look

through the budget I see very little money for locust, weed or pest control. More needs to be done.

I want to jump over to a couple of the portfolios I am responsible for as shadow minister. In sport and recreation there are major concerns about rising water prices impacting on the access costs in recreation reserves. A front-page article in the *Wimmera Mail-Times* of Wednesday, 5 May, is headlined 'Price hike — Recreation water costs to skyrocket'. That is a major concern for a lot of people in country Victoria or for all Victorians. The cost of water is going to drive down participation rates.

There is concern in the community about people who are overweight, obese or have diabetes, particularly when those conditions are related to physical inactivity; these problems are increasing. Some figures I received today show that the rate of physical inactivity for all Victorians is nearly 34 per cent, and for overweight and obese people it is 48.2 per cent. It is a worry, considering that we call Victoria the sporting capital of Australia, to see physical inactivity at that high level and that there are such overweight and obesity levels. Again that is causing problems with diabetes.

I welcome in the budget though some money for capital upgrades, for maintenance to assist and establish the State Shooting Centre, and continuing funding for drought-resistant turf, water-saving measures and synthetic surfaces. That funding is very welcome in the sport and recreation field, but the budget has no increase in funds to deliver programs supporting country sport. The people who run these programs, particularly sports assemblies right across Victoria, do an enormous job. They have had no increase in funding for five or six years, and this is causing pressure for them.

A sporting code of conduct is to be implemented. All members would agree that we need a code of conduct, but I ask the minister to tell the house what support he is going to give, particularly to groups run by volunteers. I have an article that appeared on page 3 of the *Sunday Age* of 16 May under the heading 'DVD against "ugly parents" irks AFL Victoria'. It reads:

A state government effort to force bogan, bullying parents and spectators from the sidelines of sporting events has provoked a backlash from community sporting associations.

I am saying there are 16 000 sporting groups right across Victoria, mostly run by volunteers who do an enormous job, particularly in country Victoria. The worry for these groups is how they implement this sporting code of conduct. A lot of them, particularly those connected with major sports, have good, strong

support from their executives and paid staff, but for a lot of the smaller groups, people with disabilities and others, the implementation of this code is a major concern. I call on the minister to show more support for volunteers in funding this program.

The other point I make is that Victorians want to be active. They want to be out there, they want to be playing, they do not want to be just watching. When I look at page 170 of budget paper 3, which lists the departmental output for sport and recreation development, and includes the total output cost, I have to say that the total output cost has been reduced by nearly 2 per cent from 2009–10, when it was \$85.9 million, down to \$84.2 million in 2010–11. When Victoria promotes itself as the sporting state capital of Australia, I have to ask why there has been a reduction in the total output cost under the sport and recreation budget. As I said, volunteers are important, and they need more support.

When I look at page 169 of budget paper 3 and again at the departmental output for sport and recreation, I can see that it includes a performance measure under the heading of 'International teams/sports: sports visits facilitated' and I note that the expected outcome is \$160 million, which is less than the 2008–09 actual of \$174 million. Again my question is: has Victoria dropped the ball or not worked hard enough while other states are doing better in attracting these sportspeople to come to their states? These are some of the concerns I have about the sport and recreation budget.

Looking at the youth affairs portfolio, I have to say with a great deal of disappointment that the long-awaited assistance for vulnerable youth has disappeared from the budget for the second year in a row. Labor has failed the state's most vulnerable disadvantaged young people by refusing to fund the Vulnerable Youth Framework. The government's failure to release the final strategy or even to mention it in this budget must be a major embarrassment to members on the other side of this chamber.

The framework was supposed to be funded in last year's budget but has now disappeared entirely from this year's budget papers. As I said, there is still no funding for the Vulnerable Youth Framework, particularly money to assist people who are disengaging from the education system, and there is no money to address youth services. I do admit, though, that there is \$22 million for 55 youth workers under the justice system but there is very little money to assist the youth who are having difficulty with the education system or particularly with housing problems. As I said before, housing costs have gone up by 28 per cent, which

impacts a lot on our young people who are trying to access housing or paying rent.

My other concern in the youth area is that TAFE fees are increasing rapidly. That is going to have a major impact on the ability of our young people to get a tertiary education or, more importantly, a TAFE education so that they can get the skills they require for future employment. There is also major concern about our young people being impacted by violence and bullying. That is why people are strongly supporting the coalition's push for more police.

Finally the Labor government has agreed to come some of the way in relation to police numbers but there needs to be more effort made to address some of the violence that happens on our streets in relation to some law and order issues. Hopefully there will be some respite in that area, particularly for our rural and regional youth, with the regional blueprint that is about to be released by this state government.

I also want to touch on veterans affairs. This is a small portfolio, but it plays a very important role. I want to see an improvement in the support for the Premier's Spirit of Anzac prize. There has been a lack of participation in what is a great program, which I fully support; we need to increase the number of people who participate in it.

We also have concerns about the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, particularly in the mental health area. It is running late with its redevelopment project and expenditure has dropped a bit, I have to say. More support, particularly for our veterans, needs to be given to the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital.

I also want the government to know that the Shrine of Remembrance is an important symbol for our veterans. I am pleased to see there is money being spent on work there but I want to see some more money allocated to recognise the fuzzy wuzzy angels — those very important people who helped our soldiers in Papua New Guinea during World War II.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Dandenong) — It is a pleasure to speak on the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill. Many commentators have made a range of comments about the budget, and there are many to choose from. The best one was made by Wayne Kayler-Thompson, the CEO of VECCI (Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry), who said that this budget for business delivers a short-odds trifecta. There were other positives from the Australian Industry Group, the Property Council of Australia and the Master Builders Association, let alone the range of

different welfare and community organisations which know that Labor is fantastic at budgeting for the economy but also budgeting that is targeted at where people's needs are — that is, in services.

Budgets are about the choices that governments make on behalf of their people. What we have seen over the 10 years of Labor governments is that the choices are clearly about increasing infrastructure investment across the state to help improve productivity and efficiency, to help deal with our population growth and to help rebuild essential infrastructure that has not been rebuilt because priorities by previous governments have been low. That is exactly what we have seen over 10 years. We are still doing the work that needed to be done by previous governments, whether it is putting money into our public transport system or rebuilding our hospitals, schools or police stations. These are choices that governments make.

It is fantastic that VECCI recognised the scare campaign on last year's budget. The shadow Treasurer and the whole echo of the opposition were saying that we were going to be going into negative growth and into recession and that the budget deficit was over \$1 billion. All these things were clearly wrong. We continually see that opposition members cannot read budget papers, and last year were also saying that the budget papers were overly optimistic.

When we look at the final figures we see that Victoria has fared extremely well. In the last 12 months over 100 000 jobs have been created — it is the first time ever that over 100 000 jobs have been created in Victoria in any one year — and over half of those are full-time jobs. We have seen unemployment go down to 5.3 per cent, which is under the national average. When we compare Victoria with other economies around the world and where they are, this state fares extremely well. We are going to an election later this year, and this provides us with a good opportunity to focus on good management of the economy and good prioritisation of where the highest needs are in the state, including in welfare, in hospitals, in public safety, in education, in infrastructure, in roads and in ports. We have seen record infrastructure funding in the last decade.

All we really have to do is have a look at what is happening in Great Britain. There is a new conservative government there, and what is it doing? Its first job is to massively slash funding. Where is it slashing funding? In all the areas the public keeps telling us it wants governments to spend on. They are the same sorts of areas that the same side of politics that is in opposition here keeps criticising Labor governments on, saying

that we never put enough funding into hospitals, education, public safety and infrastructure. Yet when those opposition parties get into government, the first thing they do is cut all those things.

If we listen to the federal opposition's budget response as well, we hear that it wants to do the same things. In a federal election year its response is to go and propose cutting back on exactly the things it has been criticising the Rudd and state governments for supposedly not doing. The opposition cannot have its cake and eat it too. This is a great opportunity to highlight what the priority of Liberal-National coalition governments is — to cut, cut, cut and to cut in the wrong areas.

To see what that means on the ground, all we have to do is look at electorates like Dandenong. People are continually telling me about the record investment we have seen. This budget, with all the projects that are on the ground being developed in Dandenong, is delivering close to \$100 million there just on capital works alone. At the moment we are seeing the emergency department of Dandenong Hospital being totally rebuilt and expanded with extra beds. The Minister for Mental Health and I were out there just a couple of months ago looking at the new mental health facilities — the biggest single investment ever in mental health funding for one site. We turned the first sod at Dandenong Hospital. By the time we have finished these projects, a Labor government will have delivered a totally new Dandenong Hospital with more beds and more services to meet the demands of ageing, low-income and growing communities in the south-eastern suburbs. This is what we are seeing time and again.

We are also seeing the redevelopment of central Dandenong, where the government has committed \$270 million. Tomorrow morning I will be out with the mayor of the City of Greater Dandenong and representatives of VicUrban to reopen some of the redevelopments on Lonsdale Street, the main road in Dandenong — some of the projects re-energising the city centre to encourage new growth, new commercial and retail activity and also the opportunity for residential activity in the CBD of Dandenong. We are seeing it growing. These are certainly things that Liberal governments never do.

We are seeing the funding that is going into schools. We are rebuilding Dandenong High School. This budget sees extra funding going towards a major refurbishment of Dandenong North Primary School and a refurbishment of Lyndale Greens Primary School. At Chisholm Institute of TAFE down the road we have started the automotive and logistics centre project that

is being funded in Cleeland Street in Dandenong. When you go past you see all the pylons sticking out of the ground. There is also a huge, record investment in tertiary education, not just in primary and secondary education, which is also fantastic.

We are seeing the construction by Grollo of a government services building. The Kennett government closed regional offices and centralised everything in the CBD with its inner city approach to everything. We are putting government offices back out in the suburbs, where they can meet the needs of people and where it is actually cheaper to deliver services than in expensive CBD office space. We have seen it in places like the Transport Accident Commission building in Geelong. We are seeing that growth in Dandenong with the new government services building that is there. We are seeing that there is even more demand.

Next week the Treasurer is opening the new State Trustees building. We have decentralised State Trustees, and it now has a regional office in Dandenong. The biggest grouping of its staff has moved out to the Arkana site on the Princes Highway and Foster Street in Dandenong. It is a new office development that is part of the revitalising of central Dandenong, which VicUrban has been involved in. It is the first big new office project we have seen in Dandenong in many years, and it has been delivered through coordinated support by the state government. State Trustees is in that building with its staff, and it is also providing shopfront services for elderly people who need to access deceased estates of their loved ones. Rather than having to trudge all the way to the city to access the services, they can now access regionalised services. These are things that Labor governments do.

In July we will see the opening of the George Street Bridge, a Dandenong bypass road connecting busy Cheltenham Road where EastLink goes through and traffic comes off. Rather than all that traffic coming into central Dandenong, we will get it to bypass Dandenong via the George Street Bridge. These are not necessarily sexy things, but they are really important to get traffic congestion out of the CBD and to make sure that pedestrian traffic can access the different parts of the CBD, which opens up a whole new environment by ensuring that the central part of Dandenong is not a traffic sewer where trucks and cars that do not want to be in the centre of town do not have to be there. That is why the George Street Bridge is so important. We are already seeing new restaurants and cafes that have been opening up in central Dandenong because less traffic is coming into the city. The George Street Bridge will help with that.

There is a record investment in Dandenong in the budget. We have never seen such investment before, but of course there is more that always needs to be done. Labor governments are conscious of these things. They are conscious of the need to ensure good, strong economic activity while also making sure that the dividends of that growth go back into the community.

We would like to see some extra things, and the government is committed to undertaking more school projects in the area. We have announced the bringing back of a secondary school in the suburb of Doveton, where I grew up. There will basically be an educational facility offering kindergarten to year 10, which is a very new creative concept in partnership, using some of the land of the City of Casey next to Doveton Pool in the Park, where I used to go as a kid. Making sure that a place that does not have a secondary school any more can not only have a secondary school but also have it integrated with all the primary schools and early childhood services is really something innovative happening in our local community. There are also more plans for Chisholm TAFE as part of revitalising central Dandenong, including the possibility of a second campus, and I support that.

Labor governments do not just do something and move away; Labor governments have ongoing programs to deliver dividends to the community — they have forward plans. That is why we are seeing the additional road expansion in the area with the work on the Dingley arterial bypass. It benefits Dandenong, and it benefits the south-eastern suburbs overall. It is so important for us in Dandenong because it is a big industrial area. The materials for the goods that are manufactured in Dandenong have to come in from somewhere, and the goods have to go somewhere. It is about keeping jobs, but it is also about making sure that our roads are safer and our communities more livable. That is why roads like the Dingley bypass and why the works on Peninsula Link that the budget continues to fund are so important.

In addition there are the roadworks projects we have seen completed by the Labor government. The Hallam-Narre Warren bypass was our first project. Our second project was the Pakenham bypass in the south-eastern suburbs. Our third project was EastLink. Our fourth project was the provision of extra lanes on the M1. Other projects include Dingley bypass and Peninsula Link. These are ongoing plans. It is not about saying, 'We have been in government since 1999 and we do not have any additional plans', as those on the other side suggest. The reality is that people know we have ongoing plans to keep delivering exactly the sorts of things they expect us to deliver and have seen us

deliver — the sorts of things the public needs — and that is why they have been voting for us since 1999.

However, there will be a real danger later this year. We have not heard much from members on the other side about the sort of initiatives they want to see. We are the ones who provide extra police numbers; they are the ones who cut them when they were in government. They are saying now that they will provide extra police, but we are putting in extra police. Who can you trust: the ones who have been delivering extra police or the ones who promise police and do not deliver when they get into government? Do you believe the ones who commit a huge amount of extra health dollars in this budget? This was done with the support of the federal government, which is a fantastic example of good cooperation. We battled it out, but we got a good outcome for everyone. We promise more. Those on the other side say they want to do more, and they are very critical in opposition, but when they get into government they cut back on services and staff. These are real core issues for later this year. This budget shows the real difference between rhetoric — promises you can never trust — and the record of government.

In closing, what the budget really highlights is that although we have been in government for a number of years now the good thing is that we have a whole lot of rock solid programs to deliver based on good forward estimates in the budget. We have sustainable budget surpluses, a AAA credit rating and good programs. Victoria has had 10 years of an opposition with very few policies. The biggest issue is that it cannot be trusted on the economy. It got its numbers so wrong last year when it went into a scare campaign that, no matter what it does from here on in, it cannot be trusted. When you add up its promises, you see that it underfunds many of them.

I turn to more recent announcements. The opposition has promised 60 staff for Landcare, but it has funding for only 30. This poor accounting keeps on going on in the opposition. It got its maths wrong so badly last year, we have to ask why we should trust it. There have been 10 years of good economic growth under the Labor government, with 10 years of positive dividends for the community in great jobs growth and great population growth. People are coming back to Victoria — they are voting with their feet. They are no longer leaving the state as they did when those on the other side were in government. They are coming back because they trust in Victoria, they believe in Victoria, they believe in the future dividends for Victoria and they believe in the future plans for the livability of Victoria. That is why we are getting a record number of migrants; because they see that we are steering the ship extremely well.

I endorse the budget. I commend the Premier, the Treasurer and all the ministers on their fantastic work. It is a real pleasure to see so much investment in a working-class suburb like Dandenong that always gets ignored by conservative governments.

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — Before I begin commenting on what passes for the 2010–11 budget, I turn to a comment made earlier by the member for Essendon. I stress that I have worked very cooperatively and, I think, productively with the member for Essendon for the last three and a half years, so I know she is a good operator, but she made some interesting claims about the condition of the health system. She said that since 1999 the health system had improved; it has actually gone backwards.

If you go through the *Your Hospitals* reports, you will see that the contrast between 2009–10 and 1999 is stark. In the last 12 months 137 000 people were left sitting on hospital trolleys for more than 8 hours, 10 000 more than in the previous year, and 69 000 patients did not receive appropriate care in the proper time frame. If you compare that with the 1999 figure, you will find that 72 per cent of patients received care in the appropriate time frame in 1999 and that that has now declined to 66 per cent. To suggest that the health system is in much better condition than it was in 1999 is clearly inaccurate.

The Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill does absolutely nothing for the seat of Mornington, it does next to nothing for the Mornington Peninsula and it does precious little for the state of Victoria overall. It is a cynical and failed exercise in vote buying. If you look at the index of the budget documents, you can see very quickly where it is focused. In fact I was doing that while the Treasurer was speaking the other week, and it was very apparent where the focus was. It is about holding votes in marginal Labor seats, nothing more and nothing less. There is no reasonable budget for the rest of the state, and there is little or no joy in this budget for the Mornington Peninsula.

Of the new schools provided for in the budget, 30 of 36 are in Labor-held seats. Of that money, \$30 million goes into 17 marginal electorates and — surprise, surprise! — 13 of them are held by government members. There are 112 new infrastructure projects, of which 89 are projects in Labor-held seats, and 90 per cent of the total funding provided for those new infrastructure projects is to be spent in Labor-held seats.

This budget is an exercise in conning the public. It is a tawdry attempt to persuade people that this government should be given yet another chance, but it is going to

fail because people are simply not buying the story. It is not just me saying that the budget has done very little for the Mornington Peninsula. The *Mornington and Southern Peninsula Mail* of 12 May cited Mr Kevin Clarke, one of the shire's directors, whose preliminary comment was:

We would hope to get a small amount of money out of some programs.

The paper went on to quote Mr Clarke as saying:

the shire would expect a share of \$1 million earmarked for pest and weed control in state parks.

He further said that the shire would be more than capable of spending \$1 million on pest and weed control in state parks itself. Yet \$1 million is what has been allocated for that across the state.

He also commented on neighbourhood safer places and the \$500 000 that has been made available to local government to fund them, but in order to receive any of that funding local government is required to do a lot of work, which is a further burden on ratepayers. The paper also observed, and I think it is quite right, that:

... the ALP pollies praise the 'facility improvements' for four schools and improvements for five level crossings —

including the Frankston electorate —

... all of which had previously been announced.

In other words, there is absolutely no new money at all. In my electorate we have no investment in social infrastructure and no investment in physical infrastructure despite a substantial and continuing growth in population.

We also have escalating violence. The front page of the *Mornington Peninsula Leader* this week reads 'Champion footballer left unrecognisable by a brutal bashing by gang of young men in Main St'. This is only the latest in a long line of violent assaults and attacks in the town of Mornington in the past 12 months.

Why do we have thugs carrying on in the way they do? Because they know that there are not enough coppers out on the streets to pick them up. Again and again we have young people's lives either severely disrupted, or in some cases destroyed, because our streets are no longer safe enough, but there is no money in this budget for that either. There are no extra police. There is also no funding to relieve peak-hour congestion. Bungower Road, which is going to provide the main access to Peninsula Link when it finally gets built, has one lane each way, yet not 1 cent has been allocated for its upgrade. During peak hour it has now got a point where

the traffic virtually does not move one way or the other; once Peninsula Link opens, in a couple of years, traffic along the entire road will grind to a halt. The Mornington-Tyabb Road is basically in the same situation: it was due for duplication 10 years ago, it should have been duplicated 10 years ago, and we are still waiting for it.

Despite claims that there is additional funding for health — there may be money for one or two intensive care unit beds in Frankston Hospital — there is no serious additional funding. As I mentioned earlier, almost half the emergency department patients who require hospitalisation at Frankston Hospital are left waiting on a trolley for more than 8 hours. The government's target is 80 per cent; it is just managing 50 per cent, yet there is no more money to do anything about those issues.

My electorate had one project recognised in the state budget — one project split into two components, with \$675 000 for an upgrade at the Mount Martha sewerage treatment plant, which is important work but not exactly a major project; and \$1 million for a sewerage treatment plant education centre. I have no idea what that is but I am sure it will do good work, because if people know about the good or bad environmental impact that these sorts of facilities can have, then it is worthwhile. But that is the absolute total of the money that is available for the Mornington electorate.

I want to make a brief comment about Peninsula Link. The Minister for Roads and Ports, who unfortunately has now left the chamber, put out a press release on budget day, 4 May 2010, and listed in his highlights of transport projects funded in the 2010 state budget was \$759 million for the construction of Peninsula Link. That is just totally and absolutely wrong. There is not \$759 million; there is not 10 per cent of that; there is barely 1 per cent of that in the state budget. His statement was completely and utterly wrong; it is totally misleading to claim that that sort of capital is being spent. It is certainly misleading the public — —

Mr R. Smith — It is typical!

Mr MORRIS — Yes, the member for Warrandyte correctly interjects, it is typical of the way this government operates.

I want to speak briefly about Devilbend Reserve. It was slated for disposal by this government or, more accurately, by the Bracks government. There were two parcels of land, one on either side of Graydens Road: on one side was a relatively small parcel and the other side had a parcel of some 41 hectares. Across Derril

Road the property adjoins Woods Reserve, an intact block of very important local indigenous woodland. The property was listed for sale by the government, and government members were dragged kicking and screaming to the point where they had to meet a Liberal policy commitment not to sell the reserve. Nevertheless, government members could not restrain themselves — they had to sell part of the reserve — and what we have left is the 41 hectares.

A draft management plan was prepared and submissions sought. They closed in March 2009. Now, in May 2010, the final management plan still has not been released, and you have to wonder exactly what is in it. The battle for Devilbend has been a long, hard-fought pitched battle, firstly, to retain the reserve and stop it being sold off for residential use, and secondly, to have the reserve developed in an appropriate manner. Parks Victoria seemed desperate to develop the reserve in a manner which would maximise the return and which is totally inappropriate for the natural values and the systems that are present in this reserve.

Unfortunately this is part of a disturbing trend we are seeing in a number of locations but particularly on the Mornington Peninsula, where the government is not interested in making the necessary investment to conserve the property to support the native flora and fauna and to support the natural values that are present and capable of development on the property. The government is simply interested in turning the land over to a purpose which will return the highest, but certainly not the best, value to Treasury. That is a disturbing trend.

I will speak very briefly on the issue of funding of local government. The president of the Municipal Association of Victoria, Bill McArthur, has been quite vocal on this issue, and I certainly support many of the comments he has made. His press release on the budget raises the issues of the cost of maintaining vegetation and neighbourhood safer places. As I mentioned earlier when I spoke of Kevin Clarke, \$500 000 was allocated, but Cr McArthur estimates that the cost of maintaining each neighbourhood safer place may be as high as \$40 000.

The member for Essendon said what a wonderful job this government has done in terms of funding libraries. We have now sunk to a point where the state government share of recurrent library funding is 20 per cent. It used to be dollar for dollar, but it has sunk to a point where it is now only 20 per cent of total funding. I do not call that investing in libraries or providing the resources that people in our community need to

continue to grow, to educate themselves and to broaden their horizons. To claim anything else is totally false. In his comments Cr McArthur rightly identified the government's willingness to load councils up with additional responsibilities and costs but without providing any extra money. If we look at the national figures, we see that local government rates and charges in Victoria have increased over the last decade at a much faster rate than anywhere else simply because of the level of cost shifting that has been going on.

This budget is all style and no substance. It is a cynical exercise. It is an attempt to convince voters in marginal seats that they should give the government another chance. The only vision in this budget is incredibly short term and it expires in November, and hopefully so too will the cynical, manipulative and short-sighted Brumby government.

Mr EREN (Lara) — It is a pleasure to rise to speak in support of the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill. Firstly, I again congratulate the Premier, the Treasurer and indeed all of the ministers and the people involved in producing yet another fantastic budget. It is yet another budget that is in the black. I have said this once, and I will say it many more times: all the financial institutions have said that this is a AAA budget, and AAA is certainly here to stay.

When we stood here last year, as a government we were faced with many challenges. In that year we had seen the worst bushfires in our history, and we had also faced a global economic downturn through the global financial crisis (GFC). There was a lot of fear centred around job security and job losses. However, as we know, the unemployment rate in the Geelong area is around 5 per cent, and we can certainly recall a time in Geelong when those figures were much higher. Back in 1994 the unemployment rate was around the 13 per cent mark. When you think of that figure, you realise that is an enormous percentage of unemployment, which obviously was devastating for Geelong. As we all know, in 1994 the Kennett government was in power. Now, 12 months down the track from the last budget, I am proud to say that over 100 000 new jobs have been created in Victoria — the highest growth in any state in the country. Jobs that did not exist some 12 months ago do exist now.

I turn to the global financial crisis, which is further unfolding and devastating some European nations, including Greece, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. Many countries have been devastated and continue to be devastated by the GFC. However, Australia not only saw and bucked the trend as a nation but has certainly been leading the world in terms of

economic recovery and economic growth. Further good news came when it was revealed that Victoria was the leading economy of all the states and territories. For example, in the last 12 months over 100 000 jobs have been created, which has been due to the hard work of this state government. While the economic recovery has not seen us be totally out of the woods, obviously we are well on the way.

My electorate of Lara is now considered to be the economic heart of the Geelong region. As it develops, the Geelong Ring Road employment precinct will see hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs located in that area. I am very proud to say that prior to the budget the government announced — I think through a community cabinet in Geelong — funding of \$2 million towards the development of that precinct.

Avalon Airport is another success story in Geelong. The state government invested in Avalon and assisted in that airport's venture to become the second international airport in Victoria. Increasingly Avalon will become one of the major employers in the Geelong region.

Then there is the presence of Ford in Geelong. This government has reduced WorkCover premiums and other charges to assist businesses, and particularly manufacturing companies, which are a major part of Geelong's economy. There is no question that the \$6.4 billion package the federal government announced for the motor vehicle and manufacturing industries has assisted companies like Ford, which are vitally important for Geelong. As has been mentioned earlier, this support is vitally important for the whole state and indeed for the whole country. It was a great day when Ford announced \$20 million of investment in its stamping plant.

Back in 1984, Marin Burela, the new head of Ford, was one of the workers in the stamping plant at Ford. It has been very pleasant to see someone come up from the shop floor and rise through the ranks and become the head of Ford Australia. I have a history with Ford; back in the 1980s and early 1990s I worked at Ford and was a proud union delegate there. I am very proud of the budget announcement that was made, which is critical to the Geelong area.

As I said, the Victorian economy has remained resilient, but we should not be complacent. We must remember we are not out of the woods just yet. We need to keep up the good work, and this budget certainly continues the good work that has been done in the past. This budget reflects the Brumby government's commitment to continue to work hard and place

Victoria in a good position. Given the continued uncertainty in the economic climate, this task is never to be underestimated.

Make no mistake, we are the people for the job, as we have seen since 1999 when we were first elected to government. We are not afraid to roll up our sleeves when the going gets tough. We continue year after year to deliver budgets in the black, to invest in job security, to invest in infrastructure and education, and to continue to make Victoria the best place to live, work, raise a family and invest. Despite the difficulties we have faced in uncertain economic times, the Brumby Labor government has maintained its AAA credit rating. We will deliver a surplus of some \$870 million in the 2011–12 financial year, which will be an achievement in itself, and one that is not to be overlooked or taken lightly.

Every year I stand here and listen to the opposition. Oppositions on most occasions oppose just for the sake of opposing; on occasion they come up with their own policies and they sometimes defend those policies. members of the opposition stand up now and say, 'Yet another bad budget'. They used to say, 'Labor cannot handle the finances. It cannot handle the economy'. How wrong could they be, when Victoria has a budget that is continually in surplus and is continually receiving a AAA rating from the financial institutions of the world? Since 1999 this state has certainly been in good hands — Labor hands. The story that Labor is not good with money does not wash any more; people do not believe it.

This will be my fourth budget in my first term in this place as the member for Lara. Over the course of the four years the seat of Lara and the wider community of Geelong have benefited from a record investment made by the Brumby Labor government. I thank the Premier and all the ministers for their ongoing commitment to regional Victoria. I must make mention of some of those key investments in this year's budget. They include \$33.6 million towards planning for a second hospital in Geelong and expanding the capacity of the current Geelong Hospital. This will see a new inpatient wing and additional acute and intensive care capacity, plus a further \$5 million for 10 new acute and intensive care unit beds and expanded surgery capacity.

I would like to point out that the population is booming, and there are certainly challenges for us. We are managing the growth in a responsible manner. Geelong is a great place to live, work and raise a family, and that is why we are seeing an unprecedented growth in population. My electorate of Lara extends to Wyndham Vale and Manor Lakes, which is the top end of

Werribee, and that part of the world is now the fastest growing region in the nation. This presents a lot of challenges, as I have said before, but we are certainly the people to take on those challenges and succeed.

The record investments will continue. There is a further \$76.9 million to complete the final stage of the Geelong Ring Road project, section 4C, which is the Surf Coast Highway connection to the freeway. That Geelong Ring Road has been shown in *Melway* for some 50 to 55 years. Let us not forget that it was this Labor government that made it a reality. We are seeing the benefits of making that decision, and Geelong is certainly benefiting economically as a result of that. We are now investing a further \$76.9 million towards the continuation of that road.

There is \$25 million over four years to be invested in a new environmentally sustainable government services building in central Geelong. There is a \$136.6 million boost for fire preparation and response. This will better assist those in regional areas, such as my constituents, in the event of a bushfire. There is also \$561.3 million over five years to recruit, train and employ 1700 new police, \$73.9 million over four years to redeploy 200 police to the front line, and a further \$38.4 million to release 66 police officers from telephone answering services into front-line roles. The people of Geelong and Wyndham Vale will obviously benefit from all these initiatives, and with the new Wyndham North police station already open, this will be sure to accommodate the ever-growing Wyndham Vale community.

The good work continues for the people of the Lara electorate, with a share of \$20 million over four years to create a grasslands reserve in my electorate at the edge of the urban growth boundary. It is very important to remember that buffer zone, and grasslands are very important for growing areas such as that.

There is over \$10 million for stage 1 of the Corio-Norlane regeneration project, which includes years 7 and 8 technology and science facilities at Corio Primary School, Corio West Primary School and Norlane West Primary School, plus a year 9 facility at Corio Bay Senior College. That wonderful project has been led by the community over the last three and a bit years. A lot of good people have worked very hard towards getting that project to this level. When I visited the schools involved, the principals, the school council presidents and members of the community all said, 'We are ready for our first stage of development; we really need this money'. As I have said many times, Corio-Norlane is one of the disadvantaged areas of Geelong, and certainly that first injection of money to

regenerate education in the area is very welcome. The budget also contains \$9 million for Manor Lakes P-12 Specialist College's stage 4 construction, which includes senior classrooms, information technology, a special development school, senior administration facilities and other amenities.

There is also \$4.3 billion for the regional rail link project, which, as I understand it, is to be the biggest rail infrastructure works in the nation. People who live in Geelong and the western suburbs, including Wyndham Vale and Werribee, will benefit from it. There is \$2.2 million for transportation improvements under urban renewal in Corio-Norlane, which will further benefit the area. As I said before, a lot of work has gone into Corio-Norlane to look at the issues in a whole-of-government way, and certainly it is getting the attention it needs from a fair state government. If I had more time, I would talk about the A Fairer Victoria policy under which the government announced \$1.3 billion funding to make Victoria a fairer place.

We are laying down the ground work for the future ahead and providing regional areas with more opportunity; we are locking in a prosperous future for our region. In the face of tough economic times, the Brumby Labor government has shown itself to be a very reliable government for Victorians. I am proud to say I am a member of a government that, time after time, has shown its ongoing commitment to the people of this state, to make it the best place to live, work and raise a family. I commend the bill to the house.

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I am pleased to speak on the budget bill for 2010. Like many members, when the budget papers are delivered into the house I open them with feverish anticipation, thinking, 'This year, out of the past 11 years, the seat of Evelyn and the Yarra Valley will get their fair share'. But how disappointed I was when I looked at what my electorate is to get this year. I knew that in the past 11 years the Brumby government had collected over \$340 billion in an unprecedented revenue take, and I really thought this time we were going to get funding out in the Yarra Valley. But what did I find? It did not.

I refer to an article in the *Age* of 15 May, which explains it exactly. It says that:

... new funds for schools, hospitals and train stations have been pumped into Labor and marginal seats.

When you look at the health highlights, Labor seats receive \$1.57 billion; coalition seats receive \$53.8 million. Out of the new schools, Labor seats receive \$54.13 million; coalition seats receive \$8.46 million. A total of \$83.7 million was allocated in

the state budget for 20 new premium train stations: 18 are in safe Labor seats, and 3 are in Liberal seats — sorry, they are not safe Labor seats; they are Labor seats that the Labor Party thinks they might lose, and let us hope that that happens.

Delays and bureaucratic bangles have cost taxpayers almost \$11 billion in budget blow-outs under the current state government — myki, EastLink, the channel deepening project and the Royal Children's Hospital, to name but a few. The actual cost to taxpayers now stands at more than \$10.7 billion above the originally budgeted costs.

The government has committed to putting 1966 extra front-line police on the beat over the next five years at a cost of \$673 million. All it took was 11 years, and for the coalition to promise 2640 new police and protective services officers before Labor decided it should listen to the concerns of Victorians.

What was I looking for in my own electorate? Not a great deal. We have the problem of rurality funding for the Coldstream and Yering primary schools. Once again I was disappointed to see the government ignore these great rural schools. The adoption of the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia to determine rurality has affected a number of schools on the urban fringe of Melbourne. The impact has been felt through a loss of programs, through an increased workload for teaching staff who are already overburdened, and through an increase in class sizes, which is incompatible with the department's goals.

They are not asking for huge amounts of money, but it makes a difference when the principal has to take a class at a time when other things should be attended to. It makes a difference when a preschool can operate at a break-even point; it makes a difference for a speciality teacher at a small school. But after repeatedly asking since 2001, the government has ignored those requests.

Pembroke Secondary College missed out on \$9.2 million funding. It is a college that has students from the seats of Evelyn and Kilsyth, and it needed the funding to complete its redevelopment work. It means the completion of the project is now not expected until 2013. It is overdue by about seven years, and now its redevelopment will take a lot longer.

Parents and teachers at Wandin Yallock Primary School — and me, I must admit — were left confused over the status of the school's redevelopment after it was announced that it would receive \$2 million for an upgrade to its facilities, which upgrade was expected to cost \$4 million. Despite assurances from the

government that the funding would be adequate, I find it difficult to believe the design submitted by Wandin Yallock primary, which was approved on a Monday — a day before the budget was handed down — can receive a 50 per cent discount in funding and still yield the same end result in terms of buildings. Something does not add up.

Lilydale West Primary School was having its first speech therapist visit for the year when I went to visit it in late April. Under changes introduced last year, schools that were previously visited weekly by a dedicated psychologist now rely on regional offices to make referrals. This is supposed to target care so that a child in need of specialist care gets to see someone with training specific to their particular complaint. However, it was reported in the *Age* of 21 March that principals said that support is often belated and inconsistent.

Gabrielle Leigh from the Victorian Principals Association attributes the growing levels of violence in schools to the state government's changed way of managing support services. Schools are finding there is nowhere to go with challenging students. The problem is that when children are forced to wait for these vital services, their problems intensify. I can speak from personal experience of that. If children are not given help with speech therapy when they are young, they are disadvantaged for the rest of their lives. They are disadvantaged in every avenue of learning, because if they cannot talk about the work they are doing, and if they cannot communicate with people, they begin to retreat: they retreat from the classroom, retreat from society and become antisocial.

Yarra Ranges residents are likely to face higher council rates after the government funding shortfall on the cost of neighbourhood safer places (NSPs). The government has allocated just \$500 000 in the budget to help councils pay for the maintenance of neighbourhood safer places. The funding will be shared across Victoria, and the Yarra Ranges council fears it will amount to next to nothing. It is symptomatic of a wider trend within government of shifting the cost burden of programs to local government: for instance, the landfill levy, the significant extra costs of bushfire preparation works and the need to respond to the recommendations of the bushfires royal commission.

There is a genuine concern about the cost of vegetation maintenance around neighbourhood safer places, which are required to meet strict radiant heat and defensible space criteria. After the winter growth the cost is estimated to be as high as \$40 000 a site in some rural areas. We have a great shire, but we have a lot of trees, and it costs a lot of money to remove them and the

scrub around the designated neighbourhood safer places. So far the Yarra Ranges has six designated NSPs. They are and should be a state government responsibility. The Municipal Association of Victoria has estimated councils would need a total of \$12 million for neighbourhood safer places, not the \$500 000 offered by the government. That is grossly inadequate.

In relation to dental services, one elderly resident, Connie, recently contacted my office, enraged about the standard of the dental health service in Victoria. Connie was told by Ranges Community Health that the first available emergency appointment was around three months away, which is an awfully long time to wait when you are in pain. Connie ended up paying to have her tooth fixed privately despite being eligible for government assistance. She has since been in contact with Ranges Community Health for her dental check-up and was told she would have to ring back in 12 months time, then go on a waiting list for another 12 months, so she has to wait 12 months to go on a 12-month waiting list for a dental check-up — that makes two years in total. Connie said she can understand why some pensioners resort to pulling out their own teeth due to the lack of available services.

Seven hundred people are on the waiting list for urology services; however, no urology services are available at Maroondah Hospital. A constituent by the name of Neville approached my office this year after being treated for an infection in his prostate before he could have surgery to rectify bleeding. Neville was given an urgent referral from his GP to see a surgeon at Maroondah Hospital with a view to having immediate surgery. He waited and he waited, then he contacted them and was told that Maroondah's urology department was closed and that he should go to Box Hill Hospital. He waited and waited again. The referral had gone in as urgent. Neville took the decision to purchase private health insurance last year and has since seen a private surgeon to have the problem addressed. He is still waiting to be notified by Box Hill and Maroondah hospitals. Neville's condition was extremely painful. He is a pensioner and cannot afford to pay for these things himself.

Funding is the biggest problem our hospitals face. After 11 years of neglect it is going to take a lot more than funding for a cancer and wellness centre and a new hospital in the member for Bendigo East's electorate to restore the balance to a system that has not kept pace with Victoria's population growth. In Lilydale when we got the super-clinic we were promised a GP bulk-billing service, but we have not got it. We were promised a lot of things. We have got some of the

things we were promised. We got a beautiful building, which is state of the art and has everything possible that opens and closes and works within any environmental system, but we do not have a GP that bulk-bills in the area at all.

Yesterday in a members statement I raised the issue of weeds. Yarra Ranges Shire Council was promised \$1 million to help combat the weed problem, which is at epidemic proportions. The council wrote to the MAV (Municipal Association of Victoria) and asked it to help, and the government came back and said it would give the council \$1 million in funding in the 2009–10 state budget. The council wondered why the money had not come. It waited and waited, and then decided to ask where it had gone. It was told by the member for Monbulk that the money had gone to the Department of Sustainability and Environment, not to the council; it had gone to DSE to be used on state land, not on council land. That is another \$1 million the council has got to find to manage the weeds.

The rollout of smart meters to 2.5 million Victorian homes and businesses is going to cost us, the taxpayers, a mind-boggling \$800 million more than the starting estimate. For the average mum and dad that will equate to an increase of \$68 this year and \$8 next year, according to the Australian Energy Regulator. However, we also discover that the cost of the meter is not the only cost. If you actually want to use this smart meter to help control how much power you use, you cannot go out and look at the smart meter. Instead you have to buy a screen, a digital unit, for inside the house and pay for it to be installed yourself, if you want to see whether you are going to save power. Let me tell you, the only way you are going to save power is if you do the washing at 2 o'clock in the morning, if you do not turn your air conditioner on during the day — you can turn it on at night — and do not turn the heating on on a cold day, because that is going to cost you more.

This is absolutely ridiculous — and it will hurt pensioners the most. Every \$5 this government charges pensioners means one more meatless meal a week. They cannot afford it; they are going to be going without. They will not turn the heating on; they will wrap themselves in blankets. They will not turn the air conditioning on; they will be too scared because they will know it is going to cost so much. Last year an Auditor-General's report said the cost of smart meters could blow out to \$2.25 billion. That is even more than the minister is admitting at the moment; it is more than he admitted to at the recent Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings.

The debt under this government is expected to increase more than eightfold to \$31.7 billion. Interest alone to service this will be \$3.2 billion each year by 2014. That is equivalent to the entire budget of the Department of Human Services. We have heard today how terrible that department is in coping with its duty of care to the children who are being entrusted to its care. That amount of interest alone is equivalent to employing 10 000 police or nurses or building a new hospital each year.

When I look at the situation small business and homebuyers are in, I see that small businesses are facing ever-increasing taxes. Victoria has the lowest threshold for payroll tax of any state in Australia at \$550 000 per annum. You do not have to be Einstein to work out that that does not cover a lot of employees. It is also the case that apprentices are included when you are calculating whether you exceed that payroll threshold. What incentive is there for a business which is just under the payroll tax threshold and which would like to take on an apprentice if to do so would put it over the threshold and make it liable to pay payroll tax?

We can look at the debacle over liquor licensing and at the lack of support for tourism. The tourism industry is not going well. We hear figures trotted out, but I would like to cast doubt on the veracity of those figures, because operators are telling me that visitor numbers are down, bed stays are down and purchases in restaurants and gift shops et cetera are down. Melbourne itself, because of all the sporting events, may be holding its own, but I can tell the minister that in rural and regional Victoria tourism is actually down.

Before I finish I want to refer to stamp duty. I have five children. I am fortunate that three of them have already bought their homes but two of them have not. When I look at stamp duty I see that Victoria has the highest stamp duty of any state in Australia. When purchasing a median-priced family home in Melbourne at \$524 500, non-first home buyers pay \$23 440 in stamp duty. That compares to \$9608 in Queensland, \$19 093 in New South Wales and \$18 530 in Tasmania. Where is the rhyme or reason in that? Why should our people be paying so much more stamp duty when they buy a house? It is ridiculous. Elderly couples who want to downsize will pay a high level of stamp duty. It is so wrong. As I said in my opening remarks, despite the fact that this government has had an unprecedented amount of money coming into its coffers — \$340 billion in 11 years — we are paying more and more and more tax.

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — It is a pleasure to speak on the appropriation bill and inject a bit of reality into

the debate. Victoria is going well. We have a strong budgetary position, and an enormous effort has gone into securing that budgetary position.

I want to comment a little bit on the process of developing the budget, because it is an absolutely enormous effort to pull together a budget as successful as this budget is, one which will undoubtedly excel in the years to come as a test of how well this state has been positioned for future economic growth. Many people go into building a budget like this — putting it together, doing the ticks and crosses, getting the priorities right — to ensure that services are delivered where they need to be.

I would like to acknowledge a few of those people before I begin my major contribution to this debate. Firstly, I commend the Treasurer, John Lenders, for the fantastic job he has done. I have known John Lenders for quite a number of years, and anyone who knows him knows that he has always been a fairly careful, solid, perhaps frugal but certainly deep thinker who takes things cautiously and is 100 per cent sure of what he is going to do before he does it. Since he has become Treasurer I doubt there would be anyone in this house who would not say he has grown enormously and that he is the best Treasurer in this country, in my opinion at least. He has done an exemplary job in this budget.

Secondly, I would like to comment on some of his staff, who have worked tirelessly on this budget as well, burning the midnight oil, checking over the figures and ensuring that it is as comprehensive as a budget can be. In particular I acknowledge the contribution from Roland Lindell, the chief of staff, and advisers David Bell and Caitlin Phillips. They are key people who have worked hard and who I know are tremendously proud of this budget.

The Department of Treasury and Finance has once again delivered for the state of Victoria. It has put a budget together in liaison with all the various departments. It has got the balance right between services, economic growth, what we need for prosperity and what we need to plan for the future. I acknowledge all those staff who have also worked burning the midnight oil on this budget, in particular the Secretary to the Department of Treasury and Finance, Grant Hehir, and the deputy secretary of budget and financial management, Dean Yates: two excellent public servants who serve this state very well, who are public servants in the true meaning of the word and who have delivered a great budget.

Despite what we have heard from the other side, any reasonable person could not criticise this budget, and

there has not been any criticism of any substance. It is financially sound; it is forward thinking; it builds on past policy and on previously strong budgets; and it is a budget that has positioned Victoria to lead the nation industrially, commercially, economically and on any social indices you can find.

It is time to look at a few of the facts, not the rhetoric that has gone on here in this chamber. There is no doubt that the Victorian economy has shown magnificent resilience in continuing to perform strongly, creating jobs despite the global economic downturn. Who would have thought that a government could have brought down a surplus of \$825 million, kept our AAA rating with surpluses that average up to about \$1.2 billion over the years and funded services as well as they were funded a couple of years ago? It is an almighty achievement, and it shows the resilience of the Victorian economy.

Turning to jobs, Victoria accounted for about 90 per cent of full-time jobs — not part-time — created in Australia last year. We are talking of around about 100 000 jobs created here in Victoria, and that is around 3.8 per cent growth, which is an incredible statistic, given as I said the economic impact on all our trading partners and their declining economies. Economic growth is forecast at 3.25 per cent, which is strong by any world measure in the financial times we find ourselves in. Underlining the budget is \$9.5 billion in community infrastructure. We heard about taxation, and we can talk backwards and forwards on taxation. We know we have reduced taxation rates in this state over the last few years. But the \$9.5 billion in infrastructure funding that will create 30 000 jobs is a tremendous achievement that anyone on either side of the house would acknowledge. It is great for this state; it is fantastic infrastructure that we need.

The economic side of the budget is great for families. I will talk a bit more about some of the services, but in a nutshell it is great for families in Eltham. Eltham is an electorate that has a large number of two-income families. We have mortgages, we have a high quality of life and we have longevity of life — our life spans are longer than in most other places around Australia. What is important to the people of Eltham is a secure and solid economy. They want job security. They want to know they can pay their mortgages. They want to know they can send their kids to school. They want to know they can go on their annual family holiday. These are the things that are important to families, and central to that importance is a continued strong economy which this budget delivers.

Families of course need health care. There is nothing more central to anyone's life than a healthy life. Those who have health are lucky; those who do not have health, need treatment when they need it — and they need high-quality treatment. It is always expensive, and as our community gets older, the costs go up. This budget sees a record \$4 billion commitment to Victoria's health-care services. It combines with the federal funding that we fought so hard to get. It is a massive boost for our hospital services, a boost that will substantially increase the number of patients to be treated. Something like an extra 9000 Victorian patients will get elective surgery; they will get their operations sooner than they thought. Something like 32 000 extra patients will get outpatient treatment when they need it and quicker than they would have thought; and we will see an extra 50 000 patients go through our emergency departments. These are expensive items. It is happening quickly, and it is a massive boost to our system.

I note that the Minister for Regional and Rural Development is in the chamber, and I know she is absolutely delighted with the \$473 million Bendigo hospital. Remember when the Liberals were in power? Is there anyone in this state who would have thought a Victorian government would build a \$470 million hospital in rural Victoria? It is an unbelievable achievement.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HERBERT — The opposition is criticising it. It is unbelievable. A \$470 million hospital of that size in rural and regional Victoria is a massive achievement.

In my local area, of course, I go to the Austin Hospital if I need help, and so do most people in Eltham. The Austin is a hospital that the opposition was going to close, sell off and hand over to the private sector. That Austin Hospital gets another massive boost.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — Order! I ask the shadow minister and the minister to quieten down.

Mr HERBERT — It gets another massive boost in terms of stage 2 of the \$62 million Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre at the Austin. It is a fantastic achievement. This is something we can all agree on: cancer is the blight of our modern day society. In the past maybe it was a tool that nature gave us to get rid of older people! Now of course we all want to live longer. Cancer is a blight on so many people's lives. But the technology, the treatments and the new developments are progressing massively and quickly,

and we need hospital facilities that can utilise those new treatments and new approaches, whether it be through some of the latest stem cell research that is going on or through some of the new chemical treatments. We need those things in our communities to eradicate or at least cut down the blight of cancer on people's lives. I know the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre will be an absolute boon for the 500 Victorians who are diagnosed with cancer every week, for their families and for the quality of their future lifestyle.

Education is now and has been the no. 1 priority of the government. There have been enormous achievements in education over the last decade. While I was looking at the progress of a highly successful BER (Building the Education Revolution) project I was reflecting with the principal of one of the schools in my electorate about the transformation that has happened in schools over the last decade. Governments of all political persuasions had underspent on schools. Certainly when we came into power we had schools closing all over the place, schools that were run down and falling apart, and a dilapidated teacher workforce. The state education system was in an absolutely dire state. That has changed.

We have seen capital works funding in Victoria ramp up from about \$70 million to \$90 million a year back in 1999 to \$600 million a year in the last few years. That is a massive increase. Of course with the commonwealth BER we are seeing over two years a \$2.5 billion rebuild of our schools. This has transformed them. It is not just building classrooms like classrooms: it is building new modern teaching spaces that are information and communications technology equipped and that are flexible learning spaces that enable teachers to use their very best knowledge to help individual students and assist small groups of students with the sort of education they need. This budget continues that process, and it continues it pretty strongly.

We said back in 2007, I think, that this year we would in fact commit to rebuilding or modernising 500 schools. This budget, with the \$271 million it provides for building and equipment, means we have exceeded that target by 53 schools, so a massive 553 schools will be modernised or rebuilt in this term of government. It would have taken a decade in the past to reach that sort of achievement. We are well on the way to completely transforming all schools in every part of this state by the provision of modern teaching spaces.

In my electorate the Eltham East Primary School got \$6 million for a new prep-2 centre and a new administration area — some new facilities at the front

of the school to replace the dilapidated facilities it has right now. The school is delighted; it is absolutely rapt. It has had a BER project at the back; it has had some building works done over the last few years, and this will finish that school off. It is a great school now. It has one of the best choirs in the state. It gets fantastic outcomes. This \$6 million will capitalise on all of that and make it an absolutely sensational looking school to match the educational programs it delivers.

I will just mention a couple of other things that have not been talked about a lot. The budget supports the environment, and it builds on the great legacy of the Bracks and Brumby governments in protecting Victoria's great environmental assets, whether it be water, national parks or our fantastic bushland. Eltham is on the edge of the green wedge, and we treasure that rolling plain bushland kind of environment. This budget will secure native grasslands on Melbourne's fringe to protect flora and fauna. It will upgrade our iconic national parks, with 25 new walking trails. Admission will be free from 1 July. And of course we have a \$175 million green jobs package, which is just the way to keep our industry going and position our bright, green future in a less polluting environment than we currently have.

Overall it is a great budget. It is well balanced, it builds on the prosperity of this state, it provides for a surplus and a AAA credit rating and it will position this state for a bright future ahead.

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — I rise to contribute to the debate on the 2010–11 budget. I wish to make a number of general comments and then focus on electorate-specific issues. Let us just put this budget in perspective: it is a budget delivered by a Labor Melbourne-centric government. To verify that, let us look at the government's own publication, the *Victorian Budget 2010–11 Overview — Standing Up for Families — Securing Jobs*. When we go to pages 14 and 15 and look at where the money has been spent in regional Victoria we see that in the Hume region — which is much of north-eastern Victoria — there are only four dot points for government projects being invested in in north-east Victoria. In relation to the electorate of Benalla we have mention of new and upgraded State Emergency Service equipment in Murchison, Euroa and Mansfield, which is much appreciated. The only other mention for the Benalla electorate in this document is the new permanent facilities at Tawonga Primary School. That just happens to be a rehash of an announcement made three years ago. The government's own documents show that it has not delivered a fair share to regional Victoria and certainly not to the electorate of Benalla.

If we look at the issue of accountability of this government, we note it has a very poor record. In the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee interview process, which I participated in over the last two weeks, we saw the government ministers ducking and weaving, evading, failing to own up to the truth and failing to answer specific questions when put to them by the members of the opposition. We had the government responding by saying, 'We are going to solve our problems with a bill that is before the Parliament' — I think it is called the Public Finance and Accountability Bill.

The only problem is that whilst the bill says all of the right words, there is no penalty for non-compliance with that bill. We will have another mockery of accountability. The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, if run properly and if the ministers played ball, would hold the government to account. This legislation, if it had punitive measures for non-compliance, would also hold the government to account, but that is not occurring.

If we look at the Auditor-General's report into the accountability of this government, *Performance Reporting by Departments* of May 2010, the second paragraph of the conclusion states:

Overall, there is a lack of effective outcomes performance reporting across the departments, and the standard of reporting varies considerably. Only a few departments were able to demonstrate the extent to which objectives have been met. While departments are responsible for improving the standard of performance reporting, stronger central agency leadership is needed to drive the reporting standard to minimum satisfactory levels.

In other words, there is no accountability at departmental level and there is no leadership from the ministers, the Premier or the Treasurer to ensure we get that accountability.

The other basic fact about this government is that Labor cannot manage money. Previous speakers have mentioned a \$10.7 billion blow-out on major projects management, including the infamous myki and the equally infamous smart meters — or not-so-smart meters. Labor had in excess of \$340 billion over its decade in power, yet it has managed to increase Victoria's debt from around \$5 billion to a projected debt of in excess of \$31 billion in the next couple of years. As previous speakers have mentioned, the interest bill on that alone will be \$3.2 billion a year. That would pay for a lot of coppers and a lot of other things in the Benalla electorate that would make Benalla a much greater place to live, work and raise a family.

I will look now at the issue of unmet needs in the electorate of Benalla and much of country Victoria, starting with the need to increase funding for local government for basic infrastructure. Currently the municipal rates in many Victorian rural shires are going up 6 per cent to 8 per cent per annum, yet the councils are still falling behind on basic infrastructure maintenance requirements. The small rural councils have had a gutful of that and formed the Small Rural Council Advocacy Group.

The Strathbogie Shire Council has taken the leadership in this area, with its CEO going on ABC regional radio last week to highlight the most recent round of cost-shifting by the state government to the financially stretched Shire of Strathbogie. Those cost shifts include responsibility for the initiation, establishment and maintenance of neighbourhood safer places, the imposition of the environment levy at late notice, and increased accountability measures. The Shire of Strathbogie estimates that those measures alone will increase the rates for local ratepayers by 1 per cent; that is not sustainable.

Still looking at the Strathbogie shire, it needs improved health services to get the standard up to that equivalent to the level that people in metropolitan Melbourne take for granted. In Strathbogie shire there are many public patients but there is no public hospital; there is not one public hospital bed in the shire of Strathbogie. Its health needs are met by three very good services. They are former bush nursing hospitals at Violet Town where there is an excellent service, and at Nagambie where there is also a very good service.

They provide very good services, but their ability to do that is the consequence of a fantastic effort by the local community and the entrepreneurial flair, passion and professionalism of their CEOs and their staff. The simple addition of a couple of public hospital beds to those hospitals would make their financial management much easier.

In the case of services provided by Euroa Health, it is in a position where it is using interest from the capital reserves to meet operating cost shortfalls. That is not sustainable. It, too, could survive in the short term by the provision of just two public hospital beds; but for the longer term we need a whole-of-shire approach. We need a shire-based community health service that involves the Violet Town, Nagambie and Euroa hospital services.

It also needs to incorporate an upgrading of ambulance services in Nagambie so that we do not rely on volunteers via the CERT (community emergency

response team) arrangements. This has been put to the Minister for Health, and I should say I am encouraged by his initial response; but I know there is a long way between that initial positive response and getting dollars on the table, bricks and mortar completed and professionals being in place.

Sitting suspended 6.29 p.m. until 8.02 p.m.

Dr SYKES — I move on now to deal with the Shire of Mansfield and its key needs. Yet again, these include the fundamentals of funding for roads and bridges — infrastructure maintenance — especially for the Licola-Jamieson Road, one section of which remains the responsibility of the Shire of Mansfield. The remainder is the responsibility of VicRoads. Common sense dictates that VicRoads should take responsibility for the whole road, but be supplied with adequate funding for its proper maintenance.

Mansfield also requires substantial funding for child-care services. Currently Mansfield Adult Continuing Education, and its CEO Paul Sladdin, is doing a great job providing child-care services in the interim, but in the long-term interests of the community of Mansfield — and particularly the young families of Mansfield — we need a state government commitment to upgrade child services facilities.

Similarly we need an upgrading of the aged-care facilities, supporting the community-driven project to increase aged-care facilities at Bindaree, and a general upgrading of the health service at Mansfield, particularly the coordination of primary health service delivery and allied health-care activities. If the government cared to honour its commitment to provide natural gas to many of our smaller communities, including Mansfield, that would be very much appreciated and would give smaller communities such as Mansfield a shot in the arm.

If we move on to the shire of Alpine — surprise, surprise! — roads and bridges remain in fundamental need of maintenance funding. This is nothing sexy; this is about putting in place the basic infrastructure, then maintaining that infrastructure which other communities in the higher population density communities take for granted. Alpine Shire Council needs more money coming in to local government to fund roads and bridges.

In particular funding is needed to seal the shoulder of the Great Alpine Road between Bright and Harrierville to encourage the participation of road cyclists in events such as the 3 Peaks Challenge. Road cycling is one of the pathways to prosperity in the Alpine shire and a

small contribution from the state government would reap tremendous benefits in terms of the Alpine shire being able to generate its own wealth.

The other thing that is required in the Alpine shire is security of the water supply for the irrigators and the environment in the Ovens River Valley upstream of Myrtleford. This is something that has been unclear now for a couple of years, and it is impeding the progression or transition of the tobacco growers from the now-defunct tobacco industry to some other profitable enterprise in the future.

As I have mentioned in earlier speeches in the house, Alpine Health also needs to be adequately funded to cover both basic operating costs and also the upgrading of aged-care facilities in Bright. The Bright community is having a public meeting tonight to draw to the attention of the Brumby government the need for appropriate aged-care facilities in this wonderful community.

The other thing about Bright is that during the by-election of 2000, sewerage disposal from Bright was an election issue. Ten years on, under the Bracks and Brumby governments, that issue has not been resolved, so the resolution of that issue is a high priority in the interests of the growth of the Bright community and the protection of the environment.

I touched on specific local government issues for Benalla earlier in the day. One of the fundamental issues for which people in the rural city of Wangaratta and in the electorate of Benalla would greatly appreciate support is the retention of GP services in the King Valley, particularly at Whitfield and Moyhu. I notice the Minister for Health is at the table, and I appreciate his commitment to ensuring that that happens. I ask him to remain committed and ensure that the people in the King Valley who currently rely on the health services at Whitfield and Moyhu continue to have access to those —

Mr Andrews interjected.

Dr SYKES — Thank you very much, Minister, for that commitment.

The other issue of concern in my area relates to the shire of Murrindindi, and I touched on this earlier. It has been devastated by the bushfires. The dollars that have come in so far are welcome, but more will need to be done — not just next year or the year after but for the next decade as this fire-ravaged community recovers from the generational impact of the bushfires.

In the context of all our local government areas, we need the state government's assistance with project development to provide that expertise so that projects worthy of funding can be put up for government consideration. We need to have simplified funding arrangements, with the requirement for matching input from smaller, disadvantaged shires reduced so that their ability to put in place basic infrastructure is not limited by the funding that is available to them. At the local government level we also need assistance with planning and the review of zoning.

On the broader issues, I spoke earlier about the underspend on the regional infrastructure project and the failure of the Brumby government to stand up and support improved education opportunities for our young people at secondary school and those going on to tertiary education. I also mention, just in case those present thought I would not, that the proposition of piping water from the dry north down the north-south pipeline to Melbourne, which can meet its water needs by other means, is absolutely appalling, and the Brumby government will pay the price for that. One more time I say, 'Plug the pipe'.

In the last few seconds available to me I say to the city-centric Brumby government: drought was not mentioned in the budget, but prior to the welcome rains of the last couple of days many people in country Victoria were starting to feel unnerved one more time as we faced the prospect of another failed autumn. The drought and the management of locusts are absolute priorities for rural Victoria. In conclusion, I challenge the Brumby government to live up to its claim to deliver a budget for all Victorians.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

ASSOCIATIONS INCORPORATION AMENDMENT BILL

Statement of compatibility

Mr ROBINSON (Minister for Consumer Affairs) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Associations Incorporation Amendment Bill 2010 ('the bill').

In my opinion, the bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by

the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

The bill is the second stage of a two-stage process of reform of the Associations Incorporation Act 1981 (the AIA), following the Associations Incorporation Amendment Act 2009. The amendments seek to improve the regulatory system for incorporated associations by strengthening the not-for-profit requirements of the AIA as well as reducing the regulatory burden on community organisations. The bill will amend the AIA to:

- make further provision relating to the prohibition under the AIA against the distribution of profits by an association to its members;

- enhance governance arrangements for incorporated associations;

- revise annual reporting requirements and audit thresholds;

- repeal the limitations on trading by an incorporated association;

- improve grievance and dispute resolution procedures for incorporated associations; and

- introduce a number of administrative amendments.

As part of enhancing governance arrangements for incorporated associations, the bill will apply certain parts of the Corporations Act 2001 (cth) through a declaration of applied corporations legislation.

Human rights issues

The bill raises a number of human rights issues.

Examinations and information-gathering activities

Proposed section 37AI declares the text of part 5.9 of the Corporations Act 2001 to be an applied corporations legislation matter with modifications. Section 596A of part 5.9 is modified to provide for the Supreme Court to summon a person for compulsory examination about an incorporated association's examinable affairs.

Section 596A is modified to provide that the Supreme Court is to summon a relevant person for examination about an incorporated association's examinable affairs if an eligible applicant applies for the summons and the Supreme Court is satisfied that the person is or was an office-holder of an incorporated association or provisional liquidator of the association. An eligible applicant is modified to read as the registrar, a liquidator or administrator of the incorporated association or a person authorised by the registrar to make such applications. An incorporated association's examinable affairs is defined as the promotion, formation, management, administration or winding up of the incorporated association; any affairs of the incorporated association; or the business affairs of a connected entity of the incorporated association insofar as they are relevant to the incorporated association. The registrar and any other eligible applicant in relation to the incorporated association may take part in an examination.

Section 597(12) provides that a person is not excused from answering a question put to the person at an examination on the ground that the answer might tend to incriminate the person or make the person liable to a penalty. Section 597(12A) grants a person direct immunity from self-incrimination by providing that any answer which may incriminate a person is not admissible in evidence against the person in a criminal proceeding or a proceeding for the imposition of a penalty. This immunity does not extend to proceedings in respect of the falsity of an answer provided by a person during these examinations.

Also, proposed section 37AB declares that the civil penalty provisions applying to members of the committee of an incorporated association contained in the bill are applied corporations legislation matter and subject to part 9.4B of the Corporations Act 2001. As a result, section 1317R of part 9.4B is modified to apply to incorporated associations, providing that the director of Consumer Affairs Victoria may require a person to give all reasonable assistance in connection with civil penalty or criminal proceedings under both the bill and the Corporations Act 2001. Subsection (3) provides that the director can only require a person to assist in connection with criminal proceedings if they are unlikely to be a defendant themselves in the proceedings, and are an employee, agent, officer or individual of the person who is the subject of the proceedings.

Both proposed sections 37AI and 37AB engage the right to freedom of expression. Additionally, proposed section 37AI engages the right not to be compelled to testify due to the abrogation of the privilege against self-incrimination and not providing derivative immunity for compelled oral testimony.

Freedom of expression (section 15)

The compulsion to answer questions and assist with an investigation engages the right to freedom of expression under the charter. Section 15 provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to impart information and ideas of all kinds. The right has also been held to include the right not to impart information.

The assistance of those responsible for and familiar with the processes and operations adopted by an incorporated association is necessary to conduct investigations into whether or not the regulatory obligations on members of the committee of incorporated associations are being complied with. This duty to assist is coextensive with the other obligations undertaken by members of the committee of an incorporated association who are participating in a regulated activity. Further, people with incriminating evidence who may not be implicated in any misconduct, but operate within the incorporated association, have that knowledge because of their role or position. Unless required to provide that evidence, they may not otherwise be forthcoming with information due to concerns about their future prospects or employment, loyalty to the association and concurrent confidentiality and contractual obligations.

These provisions enable appropriate oversight and monitoring of compliance with the law governing incorporated associations and are reasonably necessary to ensure members of the committee of an incorporated association who choose to be involved in the association are meeting their obligations and responsibilities, which have been designed to protect those who deal with or have interests in the association.

Therefore, to the extent that freedom of expression is engaged, these provisions fall within the exceptions to the right in section 15(3) of the charter, as reasonably necessary to respect the rights of other persons, or for the protection of public order.

Right not to be compelled to testify (section 25(2)(k)) and the right to fair trial (section 24(1))

Section 25(2)(k) of the charter provides that a person who has been charged with a criminal offence has the right not to be compelled to testify against himself or herself or to confess guilt. This right is also an aspect of the right to a fair trial protected by section 24 of the charter. The decision in *Re an application under the Major Crime (Investigative Powers) Act 2004* [2009] VSC 381 (Major Crime) holds that this right, as protected by the charter, is at least as broad as the privilege against self-incrimination protected by the common law. It applies to protect a charged person against the admission in subsequent criminal proceedings of incriminatory material obtained under compulsion, regardless of whether the information was obtained prior to or subsequent to the charge being laid.

Part 5.9 of the Corporations Act 2001 abrogates the privilege against self-incrimination by compelling testimony but replaces it with a direct immunity through section 597(12A). This immunity is limited in that it only applies to the direct use of the compelled statement in subsequent proceedings. It does not apply to 'derivative' use, which is when, as a result of the compelled statement, further evidence is uncovered that incriminates the maker of the statement. This means that such further evidence is permitted to be used in a criminal prosecution against the person.

The provisions in part 5.9 limit the protection against self-incrimination as a person who is compelled to be examined by the court is not protected against the indirect use of that information in future criminal proceedings. However, I am of the view that the limitation is reasonable under section 7(2) of the charter for the following reasons.

(a) The nature of the rights being limited

As outlined above, Chief Justice Warren in *Major Crime* held that the right not to be compelled to incriminate oneself as protected by section 25(2)(k) and 24(1) of the charter covers information obtained from a person either prior to or after a charge is laid. Her Honour held that the self-incrimination privilege extends to include both direct use and derivative use immunity. There are a number of rationales for the right against self-incrimination. These include that the state should not be able to compel an individual to assist it to prove that they have committed an offence, the concern about oppressive government conduct, the related concern about reliability of evidence, and the protection of privacy.

However, the chief justice did not rule out the possibility that a denial of derivative use immunity might be capable of justification in a regulatory context.

(b) The importance of the purpose of the limitation

The statutory purpose underlying the limits to the right against self-incrimination is to enable the regulator to perform its compliance and enforcement functions having regard to the difficulties faced when investigating offences against the Corporations Act 2001. It also exists to assist liquidators and

administrators to discharge their duties in regards to an incorporated association. Fraudulent conduct in the corporate context may involve a tangled web of activities which can only be unravelled and understood by an extremely prolonged and meticulous journey through complex financial and other records. To allow persons who may have the necessary knowledge of these transactions to refuse to answer questions may make it impossible for investigators to understand these transactions. This may undermine the whole investigative process as well as any liquidation or administration that may also be on foot.

The availability of a derivative use immunity to counter the regulator's compulsory information-gathering powers is considered too great a forensic advantage to give to examinees. Examinees would be able to extract a considerable forensic benefit through taking part in compulsory examinations by ensuring that any information, document or other thing derived directly or indirectly from the information they provided would be rendered inadmissible in any later criminal or penalty exposing proceedings against them. This would have both a 'thawing' effect on investigations, as the regulator will be reluctant to examine suspected principal offenders early (or at all) in an investigation, given the possibility of these persons attempting to make themselves prosecution proof by volunteering information during a compulsory examination. Investigations would thus be more circuitous, costly and less time efficient to avoid any possibility of immunising the key players from prosecution.

A derivative use immunity would also place an excessive and unreasonable burden on the prosecution to prove that any item of evidence it sought to tender in a criminal trial against an examinee who had claimed derivative use immunity was not obtained either directly or indirectly from that person's examination. This would unduly complicate trials and generate separate hearings to determine just when, and from what sources, particular information was obtained.

The investigative methods that the regulator would have to employ to counter these consequences could fundamentally prejudice its ability to discharge its statutory responsibilities in an efficient, effective and timely manner for the public good.

(c) The nature and extent of the limitation

As outlined above, the provision compels a person to answer a question put to the person at an examination even if it may tend to incriminate that person. While the provision prevents an answer from being admissible in evidence against a person in criminal or civil penalty proceedings, investigators are able to use a person's answer to uncover further evidence against them that may be used in criminal or civil penalty proceedings.

Here, the aspect of the right at issue relates to the use of derivative evidence. While this engages one aspect of the rationale for the privilege, that a person should not be required to assist the state in building a case against him or her, it does so to a lesser extent than the direct use of evidence because of the fact that the derivative evidence exists independently of the will of the accused. Further, it does not engage the most important principles underlying the right, namely the risk of improper interrogation techniques (including torture) or the unreliability of evidence obtained through such methods. As the Constitutional Court of South

Africa has recognised, the ability to use derivative evidence does not negate the essential element of the right: *Ferreira v. Levin* [1995] ZACC 13 per Ackerman J at para 153. The 'principal matter' covered by the privilege is protected: see the comments of Sir Anthony Mason in *Hamilton v. Oades* (1989) 166 CLR 486 at 496.

This abrogation of the privilege against self-incrimination is limited to prescribed situations. The Supreme Court can only summon a person for examination about an incorporated association's examinable affairs and can only summon a person who is (or was) a member of the committee or provisional liquidator of the incorporated association. The people who will be subject to this power have chosen to participate in regulated activities in which they have assumed duties and obligations.

Procedural fairness is afforded to examinees and witnesses, and the exercise of these powers by registrar must comply with the statutory preconditions and notice requirements set out in the Corporations Act 2001, and is subject to judicial review.

(d) The relationship between the limitation and its purpose

There is a close relationship between the limit and its purpose. As outlined above, experience of enforcing these laws has shown that granting immunities in a regulated commercial context to the type of individuals most likely to be examined and exposed to criminal and civil penalties leads to protracted investigations, with the result that those responsible for wrongdoing and misconduct can ultimately escape liability. The limitation addresses this issue by allowing the regulator to effectively investigate and unravel the complex affairs of an association without jeopardising the success of any criminal or civil penalty proceedings which may be brought after all relevant information concerning a person's activities and dealings within an incorporated association have come to light.

(e) Less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose

As outlined above, the availability of derivative use immunity, far from being a proper and balanced counterweight to the regulator's compulsory information-gathering powers, would give some examinees a forensic advantage far in excess of what was ever contemplated under the privilege against self-incrimination. Having considered the right against self-incrimination in other common-law jurisdictions and under human rights instruments, both the 1991 report by the Joint Statutory Committee on Corporations and Securities considering 'Use Immunity Provisions in the Corporations Law and the Australian Securities Commission Law' and the 1997 'Review of the Derivative Use Immunity Reforms' by John Kliver concluded that direct use immunity for oral testimony was sufficient protection for individuals who have voluntarily taken on positions of responsibility and privilege in a regulated industry. Accordingly, there are no less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose of this limitation.

Offence provisions*Evidential onuses and the presumption of innocence*

A number of regulatory offences within the Corporations Act 2001 impose an evidential onus on a defendant to adduce or point to evidence that goes to an exception, excuse or defence. The criminal offences in the applied corporations legislation sections 471A, 590, 597 and 597A, read in conjunction with section 72 of the Criminal Procedure Act 2009 (Vic), impose such a burden. In my view, these provisions do not transfer the burden of proof, because once the defendant has adduced or pointed to some evidence, the burden is on the prosecution to prove beyond reasonable doubt the absence of the exception raised. Furthermore, the burdens do not relate to essential elements of the offences and are only imposed on the defendant to raise facts that support the existence of an exception, defence or excuse.

Courts in other jurisdictions have generally taken the approach that an evidential onus on a defendant to raise a defence does not limit the presumption of innocence. However, even if these provisions limit the right to be presumed innocent in section 25(1) of the charter, the limitation would be reasonable and justifiable under section 7(2) because the defences and excuse provided relate to matters within the knowledge of the defendant.

Accordingly, I consider proposed sections 37AF and 37AI which apply the above provisions of the Corporations Act 2001 to be compatible with the right to be presumed innocent in the charter.

Conclusion

I consider that the bill is compatible with the charter because, to the extent that some provisions may limit human rights, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

Hon. Tony Robinson, MP
Minister for Consumer Affairs

Second reading

Mr ROBINSON (Minister for Consumer Affairs) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Associations Incorporation Act 1981 (the act) was established to provide a simple and inexpensive means by which unincorporated non-profit associations could obtain corporate status. The act regulates the creation, operation and dissolution of incorporated associations and is the most popular vehicle for the incorporation of community and non-profit groups in Victoria. At 30 April 2010, there were 35 915 incorporated associations on the register of incorporated associations.

The government recognises the critical importance of this act to the community, and this bill represents the second stage of an important platform of reform to ensure the act continues to meet its original aims. The first stage of reform was completed by passage in April

2009 of the Associations Incorporation Amendment Act 2009. The majority of the provisions of the 2009 amendment act have commenced operation, however part 3, which will transfer the functions of the public officer to the office of the secretary of an incorporated association, and part 4, which will introduce new matters to be included in the rules of an incorporated association, have yet to commence.

Together, these two pieces of legislation will fulfil the government's commitment to reform of the act set out in the Victorian government *Action Plan — Strengthening Community Organisations*. In parallel with the proposed reform of the act, the government has also commenced a project to revise the model rules for incorporated associations. The rules will be updated to reflect recent legislative change and the language and form improved to better reflect the largely volunteer membership of incorporated associations. It is proposed that part 3 and part 4 of the 2009 amendment act and the suite of legislative reforms introduced by this bill, will commence operation together in 2011 in conjunction with the new model rules.

I now turn to the specific reforms contained within the bill which have been the subject of wide consultation, including the public release of an exposure draft version of the bill in March 2010. This bill introduces a range of amendments to the act to:

enhance governance arrangements for incorporated associations;

revise annual reporting requirements and audit thresholds;

repeal the limitations on trading by an incorporated association;

improve grievance and dispute resolution procedures for incorporated associations; and

improve provisions relating to the winding up and external administration of incorporated associations.

The bill contains a series of amendments to improve the internal governance arrangements of incorporated associations and enhance the rights of members of incorporated associations.

To effectively service and represent their communities and be sustainable over the long term, it is critical that incorporated associations have appropriate and effective internal governance arrangements. If organisations fail, the ability of communities to identify and communicate their needs and aspirations, and to

manage and control the manner in which services are delivered is likely to be severely impaired.

Effective governance provides the foundation for the appropriate management of government — and other — funds, for compliance with legislative obligations, and the operation of the entity in accordance with its rules and charter. Committee and ordinary members of associations who understand their respective rights and responsibilities are more likely to maintain a robust relationship with their organisation, to be more confident about asserting their rights and to seek external assistance only where necessary.

The bill removes the current requirement for a separate statement of purposes to accompany an application for incorporation. The purposes of an incorporated association will now be a matter that must be expressed in the rules of an incorporated association. This will simplify the process for incorporation and eliminate the need for an applicant group to file a separate form of statement of purposes as well as a copy of their proposed rules of association.

The separation of the statement of purposes and the rules reflects the former companies model, where a company had a memorandum of association — which included its name, objects and powers — and articles of association — which contained the other constituent provisions.

The schedule to the act, which lists the matters to be included in the rules of an incorporated association, will be revised by the bill to specifically include the purposes of the association as a matter that must be addressed by an incorporated association in its rules. The bill will also revise and reorder the matters in the schedule to provide additional assistance to an unincorporated group wishing to develop its own rules of association.

A transitional provision will ensure the continuing validity of rules and purposes for existing associations that currently have a statement of purposes separate from their rules of association.

The bill improves the general utility of the rules of an incorporated association for members by making it clear that the name and purposes of an incorporated association, the rights, obligations and liabilities of its members, resignation and cessation of membership and the process for appointment and termination of the association's secretary must be addressed in the rules.

The bill inserts a new definition of 'office-holder' of an incorporated association. This amendment recognises that persons other than the members of the committee

of an incorporated association may hold significant responsibilities by including employees of the association who make or participate in decisions that affect the whole or a substantial part of the operations of an incorporated association within the definition. For example, employees such as the chief executive officer or the chief financial officer of a large incorporated association with significant annual revenue are likely to be captured by the definition. However, it is not intended that the definition capture ordinary employees, ordinary members, non-members or volunteer participants.

Introduction of duties and civil penalties

It is settled law that an office-holder — such as a committee member — owes a duty to their association to exercise care and diligence when carrying out their responsibilities as a committee member. However, unlike companies, where the duties owed by a director to the company have been codified under the Corporations Act 2001, no similar statutory guidance is provided to the members of a committee of an incorporated association.

To address this deficiency, the bill clarifies the duties of an office-holder of an incorporated association. These provisions are modelled upon equivalent provisions in the Corporations Act 2001 and provide for a duty of care and diligence, one of good faith and proper purpose, and a duty to avoid trading while insolvent.

In relation to the duty of care and diligence, the bill follows the Corporations Act model and adopts the 'business judgement rule'. An office-holder will be taken to have fulfilled their duty of care and diligence if they make a business judgement and:

the judgement was made in good faith and for a proper purpose; and

the office-holder does not have a material personal interest in the subject matter of the judgement; and

the office-holder informed himself or herself about the subject matter of the judgement to the extent that they reasonably believe to be appropriate; and

the office-holder rationally believes that the judgement is in the best interest of the incorporated association.

In relation to an incorporated association, a business judgement will mean a decision taken in furtherance of the purposes and operations of the incorporated association.

The bill also inserts a provision to establish the circumstances where it is reasonable for an office-holder to rely upon information or advice provided by a third party in carrying out their duties. Those circumstances will include information or advice received from employees or from professional advisers.

The bill introduces for the first time the ability for the court to impose a civil pecuniary penalty for contravention of specified provisions of the act. This is achieved by application of the civil penalty regime established under the Corporations Act 2001. However, while the Corporations Act provisions allow for a maximum civil pecuniary penalty of up to \$200 000, in applying these provisions to associated incorporations, the maximum amount has been limited to \$20 000 in recognition of the not-for-profit and voluntary character of these organisations. It should also be noted that in determining the appropriate penalty, the court will take into account any remuneration of the office-holder as well as the size and complexity of the association.

The court will also have discretion to order the payment of compensation to an association for any damage suffered because of a contravention, and have the power to grant relief in civil proceedings where a person may be found to have contravened a civil penalty provision but has acted honestly and, having regard to all the circumstances of the case, the person ought fairly to be excused.

The bill provides that a contravention of the duty of care and diligence, duty of good faith and proper purpose or duty to avoid insolvent trading may expose an office-holder to a civil pecuniary penalty.

Furthermore, contravention of the duty to avoid insolvent trading may also constitute an offence in circumstances where the office-holder had reason to suspect that the association is or would become insolvent, and the failure to prevent trading while insolvent was dishonest.

Section 29A of the act makes it an offence for a committee member or former committee member to knowingly or recklessly make improper use of their position or of information acquired by virtue of their position to gain a benefit or advantage for themselves or to cause detriment to the incorporated association.

The bill amends section 29A so that it will apply to both office-holders and former office-holders. It also amends section 29A to introduce civil pecuniary penalties where a person makes improper use of his or her position, or of information acquired by virtue of that position, for personal advantage or to cause detriment

to the incorporated association, but without circumstances of knowledge or recklessness.

Section 29B and section 29C have been amended to ensure that these sections have a broader scope, are consistent with contemporary terminology and are analogous to equivalent Corporations Act provisions. The bill amends section 29C(1) so that a member who has a material personal interest in a matter will be prohibited from taking part in deliberations concerning that matter. The member will be required to leave the room when the matter is being considered and voted upon.

Currently, the act is silent on the issue of an indemnity for committee members. Recognising the reliance of the not-for-profit sector on the goodwill and efforts of volunteer membership, the bill provides that an association must indemnify each member of its committee for any liability incurred by them in good faith in the course of performing their duties on behalf of the association.

The bill also contains a number of measures that will enhance member control and participation and assist in reducing disputes such as:

- providing that a member has a right to inspect and obtain a copy of the rules of the incorporated association;

- providing that where a member requests a copy of a document the association must give the copy to a member within seven days of the request and after payment of a prescribed fee (if any);

- providing that if a member has voting rights, the member must be notified of all proposed general meetings;

- providing that an incorporated association must not prevent a member from attending or voting (if entitled to do so) at general meetings; and

- providing that if proxies are permitted, and the committee sends out proxy forms, all voting members must be sent a proxy form.

Section 14B of the act currently provides that the grievance procedure of an incorporated association must incorporate the principles of natural justice. This section has been amended to clarify that in accordance with such principles the incorporated association must ensure that each party to a dispute has an opportunity to be heard and that the dispute must be resolved by an unbiased decision-maker. Similarly, in the case of disciplinary procedures, an incorporated association

will be required to ensure that the member subject to the procedure is informed of the grounds on which the disciplinary action is proposed to be taken, has an opportunity to be heard and that any determination is made by an unbiased decision-maker.

Improving meetings

The bill makes a number of amendments to improve meeting provisions. It clarifies that a reference to a 'general meeting' in the act includes the annual general meeting, a special general meeting or other general meeting of the members of an incorporated association. It also provides that committee meetings and general meetings can be held in two or more venues using any technology that allows participating members to clearly and simultaneously communicate with each other participating member. This will enable members to be present at a meeting even though they may be physically remote. Finally, the bill makes a number of clarifying amendments in relation to the conduct of an annual general meeting to improve the submission of financial statements.

Filling of vacancies and removal from office

The 2009 act transferred the functions of the public officer to the secretary of the incorporated association. Currently, where the office of secretary becomes vacant, the committee of the incorporated association is required to appoint a person to fill the vacancy within 14 days. It is intended to allow incorporated associations to decide the process that they wish to adopt for the appointment and removal of their secretary, and options available to associations include appointment by the committee or election at a general meeting as a member of the committee.

Where it is not feasible to fill that vacancy within 14 days in accordance with the process under the association's rules, the bill allows for temporary filling.

The act also provides that the secretary's office becomes vacant if the secretary ceases to be resident in Victoria. However, it is no longer necessary to prohibit a secretary from residing in another state or territory of Australia. With current technologies, it is possible to communicate effectively without being physically present. Accordingly, the bill provides that the office becomes vacant if the person holding that office ceases to be resident in Australia.

The bill also clarifies the removal of committee members from office, and clarifies that a committee member will cease to hold office if he or she fails to attend three consecutive committee meetings without leave. This amendment seeks to address situations

where a committee is in dispute and unable to achieve a quorum because members repeatedly fail to attend meetings.

Annual reporting requirements

The bill introduces significant changes to annual reporting requirements.

The current reporting thresholds for prescribed and non-prescribed associations have not been revised for more than 10 years. Not-for-profit sector stakeholders have suggested that the current threshold of \$200 000 annual revenue for prescribed associations is too low given the cost of obtaining a formal audit, which may range from \$2000 to \$8000. This has been a particular problem for associations that may be asset rich but revenue poor and finding it difficult to comply with this requirement. In addition, the relatively low-risk profile of some of these associations has cast doubt on the appropriateness of a requirement to have their accounts audited.

The bill also revises reporting requirements to introduce a contemporary, tailored financial reporting regime that will reduce the regulatory burden across a range of associations while ensuring that appropriate levels of financial transparency and governance are maintained.

A framework of three tiers replaces the current prescribed and non-prescribed reporting regime and aligns with a similar framework proposed for companies limited by guarantee. The tiers will be based upon total revenue with tier 1, comprising total revenue of up to \$250 000, capturing the majority of incorporated associations. Tier 2 will capture those associations with revenue exceeding \$250 000 and up to \$1 million, while tier 3 captures all those associations with total revenue exceeding \$1 million.

Tier 1 incorporated associations will continue to report to the registrar on the same annual basis as currently applies for non-prescribed associations. The major change is that tier 2 associations will no longer be required to have their accounts audited. Instead, the bill provides for their accounts to be reviewed by an accountant independent of the incorporated association. It should be noted that while a review is not a formal audit of accounts and is expected to be around one-third of the cost of a full audit, it will still be subject to compliance with standards set by the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board.

Tier 3 incorporated associations will continue to report to the registrar on the same basis as currently applies to prescribed associations. These associations will be required to have their accounts audited and to submit a

copy of the audit report to members together with their financial statements at the annual general meeting.

All incorporated associations will continue to be required to submit financial statements at their annual general meeting, and the association treasurer and one other committee member will need to certify that these statements provide a true and fair view of the financial position of the association.

The bill amends the act to ensure that associations are accountable to the membership by providing that a tier 1 association must have its accounts reviewed or audited by an independent accountant if, at a general meeting of the association, a majority of members vote to do so. Similarly a tier 2 association must have its accounts audited by an independent accountant if, at a general meeting of the association, a majority of members vote to do so.

Section 53C of the act which provides qualified privilege to statements made by an auditor, statutory manager, liquidator or administrator in the course of performing their duties is extended to include an independent accountant who conducts a review of the accounts of tier 2 association.

Removal of restriction on trading

The bill repeals the prohibition on trading by an incorporated association.

Since the act first commenced in 1983, the not-for-profit sector has experienced significant changes in how it delivers services and in its relationship with government. In practice, governments, both state and federal, actively encourage many incorporated associations to take on new trading activities. For example, the contracting out of the delivery of social services to community organisations has meant that incorporated associations are increasingly engaging in trading activities as a predominant purpose and activity, potentially in breach of the existing legislative provisions.

Removing the restriction on trading will enable an incorporated association to engage in trade or trading activities in pursuance of and in support of its purposes. However, consistent with the not-for-profit character of incorporated associations, the act will continue to prohibit an incorporated association from securing pecuniary profit for its members.

Voluntary administration and winding up

The act applies various provisions of chapter 5 of the Corporations Act in respect of the voluntary

administration and winding up of an incorporated association. The bill inserts a new part VIII AA into the act which sets out a more detailed scheme of the parts of chapter 5 that will apply to incorporated associations.

The bill also contains a number of other administrative amendments, transitional provisions and consequential amendments. For example, one administrative amendment that is being made seeks to address the high levels of new associations among Victoria's migrant and refugee communities that are being formed. Cognisant of this, the bill authorises an incorporated association to keep its records in any language, provided a copy in English can be produced upon request.

This bill forms an important part of the Victorian government's ongoing commitment to developing and supporting our community, voluntary and not-for-profit organisations.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr O'BRIEN (Malvern).

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 9 June.

SUPERANNUATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Statement of compatibility

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (the charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2010.

In my opinion, the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2010, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

The bill will amend the following seven acts (the superannuation acts) to ensure their compatibility with the charter:

- (a) Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1986 (ESSA);
- (b) State Superannuation Act 1988 (SSA);
- (c) State Employees Retirement Benefits Act 1979 (SERB);

- (d) Transport Superannuation Act 1988 (TSA);
- (e) Superannuation Portability Act 1988 (SPA);
- (f) Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation Act 1968 (part 3) (PSSA); and
- (g) Police Regulation Act 1958 (part 3 and schedule 4) (PRA).

These acts contain provisions that are potentially incompatible with the human rights contained in the charter. The primary objective of the bill is to ensure that each of these acts can be read compatibly with the human rights contained in the charter. The bill promotes the right to equality before the law (section 8 of the charter); right to privacy (section 13 of the charter); and the protection of property rights (section 20 of the charter).

In addition to the above amendments that relate to the review of the superannuation acts for compatibility with the charter, the bill amends the acts governing the judicial pension schemes. These amendments make same-sex partners eligible for a reversionary pension with consistent provisions to the amendments to the superannuation acts. The acts amending include: the Constitution Act 1975, the Supreme Court Act 1986, the County Court Act 1958, the Magistrates' Court Act 1989, and the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General Act 1972 (the judicial acts). The bill also amends the ESSA to allow members of Ambulance Victoria who transfer to the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority to retain their membership of the Emergency Services Superannuation Scheme.

Human rights issues

1. Human rights protected by the charter that are relevant to the bill

Section 8 of the charter — recognition and equality before the law

Section 8(3) of the charter recognises that every person is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination and to equal and effective protection against discrimination. Section 8(3) operates to prohibit discrimination in law or in fact in any field regulated by public authorities and, as a consequence, legislation should not have a discriminatory effect on any person. Discrimination under the charter means direct or indirect discrimination as defined in the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 on the basis of an attribute set out in section 6 of that act, which includes discrimination on the basis of 'sexual orientation', 'marital status', 'age', 'pregnancy' and 'impairment'.

Superannuation, being a method of providing retirement income, inherently discriminates on the basis of age. As such the superannuation acts contain a number of provisions that are not compliant with the charter due to age-based discrimination. The bill amends the superannuation acts to either remove the age-based discrimination or amend the provisions such that any potential incompatibility with the charter is minimised. The amendments contained in the bill include:

Amendments to the superannuation acts to extend contributory service in defined benefit schemes beyond

age 65 (and as permitted by commonwealth superannuation law).

An amendment to the PSSA to ensure that orphan children of former members are entitled to an orphan pension regardless of the age of the member when the child was born.

An amendment to section 40 of the SSA to require the board to use a formula that is based on an actuarial assessment when converting a partner's pension to a lump sum. This provision currently gives the board the discretion to establish what commutation rates will be for a pensioner over the age of 60. Having different rates as a person ages is justified on the grounds that a person's life expectancy reduces as they age and therefore the present value of their pension reduces. By inserting a formula it ensures that the commutation rate is actuarially justified on the basis of life expectancy.

An amendment to PRA, SERB and the SSA to provide that the partner of a pensioner is entitled to reversionary benefits regardless of the age of the pensioner when they commence their relationship. The amendment applies to partners of living pensioners at the commencement of the bill. The prospective nature of the proposal is justified on the grounds that it is administratively difficult and costly to provide a pension in circumstances where the member has died prior to the commencement of the bill.

The bill amends the superannuation acts to allow members to nominate their dependants (and, in very limited circumstances — in the PRA, SSA, SERB, and PSSA, allow adult children to receive a pension on the death of the member).

All children as defined in these acts are entitled to a benefit (presumably as they are assumed to be dependants of the member). Typically, the definition of child includes all children under 18 and full-time students aged 18–25. This definition excludes from a benefit full-time students who are over age 25, and those who are over the age of 18 but are disabled or otherwise dependent upon the deceased. These provisions may constitute discrimination on the basis of age and impairment and may be incompatible with the right in section 8(3) of the charter. The amendment removes possible discrimination on the basis of impairment by allowing the member to nominate their dependants.

Incompatibility relating to discrimination on the basis of impairment is minimised with the provision of adult child pensions. These pensions may only be paid to adult children who satisfy the definition of disabled in section 8(1) of the Disability Services Act 1986 (consistent with commonwealth law) and are financially dependent on the member.

The limitations on the provision of adult child pensions are justified because pursuant to a heads of government agreement with the commonwealth government signed in 1996, state and territory governments undertook to ensure conformity to the commonwealth's retirement incomes policy. In return, public sector superannuation schemes are exempt from the commonwealth act but are nevertheless considered complying superannuation funds and enjoy concessional tax treatment.

The proposed provision of adult child pensions is based on the premise that some adult children who are disabled, and no longer fit the definition of child, are dependent on their parent or guardian for financial support. The financial dependency test in the adult child definition is to ensure that any adult child, while meeting the definition of disabled, is actually financially dependent on the member and thus entitled to a benefit. This limitation is justified by the social policy of wherever possible encouraging and recognising the financial independence of adult children.

If the bill were to allow adult children who do not meet the definition of disability in the commonwealth act to receive a pension, this could result in dire financial consequences for both the scheme and its members through the loss of valuable tax concessions. There remains potential discrimination on the basis of the age of the child. However, this is justified on recognising that the scheme needs to be economically viable by limiting the benefits under the scheme. To enable actuarial assessments of the cost of the scheme the class of beneficiaries needs to be limited and predictable. A further justification is that of social policy, encouraging financial independence of children over the age of 18, and recognising that the age of 18 is a recognised end point of financial family dependence at the same time recognising that there are social benefits associated with full-time tertiary education notwithstanding that this necessarily prolongs family financial dependence.

Two components of the death and disability insurance portion of the state's superannuation scheme were found to contain provisions which may discriminate on the grounds of disability due to the timing of disability payments in the SERB act and also the use of the medical classification system.

The bill amends section 55 of the SERB Act, such that all members in receipt of a disability pension are entitled to receive their lump sum payment (the balance of their beneficiary account) at the age of 60. This proposal removes the differing treatment of a person who retires on the grounds of disability before or after age 60.

The bill repeals the medical classification facility in relation to death and disability benefits in the SERB and the SSA. Medical classification systems represent prima facie discrimination on the basis of impairment due to the fact that they will affect those who were determined to be in some way impaired differently to those who complete the same number of years of service but who were not classified as having an impairment.

Under section 28 of the SERB act, the amount of death and disability benefits payable under the scheme between the period of termination (if under age 65), and age 65, is determined, in part, by the medical classification of the employee. This medical classification is determined based upon medical and actuarial advice. Similarly, sections 62 and 64 of the SSA require medical classification relating to the anticipated ability of the member to continue as an employee until age 60.

By repealing the medical classification systems from the SERB and the SSA all current members will have access to a full benefit and this will remove any potential incompatibility with the charter. The proposal will only apply to current members who have a medical classification certificate. In this

respect, it should be noted that currently all classification statuses revert to a full benefit after 20 years service.

The bill amends the ESSA and SERB to provide for up to 12 months unpaid parental leave per confinement to count as contributory service. Currently a member who is on parental leave has to pay a contribution in order for that period to count as service whereas a member on unpaid sick leave has that period count for service without any contributions being levied. This discriminates on the basis of pregnancy and is potentially incompatible with section 8 of the charter.

When designing this policy the cost of providing parental leave as service, regardless of how much leave was taken, was balanced against the discrimination in the differing treatment for superannuation purposes of parental leave and unpaid sick leave. Twelve months service per confinement balances these competing interests and is a justifiable limitation.

The other issue in relation to parental leave is the impact that parental leave has on a SSA member's death and disability insurance cover once they return from this leave. Currently sections 35(2) and (3) of the SSA provide that when a person returns from leave without pay (including parental leave) they will receive reduced benefits if they retire on grounds of disability or death within the period outlined in section 35(1).

This provision has potential to indirectly discriminate against women on the basis that women are more likely to have an extended period of leave, to have or care for children. The bill amends section 35 of the SSA to remove the waiting period for a person to be covered by a death or disability benefit after they return from leave without pay. This proposal removes potential discrimination on the basis of pregnancy or caring for a child, or on the basis of impairment, bringing section 35(2) and (3) into line with section 8 of the charter.

Section 13 of the charter — privacy and reputation

Section 13 of the charter recognises that every person has a right not to have their privacy arbitrarily interfered with, including information and correspondence. This right overlaps with the obligations contained in the Information Privacy Act 2000 and the Health Records Act 2001 (the privacy acts). The right is broader than the privacy acts in that it goes beyond recorded information and medical examinations without consent. The following amendments contained in the bill ensure that the superannuation acts are compatible with section 13 of the charter.

An amendment to the ESSA that limits the provision allowing the board to require a member to undergo a medical examination or request other information to situations where it is necessary to determine the appropriate level and cost of disability and death insurance for the member. The ESSA currently allows the board to require a member to undergo a medical examination, or request other information, for any purpose.

Amendments to the superannuation acts to require the trustee/board to disclose the contents of medical reports to the member.

An amendment to the SERB act to require that the board only use or disclose information it receives from another party insofar as it is required for the purposes of the administration of the fund. Section 69 of SERB

currently provides that the board may at any time require that information be provided, either by an employer or head of department or by a member, employee, pensioner, partner or child of any deceased member.

In addition the bill also contains amendments to ensure compatibility with the charter by limiting arbitrary interference with a member's family, specifically the nature of a member's personal relationships.

The bill amends the PSSA, the PRA, SERB, and SSA to provide that, where a member has more than one spouse, the trustee/board must follow a set of guidelines when determining how to apportion benefits. The relevant provision in each act currently gives the board/trustee absolute discretion in apportioning of benefits (in the absence of any direction from the member). By giving all partners the opportunity to make written representations and by requiring the board/trustee to follow guidelines, the possibility of arbitrary interference with one's family is removed.

The bill amends the superannuation acts to make same-sex partners eligible for a reversionary pension even if the superannuation fund pensioner was already receiving a superannuation pension when the Statute Law Amendment (Relationships) Act 2001 (SLAR) amendments came into effect on 23 August 2001. This amendment is prospective in nature and any applications will be from the date the bill becomes law. The bill also makes amendments to the judicial acts in order for the criteria for obtaining a judicial pension to remain consistent to that of the superannuation acts.

There are several factors that justify the prospective rather than retrospective function of the amendment.

The prospective nature of the proposal is justified on the grounds that it is administratively difficult and costly to provide a pension in circumstances where the member has died prior to the commencement of the bill. By way of example, all potential claimants may need to be contacted and notified, and it would be difficult in advance to identify who those claimants might be, and the extent to which they would have claims. Prospectively, by contrast, it would be possible to establish a scheme of notification and identification which would enable assessment of likely cost, and advance identification of whether or not a particular couple would qualify. Therefore the prospective nature of the proposed amendment is a justifiable limitation on the charter right to equality before the law and privacy.

Section 20 — property rights

Section 20 of the charter establishes a right not to be deprived of property other than in accordance with the law. In the context of this right, property has a broader meaning than title or ownership to include entitlements to a future superannuation benefit as a member and as a beneficiary of superannuation death benefit. Where there is discretion involved in the deprivation of property such discretion should not be arbitrary but be confined and structured.

The bill amends the relevant superannuation acts to remove the adjustment to reversionary partner pensions for partners who are more than five years younger than the former member. Currently the superannuation acts require an adjustment to a reversionary partner pension where the surviving partner is more than five years younger than the

former member and only became the partner of the former member after the former member had exited the scheme.

This amendment removes discrimination based upon age and as such removes potential incompatibilities with section 13 and section 20 of the charter as the benefit will no longer be determined on the age difference between the member and their partner. The prospective aspect of this proposal discriminates against people who have already had their pensions issued. This aspect is justified on the grounds that it is administratively difficult and costly to adjust pensions that have already been vested. In addition, the costs associated with applying this proposal retrospectively are unknown and have not been taken into account in the actuarial assessment when determining past employer contributions, but can be taken into account in the future.

The bill repeals the sections of the PRA and the SSA which allows for a reduction of the pension where the member brought on sickness as a result of his or her own fault and allows for a full pension to be reinstated on application. Currently this provision interferes with members right to privacy and property rights as the provision allows the board to make an assessment on an individual's behaviour and recommend a reduction in their benefit as a result of this assessment. Repealing this section removes the prima facie infringement of the charter rights relating to privacy and property.

The bill amends the ESSA, the PRA, the SSA, the TSA and SERB to require that any decision by the board to pay benefits to a guardian or administrator of a member be based on the member being incapable of managing his or her financial affairs. Currently, the relevant sections of the ESSA, the PRA, the SSA, the TSA and SERB allow the board to pay a benefit to a guardian or administrator in circumstances where the member may be capable of managing his or her financial affairs despite being mentally incapacitated. This situation is potentially incompatible with the privacy and property rights of the charter. The amendments in the bill limit the circumstances where a member's benefit may be paid to a guardian or administrator to where a member is deemed incapable of managing his or her financial affairs. This removes the potential incompatibility with the charter.

Conclusion

I consider that the bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

Tim Holding, MP
Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission

Second reading

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

In July 2006, Victoria became the first Australian state to introduce a legislative charter of human rights.

Since that time, this government has conducted a comprehensive review of Victoria's existing superannuation legislation to survey which areas may

be incompatible with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. This bill will amend all of Victoria's superannuation acts to address any provisions that were found to be potentially incompatible with the charter. The bill includes amendments to the following acts (referred to hereafter as the superannuation acts):

- Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1986;
- State Superannuation Act 1988;
- State Employees Retirement Benefits Act 1979;
- Transport Superannuation Act 1988;
- Parliamentary Superannuation and Salaries Act 1968 (part 3);
- Police Regulation Act 1958 (part 3 and schedule 4); and
- Superannuation (Portability) Act 1989.

In addition, the bill includes amendments to superannuation or pension-related provisions in several other acts.

The Victorian government is committed to ensuring that the state's superannuation acts strike the right balance between the fundamental human rights of Victorians and the limitations upon those rights that can be justified in a free and democratic society.

The amendments contained in this bill represent this government's continuing pledge to protect and promote human rights.

I will now turn to the amendments in the bill.

The bill will amend the provisions of the superannuation acts relating to reversionary pensions to ensure consistency with the right to equality before the law and the right to privacy under sections 8 and 13 of the charter.

Currently same-sex partners are not eligible for reversionary pensions if their deceased partner began receiving a pension before the Statute Law Amendment (Relationships) Act 2001 (SLAR) came into effect on 23 August 2001. This bill will ensure that reversionary pensions will be prospectively paid to same-sex partners of pensioners regardless of when the pensioner began receiving their pension.

The bill will amend relevant provisions of the superannuation acts to allow members to nominate who their dependants are. The board or trustee will now be

required to consider the member's right to privacy under section 13 of the charter, by taking the member's nominations into consideration when apportioning benefits.

In the area of unpaid leave, incompatibilities with the charter exist within the Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1986 and the State Employees Retirement Benefits Act 1979. Currently those on parental leave are treated less favourably than those on unpaid sick leave. These acts will now be amended such that parental leave of up to 12 months per confinement will now count as contributory service. As with unpaid sick leave, members will not be required to contribute during this period and will retain their death and disability insurance cover.

Several provisions exist across the superannuation acts which restrict benefits in a way that is inconsistent with section 8 of the charter relating to age-based discrimination.

The Police Regulation Act 1958, the State Employees Retirement Benefits Act 1979 and the State Superannuation Act 1988 contain provisions that in some circumstances restrict reversionary benefits with reference to the age when a pensioner commences a relationship. This section will be amended to provide reversionary benefits regardless of the age of a pensioner when they commence a relationship.

Currently under the Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation Act 1968 orphan child pensions are restricted in some circumstances where a member is over a certain age. All eligible children of former members will now be eligible for an orphan pension regardless of the age of the pensioner when the child was born.

Some of the superannuation acts contain provisions which can reduce the reversionary pension payable in circumstance where a pensioner begins a relationship with a person who is more than five years their junior. Under the changes made by this bill, age difference between partners will no longer be a factor in the calculation of reversionary benefits.

The State Superannuation Act 1988, the Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1986, the Transport Superannuation Act 1988, and the State Employees Retirement Benefits Act 1979, will be amended to allow members to accrue benefits until age 75. Superannuation is by its nature an area where some age-based requirements are necessary. However, to ensure consistency with the principles of the charter, members who are under age 65 at the commencement

of this bill will now be allowed to accrue benefits until age 75 or as permitted under commonwealth law.

The bill will repeal the sections of the Police Regulation Act 1958 and the State Superannuation Act 1988 which allow for a reduction of a disability pension where a member brought on sickness as a result of his or her own fault. This will codify existing practice and remove incompatibility with the privacy and property principles of the charter.

The State Employees Retirement Benefits Act 1979 and the State Superannuation Act 1988 will be amended to remove any reduction in a member's benefit due to medical classification. Any current member with a medical classification will now be entitled to full benefits, consistent with the charter principle of equality before the law. This amendment will not affect existing pensioners.

Under the State Superannuation Act 1988, members returning to work after a leave of absence currently have a waiting period before they regain their death and disability insurance. This provision has been identified as indirectly discriminating on the basis of pregnancy or caring for a child and impairment. This bill will remove any waiting period and ensure that insurance coverage begins from the resumption of work.

The bill will remove the requirement for State Employees Retirement Benefits Act 1979 disability pensioners to wait until age 65 to access their lump sum benefit. Access will now be from age 60, consistent with other members and the equality principles of the charter.

The bill will amend the Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1986 to restrict the circumstances where a member is required to undergo a medical examination for consistency with the charter right to privacy. The board's power to require a member to undergo a medical examination will be limited to situations where it is necessary to assess their incapacity or for insurance purposes.

Medical reports are often required by the board or trustee to make assessments of disability claims. For consistency with the charter's privacy principles this bill will amend the relevant superannuation acts to ensure members who are affected by a decision based on a medical report will have access to that report, subject to relevant sections of the Health Records Act 2001.

The allocation of benefits where more than one surviving partner exists is often a difficult task. Under the relevant superannuation acts the board will now be

required to consider any submissions from surviving partners to ensure their right to privacy under the charter is protected. A set of criteria to be used by the board or trustee when considering any apportionment between partners will also be established.

Under certain circumstances, the board or trustee may make a decision to pay a member's benefit to a guardian or administrator. This bill stipulates that any such decision can only be based on whether the member is capable of managing their financial affairs. This change ensures the relevant acts are compliant with the privacy and property principles set out in sections 13 and 20 of the charter.

The privacy principles of the charter are also the concern in relation to the disclosure of information provided to the board or trustee by a third party. This bill amends the State Employees Retirement Benefits Act 1979 to restrict the use or disclosure of such information to circumstances where it is required for the administration of the fund.

The bill will amend the State Superannuation Act 1988 to codify the existing practice of using an actuarially based formula to convert the partner pension of a recipient over age 60 to a lump sum.

This government is committed to the principles of the Victorian charter of human rights and responsibilities and will continue to actively review and amend legislation in the interest of protecting the human rights of all Victorians.

In addition to the amendments relating to the charter, the bill will also amend those acts which govern the payment of judicial pensions. These amendments are consistent with those made to the superannuation acts relating to reversionary pensions for same-sex couples.

The bill will also make a minor amendment to the Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1986 to ensure eligible Ambulance Victoria employees can retain membership of the defined benefit scheme if they transfer employment to the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr WALSH (Swan Hill).

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 9 June.

WATER AMENDMENT (VICTORIAN ENVIRONMENTAL WATER HOLDER) BILL

Statement of compatibility

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Water) tabled following statement in accordance with Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act, I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Water Amendment (Victorian Environmental Water Holder) Bill 2010.

In my opinion, the bill, as introduced in the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the charter.

I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

This bill amends the Water Act 1989 (the act) to establish a Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH) as an independent statutory body responsible for managing environmental water in Victoria that will —

- (a) hold and manage all Victorian environmental water entitlements;
- (b) be responsible for achieving the most effective use of that water at a statewide level;
- (c) plan for and report on the application of that water;
- (d) enter into agreements with the commonwealth environmental water holder to ensure optimal and coordinated use of environmental water;
- (e) work with waterway managers to plan for and deliver environmental water to priority sites; and
- (f) operate in accordance with ministerial rules and be accountable to the environment minister.

Human rights issues

The bill does not raise any issues relating to human rights protected by the charter.

Conclusion

I consider that the bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities as no provisions of this bill engage human rights under the charter.

Tim Holding, MP
Minister for Water

Second reading

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Water) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Victorian government's environmental water holdings are a critical part of our statewide river and wetland health program. This program aims to secure the health of rivers, wetlands and estuaries in the face of increasing water scarcity and climate change and improve their environmental condition to ensure they can continue to provide environmental, social and economic benefits for all Victorians.

Providing adequate environmental flows is crucial to the maintenance and improvement of river and wetland health which in turn underpins regional economies and community wellbeing. They provide good quality water and recreational and tourist services. In addition, iconic sites such as the Barmah and Gunbower forests are often connected with our cultural identity as well as our environmental heritage. Their wellbeing is strongly linked to our own.

The Victorian government has made a very strong commitment to improve river and wetland health. Significant investment has been committed to recover water for stressed river systems, including through large regional infrastructure projects such as the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline and the Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project. To date, completed projects have delivered high and low-reliability entitlements equating to about 350 billion litres on average a year over the long term, with more on the way as projects are progressively completed. This increase in environmental water assets provides much greater management capability, but also the need for greater accountability.

This bill establishes the Victorian Environmental Water Holder as a new, independent, statutory body responsible for making decisions on environmental water use in Victoria. This change will enhance efficiency, accountability and coordination, providing critical improvements in the evolution of sustainable water management. The bill builds on the strengths of our current management arrangements.

Current strengths

Current arrangements for environmental water management reflect the strong policy directions set by the government's *Our Water Our Future* white paper. The white paper established the environmental water reserve, a subset of which is the environmental water entitlements held and managed by the environment minister. Waterway managers, namely catchment management authorities and Melbourne Water Corporation, play a key role in this management by planning for and advising the minister on priorities for environmental watering.

These existing arrangements have a number of strengths that this bill will retain and enhance:

the environment minister is responsible for setting environmental policy and, in this respect, is responsible to the community through Parliament;

at the regional level, the community is heavily involved in waterway managers' planning, particularly identifying the environmental values of highest priority; and

waterway managers ensure that environmental water is delivered as part of integrated river and wetland management programs.

Change, challenges and opportunities

Since the release of *Our Water Our Future*, there have been significant changes in the context for environmental water management within Victoria. There have now been 13 consecutive years of drought, with the prospect of ongoing water scarcity resulting from climate change. In response, environmental management has had to become more sophisticated, flexible, adaptive and responsive. This bill is an important step in recognising and meeting these new challenges and opportunities.

This bill helps to make the most of the government's significant investment to provide additional water for rivers and wetlands. Establishment of the water holder enables it to be managed as efficiently and effectively as possible. We must get maximum 'bang for our buck' — to reduce the need for additional water recovery and avoid potential community impacts. This bill achieves greater efficiency by improving responsiveness in environmental water management. It allows greater ability to capitalise on opportunistic rainfall and flow events and adapt environmental water use to changing seasonal conditions.

The environmental water entitlements resulting from water recovery projects are considerable and warrant a high level of robust and accountable management. This bill installs the Victorian Environmental Water Holder as the guardian of this important task and improves the transparency of decisions about environmental water.

The development of the water grid provides opportunities to use environmental water across regions. This requires greater coordination to ensure that environmental water is targeted to the sites of highest environmental priority.

Coordinated decision making is also of increasing importance with the creation of a new player in

environmental water management, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. By creating a single Victorian entity responsible for liaison, we will ensure that Victorian and commonwealth environmental water use will be coordinated for maximum benefit.

Victoria's position will be strengthened because the environmental water holder will put forward a single voice on state priorities that draws strongly on regional planning.

An improved institutional framework

Within this context, the government introduces this bill to improve the institutional framework. It will enhance the management of environmental water in Victoria, building on existing strengths and positioning us to meet current and future challenges.

The centrepiece of this framework is the Victorian Environmental Water Holder, a new, independent, statutory body, with the primary objective of using environmental water to protect environmental values and improve waterway health. The environmental water holder will be responsible for making decisions on the use of environmental water, from entitlements currently held by the environment minister. The bill amends the Water Act 1989 to create the environmental water holder and provide attendant powers and obligations to ensure the entity achieves its objective. The environmental water holder will consist of at least three commissioners, appointed by the Governor in Council.

This bill places the Victorian Environmental Water Holder within a regulatory framework that establishes accountability to the environment minister via planning and reporting requirements as well as a limited power of direction. Operation of the environmental water holder will be guided by its legislative requirements, rules developed by the environment minister and broader government policy set around environmental water management. Within these boundaries, the environmental water holder will be free to make decisions on the use of environmental water to support our waterways and wetlands. It will be empowered to acquire and trade water, another tool to manage the risks of variable water availability. In addition to the trading rules which apply to an irrigator or other entitlement holder participating in water trade, the environmental water holder will be subject to the entity's overarching objectives outlined in the legislation and rules issued by the minister for environment.

The bill will ensure the Water Act formally recognises and consolidates the key role of waterway managers in planning for and delivering environmental watering

decisions. These functions are currently undertaken by Melbourne Water and catchment management authorities. The regional perspective of waterway managers is an essential contribution to the decision-making process that ensures environmental watering is integrated with broader river and wetland health initiatives.

This bill delivers on the Victorian government's commitment to establish a Victorian Environmental Water Holder, as outlined in the Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy and the land and biodiversity white paper. It is also consistent with the Victoria-commonwealth bilateral agreement for stage 2 of the Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project as well as Victoria's national water initiative commitments.

Environmental water management has been through a rapid evolution in recent years, and the environmental water holder will improve adaptability to change, within a clear legislative framework. However, the management context for the environmental water holder will change considerably over the next decade with the advent of the Murray-Darling Basin plan and the completion of major infrastructure projects. Recognising this, the government considers it appropriate that the environmental water holder framework should be reviewed at some time in the future to ensure the institutional arrangements support efficient and effective environmental water management.

This bill will enhance the institutional framework to support the efficient, accountable and coordinated management of environmental water in Victoria, a critical element of the state's river and wetland health program. This framework will form the foundation for a present and future that sustains our waterways to the benefit of our environment and community wellbeing.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr WALSH (Swan Hill).

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 9 June.

APPROPRIATION (2010/2011) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of Mr BRUMBY (Premier).

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — It is with great pleasure that I make a contribution to the budget — or the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill as it is commonly known. This will be my 14th budget response to the house; I made four under the former Kennett government, and this is my 10th response under a Labor government. I can inform the house that the seat of Ivanhoe has fared far better in the last 10 years than it did in the seven years prior to that.

I will outline to the house some of the things we have achieved in the 10 years since the Bracks and now Brumby governments have been in office. I am very pleased the Minister for Health is in the house, because the biggest achievement has been the saving of the Austin Hospital from privatisation by the previous government. I recall vividly the day when former health minister John Thwaites attended the Austin Hospital to say the privatisation was off and the government was going to spend money. He did not announce the actual amount then, but the enthusiasm that came from the staffroom of the hospital was very clear.

Subsequent to that, the government spent \$376 million on the redevelopment of the Austin Hospital and the relocation of the Mercy Hospital from East Melbourne to Heidelberg. The neuroscience facility, currently under construction, will cost about \$40 million. Previously the government spent about \$18 million on the mental health facility, at the top end of the hospital near Upper Heidelberg Road, which was opened just before the last election. There is more to be spent on the Austin, as I will detail in a moment.

Certainly schools have fared far better under this government than under the previous government. Millions have been spent on Viewbank College, Rosanna Golf Links Primary School, Rosanna Primary School, Heidelberg Primary School, Ivanhoe East Primary School and Bellfield Primary School. All of those schools have had major redevelopments under this Labor government during my term as the local member, and there have been many other lesser works done at other schools.

The Minister for Health has visited the new Banyule community health centre on many occasions. The old building was part of what was known as the Olympic Village, then it was part of the Office of Housing, then it became the West Heidelberg community health centre. That building has been completely replaced with a fabulous new \$18 million building, and I can assure members that residents of the West Heidelberg and Olympic Village area are well and truly aware of who got that for them.

Pedestrian safety has also been of paramount importance in my electorate. In the last four or five years some four or five pedestrian crossings have been installed in the electorate, including one outside the Austin Hospital in Studley Road. I commend, as I have done in the house before, the Minister for Roads and Ports for that work. This budget will fund the pedestrian crossing on Burke Road North, and I will elaborate on that a little later.

Certainly pedestrian safety in the electorate of Ivanhoe has been greatly enhanced. Road safety improvements along Rosanna Road, one of the busiest roads in my electorate, included moving a pedestrian crossing to Darebin Street to make that intersection complete.

SmartBuses have been introduced to the electorate. People who have used them will know that the SmartBus works exceptionally well; it runs every 15 minutes on average during the middle of the day and certainly extends the available bus services. When I was elected, bus services to Heidelberg finished running at 1 o'clock on a Saturday; they now operate seven days a week up to about 9 o'clock.

Last week I was at the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE on the corner of Waterdale Road and Bell Street, where a new \$8 million facility has been opened. All those things have happened under this government.

At the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital a new hydrotherapy pool is currently being built and new wards 17 and 18 are being built; I hope they will be opened later this year. In this budget the Austin Hospital has fared exceptionally well again, with an extra \$70 million for the Olivia Newton-John facility. That is on top of the previous \$25 million allocated by this government, which basically will finish off construction of the entire Olivia Newton-John facility where there is presently just a big hole in the ground.

That will be an enormous benefit to people suffering cancer; the funding of that facility is a major achievement of this government. Certainly I also commend to the house Olivia Newton-John for all her efforts and fundraising; I think she has raised something like \$13 million in the time she has been involved with the centre that bears her name. Without her support this would not have occurred; I recognise that and commend her for it. The federal government has also put some funding into the facility.

Also at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital \$14.2 million has been allocated for 22 community health-care beds, and the need for that followed consultation in the area. Those beds will be the first of

120 beds for the hospital. I commend the government for taking mental health seriously and starting the process at the repatriation hospital. Things are well under way.

There is major development at both the repatriation hospital and the Austin Hospital. My estimation — although it is not perhaps precise, because I know, for example, that the minister has been out there many a time and opened a new ward here and a new facility there — is that the government has spent well over \$600 million on health in the Ivanhoe electorate. That record is second to none in the history of the state under any government. I am exceptionally proud that that has occurred during my term as member.

School education is also vitally important. I did list the facilities that have been redeveloped, but the Heidelberg schools regeneration project is now well under way. Last year's budget saw phase 1 funded in part; this budget is now funding the rest of phase 1 to the tune of an extra \$5 million. That is brilliant news for that schools regeneration project.

I commend to the house everybody who has been involved — teachers, parents, students, the school principals, the school staff, the education department — all of whom have worked tirelessly to get this facility on the road to being built. They have all spent countless hours in their efforts. It is something that the schools wanted. It is a merger of several schools — namely, Latrobe Secondary College, Banksia Secondary College, Haig Street Primary School, Olympic Village Primary School and Bellfield Primary School.

I admit I am a little disappointed that the budget, while it funded \$5 million for the completion of phase 1, did not fund phase 2, which is an important component in the future development of the school. I hope a future government funds this as a matter of priority. West Heidelberg needs that school to get the kids interested and educated; it is Labor heartland, and it deserves the best a Labor government can deliver.

On that issue, a development that has come forward in the last couple of months is the Olympic Village Primary School, which remains as part of the Heidelberg schools regeneration project as a P-4 school. The Banyule City Council and everyone else who has been working on it think it is a fabulous idea for a learning hub. It has been estimated to cost \$70 million, but there is no funding for it yet. I would desperately like to see that funded in future budgets. Again it is Labor heartland. We need the facilities of a learning hub at the former Olympic Village as part of the school regeneration project that remains to be

completed on what was the La Trobe Secondary School site. One criticism I have there is that it is called the Charles La Trobe Secondary College site. The state government missed a grand opportunity to name it the Victoria Cross College. The local branch of the Labor Party basically resolved for that to occur and is disappointed that the school is named for Charles La Trobe. It is up to the Labor Party branch to let the government know that, but I thought I would flag it here as well.

Other things are desperately needed in the area. The Lions House project is a proposal to help people in care at the Mercy Hospital for Women and all the family members who come down to visit them. That is yet to be funded, although there have been years of consultation. There is a proposal to build it on the Martin Street car park, which is opposite the Austin Hospital. I have done a survey — I am very good on surveys with the electorate! — and although there is some apprehension about it, the majority of people in the area would like to see the Martin Street car park extended.

One of the biggest issues we have in the Heidelberg area is parking. There has been a massive increase in parking around the Austin Hospital, not just for the hospital but generally speaking for the railway station and so on. With the redevelopment, the government built 1200 car parking spaces. There were no car parks at the Austin Hospital when it was built in 1882. We now have 1200 places. I know one particular councillor — —

An honourable member — Who? Name him. Carbines.

Mr LANGDON — No. The current deputy mayor, Jenny Mulholland, had advocated that the car park be built for 5000 cars. In my estimation that would have built the Austin Hospital another 16 levels higher.

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

Mr LANGDON — I am sure the member for Bulleen can see the Austin Hospital now, but if it had been another 16 floors higher, it would have almost overshadowed the electorate of Bulleen! With the new facilities of the neuroscience building and the Olivia Newton-John Cancer Wellness Centre, car parking around the Austin Hospital is a major concern. Those facilities will not be built with car parking, so the Martin Street car park must be expanded in the future to take the excess cars. That is an issue generally in my electorate as well.

If we go back to West Heidelberg, another thing that is important is the West Heidelberg police station. It has been there for many years, and I have been advocating for at least 10 years that it be redeveloped and possibly even relocated. But it has to stay in West Heidelberg. West Heidelberg wants and needs a police station to stay there. It must be adequately staffed. Hopefully some of the 1966 extra police will spend more time in West Heidelberg to make sure the police station is fully staffed.

Other funding is needed in the area for a library in West Heidelberg. The most socially disadvantaged area in my electorate does not have a library. I would like that to be provided, and it is something I have been working on.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LANGDON — For those members who have come into the house very recently, I can assure them that the list of things I have done in my electorate is quite substantial. But no matter what time you have, unfortunately you cannot do everything. Aged-care beds would not go astray on the repatriation hospital site as well. A little thing I have also been pushing for has to do with the Heidelberg School of artists, which is recognised as one of the pre-eminent art groups in the history of Australian art. There is currently no gallery in the Heidelberg area to recognise that. I must admit it is a pipedream, something I would like to see established some time in the next 5 or 10 years, but I understand there are other demands in other electorates.

The Burke Road North pedestrian crossing has been budgeted for. Many local councillors and others recently advocated for it, but I want the house to know that I delivered on that commitment to get a Burke Road North pedestrian crossing.

One of the biggest issues without doubt in my electorate is the proposed tunnel and the \$38 billion transport plan. I am well aware that the member for Bulleen spoke on this matter prior to the dinner break, and he is supportive of something being done. There is a major issue with traffic congestion in both the Bulleen and Ivanhoe areas. It is described as the missing link from Bulleen Road to Manningham Road and up Rosanna Road.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Jasper) — Order!

Mr LANGDON — I shall continue. Thank you. Interruptions are most disorderly, though quite worthy. It is a shame there was no commitment in this

budget — that I can find — to start the community consultation process. There is enormous feeling within my electorate that something has to be done. The government has to get its act together, and the Liberal Party I might add has to commit itself not to build a freeway through the area but to build that tunnel. It is not just the government. The Liberal Party also has to commit itself to making sure the traffic does not continually build up along Rosanna, Bulleen and Manningham roads.

I commend this budget to the house. It will be the last budget I comment on in the house. In the future I may well be commenting on the budget, but it will not be within these four walls. There is a long list of things that my electorate still needs. I would ask future members to please follow them through.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Jasper) — Order! I call on the member for Warrandyte, and I will seek to protect him from any unwanted interjections as long as he does not provoke government members.

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — Thank you, Acting Speaker. I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill 2010. It is worth noting from the outset that we in this chamber are probably the only ones still talking about this budget, because it is evident to everyone that just a few days after the budget was presented in this house it sank without a trace. The reason is that the public and media have become so attuned to Labor's spin, Labor's rhetoric and Labor's broken promises they are just not willing to listen to what the government is saying anymore.

In 1999 Labor came to power with a lot of lofty ideas about transparency, and the mantra of governing for all was repeated ad nauseam. It is a shame that these ideals have degenerated over the past 11 years to a culture of secrecy and cover-ups and the use of power to reward just a select few.

You would think that after 11 years, after \$340 billion in revenue, this government would have actually been able to achieve something. I think Victorians out there would think there was not too much you could not do with \$340 billion in revenue. But I think history will show that this Labor government has wasted the opportunities of the last 11 years and indeed will leave office with no legacy to show for its time in government.

After the government has received \$340 billion in revenue we still have the least number of hospital beds per capita of any state in Australia; violent crime in Melbourne, in the outer suburbs and in the regional

centres is at record levels; public satisfaction with train services is at a record low; and road congestion is at its worst. On top of that, every man, woman and child in Victoria will be saddled with the \$31.7 billion debt this government has imposed on Victorians — and \$31.7 billion is an incredible amount of money. According to the government's own figures, this debt will incur a \$3.2 billion interest bill by 2014. Just to put that into perspective, \$3.2 billion is the total budget per year of the Department of Human Services. It is an incredible amount of money.

This government is an absolute master at wasting money. It has recently been shown that this government has overseen \$11 billion worth of blow-outs in major projects, be it smart meters, be it myki, be it channel deepening or be it regional fast rail. Everything this government touches, every project it touches, ends up costing more than it said it would. Added to that, a recent Auditor-General's report said, as reported in the *Australian Financial Review* of 6 May:

The effectiveness of more than \$31 billion in Victorian government spending is unclear because of shortcomings in the state's performance monitoring systems ...

An article in the *Australian* on the same day states:

The analysis of performance measures found there was a 'significant deficiency' in reporting and that six departments had 'no or (a) limited number' of ways to measure whether \$31 billion worth of funding had been used effectively.

The report also said that two-thirds of performance measures used by this government were irrelevant or inappropriate. What did these people opposite say when that report came out? What did these champions of the independence of the Auditor-General do? Did they say, 'We had better have a look into that'? No, instead, as reported in the *Australian*:

The government's response to the audit — which was included in the report — states that it 'disagrees with several of the negative assessments' of the Auditor-General and that the findings were biased.

What the government said was that the Auditor-General was wrong, there is not a problem, and that it should just be allowed to get on without actually accounting for any of the expenditure that it makes. Certainly any discussion of the Labor government's financial mismanagement would not be complete without a mention of the recent gaming machine auction, which was an absolute and total debacle and which was described by the *Australian Financial Review* of 12 May in the following terms:

The Victorian government's auction of gaming machine licences has fallen flat, delivering \$1 billion less than

budgeted for and providing a major windfall for pub operators ...

That was \$1 billion left on the table. One billion dollars could pay for 10 000 extra nurses; \$1 billion could pay the budget of the police department for an entire year; and it could pay for, from scratch, an entire hospital.

The Minister for Gaming has made a mess of every single thing he has touched, be it the liquor licences or Intralot, and now we have the gaming machine auction, which has just thrown Victorians' money away. What did the minister say? When every single person remotely connected with the gaming machine industry said the way it was run was an absolute farce, the minister said:

I don't think it is a clanger. Sometimes good policy costs.

If good policy is going to cost a billion dollars, then I would suggest to the minister that perhaps it is not good policy. The Minister for Gaming has made an absolute mess of it. He is one minister who makes even the Minister for Police and Emergency Services look mildly effective!

Labor says often that it governs for all. The Treasurer said this budget is not designed to shore up marginal seats and Labor seats. But a cursory look at the budget shows us that this is patently not true. Thirty out of the 36 schools to which funding is allocated in the budget papers are in Labor seats. Sixteen out of 20 station upgrades are in Labor seats. The bulk of health funding as detailed in the budget is going to Labor or marginal seats; and of the 26 announcements made this year by the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs of funding going to sporting clubs, 20 have been for clubs in Labor areas. This is patently a method for the minister to just help local members, while those Victorians living in coalition seats are left wanting. Certainly I have a couple of cricket clubs in my electorate, the Ainslie Park and North Ringwood cricket clubs, which desperately desire some work to be done to their cricket nets, but of course they do not rate on the minister's list of those that are actually in need.

Let us look at the centrepiece of this budget. The centrepiece is the extra numbers to the police force that the government proposed. This policy is one that the opposition put out some weeks prior. It is interesting to note that the government could not even copy that policy properly. It is just amazing: it cannot even copy something properly. Many of the government's proposed police numbers have been committed to patrol railway stations, in contrast to the coalition's very sensible policy of freeing up the additional police we have promised by having railway stations manned

by protective services officers. This policy is just one of many that the government has stolen.

Some members might have seen the Attorney-General on the ABC *Stateline* television program desperately trying to explain how the government's commitment to abolishing suspended sentences substantially differed from that of the coalition. He could not do it. It is amazing how this government keeps taking policies from the opposition. I wish it would give me a clue as to when it will announce that it will abolish home detention or when it will introduce an independent, broadbased anticorruption commission, because I am sure it is coming — I am absolutely sure it is coming.

Fifty policies have been taken by the Labor government from the coalition in recent times, and its refusal to acknowledge that shows either its ignorance or the willingness of its backbenchers to just swallow the line from its front bench.

This government is tired, it is bereft of ideas, and all it does now is spend its time churning out government advertising, whether it is advertising on schools that basically tells us that state schools are managed by the state government, whether it is infrastructure advertising which tells us about projects that have not even been started, or whether it is advertising about public transport that tells us about plans that are not even funded. That is all the government does now. It just churns out advertising trying to tell us it is doing a great job when the reality is that it is not at all.

As the coalition spokesman for manufacturing I find it very disappointing that there has been very little commitment in the budget to support the manufacturing industry. In fact the only commitment in the budget to the government's flawed manufacturing industry plan, *Building Our Industries for the Future — Action Plans for Victorian Industry and Manufacturing*, is in the form of funds for the tourism and film industries. While I acknowledge that those industries are quite deserving of funding, but it is interesting to note that the manufacturing industry has not really been given too much support at all.

There has been some concession to business with the introduction of a Competitive Business Fund, which will be an \$11.4 million fund designed to assist businesses to invest in new equipment and technology. I look forward with interest to see how that program is rolled out. I am sure it will be rolled out with the obligatory photo opportunities from ministers in high-visibility jackets and hard hats.

I note also that the government is spending money to educate businesses about foreign exchange risk. Given my 18 years in the foreign exchange markets prior to entering this place I look forward with some interest to seeing how the government rolls out that particular educational program. What this government needs to do is to support jobs in areas that have a traditional base in manufacturing with programs like the Geelong Investment and Innovation Fund, which was introduced and proposed by Ford and the former Howard federal government. It is unfortunate that the government has not utilised that program to its fullest extent, but those sorts of programs are the ones that should be supported by this government.

With regard to my own electorate, I must say one of the major disappointments from this budget was the lack of funding for Ringwood railway station. I have canvassed this issue many times in this place. The station's ramps do not conform with the provisions of the federal Disability Discrimination Act. There are no amenities for commuters around the main platforms, and I have talked about the security and safety issues many, many times in this place. All that this budget does is allocate money which was previously announced in 2008 towards the interchange at the front of the station redevelopment. I have to say that no-one in the community asked for this project. I have it on good authority that doing the two projects separately the station redevelopment and the bus interchange will actually incur a cost of an extra \$20 million over and above what it would cost if those projects were done as one. It just amazes me that that is the case. It is almost as if this government tries to go out there and waste money.

The fact is that this station is in what the government has deemed a central activities district. It is near the site of a major commercial development, and the community fails to understand why this government has not seen this project as a priority.

Another major project that was overlooked in this budget was the Maroondah regeneration project, a project initiated by the Maroondah Education Coalition, which is a group of seven schools in and around my electorate and some schools in the member for Kilsyth's electorate. That group has been championing the Maroondah regeneration project, which is an innovative bid to reconfigure those seven schools in a way that will achieve better outcomes for their students.

Those schools were very disappointed that the government failed to fund this project. The government committed \$1 million in the budget last year for planning for the project and gave every reason for the

schools to expect funding to begin to put the plan into place. The schools were very disappointed that the funding was not in this budget, and the *Maroondah Leader* of 11 May reported:

Croydon Community School principal Bronwyn Harcourt said she was surprised that the project had not received any funding.

The paper went on to report:

'All the signs ... were positive, but you can never rule out political bureaucracy', Ms Harcourt said.

There are a lot of disappointed people in my electorate because there are a lot of projects that were not funded. The government response to complaints about that lack of funding was predictable. Again, on 11 May the *Maroondah Leader* reported:

The Leader's questions to the state government about why the area missed out on any major budget investment were not answered ...

That is just typical of this government.

At the end of the day nothing has really changed in this budget that was handed down a couple of weeks ago. Myki still costs too much and we still do not know when it is going to start; debt is rising, accompanied by the \$3.2 billion interest bill; our streets are still unsafe; and our trains are still unreliable. It is disappointing that the Brumby government has chosen to use this year's budget and taxpayers dollars in an exercise to shore up Labor MPs' seats amid a climate of declining popularity. But I am confident that Victorians will see this cynical budget for what it is and make their opinion of this tired, secret and arrogant government known at the ballot box.

Mr HUDSON (Bentleigh) — I am proud to be part of a government that has delivered a budget that is delivering on services, investing in infrastructure, tackling disadvantage and creating jobs. That is a record that the Brumby government can be proud of. It is a record that the opposition, for all its complaints, carping, whining and criticism — and we just had another 13 minutes of it; the member could not quite get to 15 minutes — cannot undermine. It is a record that is credible because it is underpinned by performance.

Last year in the budget we confronted the global financial crisis, the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression, and as a government we focused on jobs. We said we would create and support 35 000 jobs by investing in services and in infrastructure. The member for Scoresby, the shadow Treasurer, in his budget reply last year claimed that the budget was a

house of cards. He said we could not create 35 000 jobs; in fact he said we would lose jobs.

He said last year, in talking down the Victorian economy, that we would go into negative growth, that we would decline in terms of our economic performance. Like Nostradamus, he issued his own quatrains and expected everyone to take them seriously. On 9 June 2009 the shadow Treasurer claimed in this place that:

... it is highly possible that Victoria could be looking at negative growth of over 1 per cent next financial year, or a turnaround of minus 1.5 per cent.

The shadow Treasurer told us a recession was inevitable, but, unfortunately and like Nostradamus, the forecasts of the member for Scoresby were based on no evidence and were therefore useless. You might as well predict the budget and the economy from the stars, because what has happened is that almost 100 000 Victorian jobs have been created over the last 12 months and Victoria generated an incredible 92 per cent of all full-time jobs created in Australia over the last year.

Then our shadow Nostradamus predicted that Victoria would lose its AAA credit rating because of our debt rollercoaster in the May 2009 budget. Guess what? Victoria has had its AAA credit rating confirmed again following this year's budget; in fact we are the only state in Australia to have a budget surplus this year as well as have one forecast for the next four years.

Our shadow Nostradamus, the member for Scoresby, specialises in end-of-time prophecy. Every year in his budget reply he gets up in the Parliament and predicts the end of the world. Each year he claims that state debt is out of control, that budget costs will blow out and we will go into deficit, that state taxes such as stamp duty and land tax are crushing the economy, that services are in terminal decline and that the Victorian economy is on an inevitable slide to disaster. Like Nostradamus, shadow Nostradamus never makes predictions about good things.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Jasper) — Order! References to the member for Scoresby should be used appropriately.

Mr HUDSON — Shadow Nostradamus never makes predictions about good things that will happen; he only makes predictions about disasters. The problem is that none of his predictions comes true, and as a result no-one believes him. No-one believes the predictions of the member for Scoresby.

The most respected economic commentators in the state do not believe him; the record number of people moving to Victoria from interstate and overseas do not believe him; and the record level of investment by the business community in Victoria shows that it does not believe him. No-one is listening to the shadow Treasurer, our resident Nostradamus, because there are only so many times you can predict the end of the world without it happening without losing your credibility.

Unfortunately that is what has happened to the shadow Treasurer because in the real world of the state budget, the government's fiscal position is as solid as a rock. We have delivered an \$870 million operating surplus in 2010–11, an operating surplus averaging \$1.2 billion over the following three years.

Of course the economy will continue to grow strongly — this year by 3.25 per cent. Our shadow Treasurer, our own Nostradamus, claims that our debt is spiralling out of control and there is no plan to repay it, yet net debt as a percentage of our economy and in actual dollar terms will be lower than was forecast in last year's budget. It will be lower than last year's budget, not higher. The problem for the shadow Treasurer is that there is just too much good news in this year's state budget.

In this year's state budget we have delivered on our 2006 election commitment to rebuild or refurbish 500 government schools in the term of this government. We have delivered on that and we have gone beyond that commitment. We have exceeded our target by 53 schools. I have heard opposition members complaining and carping about individual schools — schools that they claim have not been upgraded in their electorates — but the fact of the matter is, and this is undeniable, that we have presided over the biggest school rebuilding program by far in our state's history, and there is much more to come.

The people of the Bentleigh electorate have seen the benefits of this program. In the seven years of the Kennett government not a single school in my electorate was upgraded. In fact five schools servicing my electorate were closed. The only school that had any rebuilding works undertaken was one where part of the school burnt down. Under this Labor government over \$60 million has been invested in rebuilding schools serving the Bentleigh electorate. There is a further commitment in this budget to provide planning money to McKinnon Secondary College, a school of 1580 students, for it to plan the next stage of its redevelopment.

Then there is the record health and hospital budget — a \$4 billion budget over four years that is going to provide for the building and upgrading of Victorian hospitals, allow faster treatment of patients, have more people seen in our emergency departments and enable more elective surgery than ever before. This is two health budgets in one. We have been able to deliver two health budgets in one because of the great advocacy by our Premier in the national debate over future health-care funding. The Premier quite rightly insisted that any national health care reform — any reforms that were instituted by the commonwealth — had to include more money to treat more patients now, and that is precisely what the Premier was able to achieve at the Council of Australian Governments meeting. As a result of his advocacy not only have other states benefited from our willingness to negotiate hard with the commonwealth but also over the next four years in Victoria we will be able to treat 150 000 more emergency department patients each year within a 4-hour time frame.

We will also ensure that 34 000 more patients will receive elective surgery faster. An additional 332 subacute beds will enable the treatment of 5000 more patients annually. At the Monash Medical Centre in Clayton, which services my electorate, we are seeing an investment of \$11 million to expand paediatric services in that great hospital, including 10 inpatient beds, 5 paediatric intensive care beds and 4 neonatal intensive-care cots, as well as the refurbishment of the Ronald McDonald House Monash Family Room. That is an \$11 million investment for my electorate.

There are other benefits that are flowing from the budget. For example, let us look at what the government has done to support kindergartens in my electorate over the last year. A sum of \$600 000 has been invested in redeveloping and refurbishing kindergartens at a time when families are moving into the Bentleigh electorate in increasing numbers. People are moving back into the older suburbs. A growing number of families are looking for kindergarten places. A sum of \$600 000 is being invested in kindergarten places in the city of Glen Eira — the highest amount invested in any municipality in Victoria.

On top of that, we will inevitably see a local share of the 3590 extra kindergarten places that were funded in this budget. This is a tremendous commitment that has been made by the government. We have guaranteed through that commitment that every four-year-old child will get access to a kindergarten place — and they will continue to get access to kindergarten places. We have the highest kindergarten participation rates in Australia.

We have made enormous investments in early childhood development, and we know that those investments will provide a return. For every dollar we invest we get a return of \$7 by making sure that those children get the best start in life, that we tackle any disadvantage or developmental delay that exists for those children and that we identify anything that is going to inhibit their learning in the future. We have made those investments, and that will drive future school completion rates. I notice that the shadow Treasurer criticised Victoria's year 12 completion rates. The fact is that year 12 completion rates have risen since we came to government.

In addition, as a core part of the budget, we have made a major commitment to expanding our police force. Not only is Victoria the safest state in Australia but it will be even safer because of the commitment we have made to providing 1966 additional police over the next five years.

Members of the opposition love to run around and try to denigrate the level of safety in Victoria, making everyone fearful, but the fact of the matter is that the crime rate in Victoria is 23 per cent below the national average. The city of Glen Eira is one of the five safest municipalities in metropolitan Melbourne. It is a very safe area, and these budget initiatives will ensure it is even safer.

In addition there are some good social justice initiatives in the budget. Let me point to one of them: the budget increases the water concession for low-income households to \$29 — a 10 per cent increase. We recognise the fact that pensioners and other concession beneficiaries — people on low incomes — are doing it tough and facing increases in water bills. We know that the cost of water will be higher in the future, but we are easing the pressure on these people by making available this water concession. The concession was increased last year, and it is being increased this year. In addition these people will continue to have their electricity bills reduced through concessions.

The state budget lays the foundations for Victoria's future growth and prosperity. The shadow Treasurer — our resident Nostradamus — is trying to run it down and is gnashing his teeth. His predictions have not come true: Victorians are reaping the benefits of sound economic management, our commitment to jobs in services and our investment in infrastructure. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HODGETT (Kilsyth) — What a performance from the member for Bentleigh! He has been up in his office practising his delivery over the dinner break —

and why not? It is only a matter of time before a vacancy occurs, but which incompetent minister will it be — the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Sideshow Bob; the Minister for Mental Health, Minister Neville; or the Minister for Gaming, the billion-dollar man, Minister Robinson?

I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill. I say at the outset what a tired and policy-starved Brumby Labor government we have after 11 years in office. It is a government that has run out of ideas and chosen the easy but lazy path of trying to flush out coalition policies at any opportunity so as to pounce on them and adopt them as its own. The coalition has already announced more than 60 policies since the 2006 state election, many with a strong focus on law and order issues. I note with interest the fact that more than 50 previously announced coalition commitments have been adopted by Labor since the last election.

The 2010–11 state budget totally ignores many of the needs in my electorate of Kilsyth. It is extremely disappointing that the Brumby Labor government has neglected my electorate by not committing any specific funding to the area. Labor has neglected the outer east for 11 years, and sadly this budget suggests that nothing has changed. Labor has refused to deliver the desperately needed protective services officers for Ringwood East, Croydon and Mooroolbark railway stations, and safety continues to be a huge issue for commuters, including my own nephew, who was the victim of an armed robbery on a train from Mooroolbark to Croydon just a few weeks ago. Everyone deserves the right to feel safe on our trains and stations, and the government has let these people down.

The Premier had the opportunity to fund upgrades to Mooroolbark police station and throw support behind the underresourced police officers at Mooroolbark and Croydon, but once again he has not delivered. My local area has been ignored and basic services continue to get worse under the Premier.

The Labor government has turned its back on the Maroondah regeneration project and the Mooroolbark station creative community hub by failing to give them any specific funding — and I will speak on those two projects a little later in my contribution.

Worse still is the \$31.7 billion debt that will burden future generations. The government continues to rack up a huge debt by wasting money on myki and the smart meter rollout and by mismanaging projects, with cost blow-outs on projects such as the desalination plant, yet there are no debt repayment plans in place.

Labor cannot manage money. Whilst I say it has no debt repayment plan in place, we know that Labor secretly crosses its fingers and hopes that the coalition will get elected from time to time so that someone can restore sound financial management to the state of Victoria, balance the books, pay off the huge state debt run up by Labor and restore confidence in the Victorian economy.

Under Labor the state's debt servicing interest bill will climb to \$3.2 billion over the next few years — an increase of more than 180 per cent since 2008. That is \$3.2 billion — or \$3200 million — each and every year which could have been used for improving infrastructure and services such as roads and bridges, hospitals and schools and for providing more police. That \$3.2 million would be enough to recruit a further 30 000 police officers or nurses. It is not rocket science: if you borrow money, you need to have a repayment plan. Once you pay off the debt, you then have the opportunity to put the money — the money that had previously been used to pay off the principal and interest bill — towards other projects.

The coalition is not in the business of spending money it does not have. Think of it like many families in my electorate of Kilsyth do. Families in my electorate are doing it tough to pay off their homes, pay their bills on time and put their children through school. They save and borrow with a plan in place to pay off the debt and get ahead in life. They know that when they pay the home mortgage down that will free up money and offer them choices. Some might put an extension on their home, some might assist their children through university or buy them their first car, some might invest for the future — —

Mr Kotsiras — Some pay for weddings.

Mr HODGETT — Some pay for weddings, some upgrade their cars and some save for a rainy day.

Sadly these concepts are lost on the Brumby Labor government. Reckless spending, out of control debt and no repayment plan means the approach is to spend, spend, spend and let some other bunny take responsibility for the debt. This is a disgraceful financial model that steers us all towards disaster.

In the time remaining I wish to highlight many of the funding needs ignored and neglected in this year's Brumby Labor government budget. I will start with Maroondah Hospital. The Premier has again shown that he is not interested in supporting and improving health services in my electorate by not funding additional staff or by funding resource upgrades at Maroondah

Hospital. This is extremely disappointing for local residents, especially given the higher number of walkouts as revealed in the latest *Your Hospitals* report. This report has shown that the Labor government is not supporting the hardworking doctors and nurses at the Maroondah Hospital.

In relation to public housing and affordable housing, the Labor government has shown that it does not care about addressing the issue of homelessness and the issue of affordable housing shortages in the outer east. Despite the rising demand for public and affordable housing, there has been no significant commitment by the Brumby government to fund additional facilities or support networks in my electorate.

To take a recent example, the Holy Fools put in a submission for the use of the former Croydon Metropolitan Fire Brigade station as a drop-in shelter to provide meals and emergency accommodation. That was sent some weeks ago, I believe, but it has not had a response; it has fallen on deaf ears. The needs are tremendous out our way and these groups feed hundreds of homeless people on most nights of the week, but the Brumby government does not care about that.

In relation to stage 2 of Pembroke Secondary College, I was very disappointed that the Labor government has not followed up and delivered the stage 2 funding for the final works to be completed at the Reay Road site. This is one of many schools in my electorate; it is one that I take a particular interest in, and it is another example of Labor's inability to follow through on projects. As people in my electorate, in the school community and in the Pembroke school community in particular, know, I fought very hard for the \$10.4 million for stage 1, and I will continue fighting for the stage 2 funding so that this state-of-the-art facility is completed and delivered to our local school community.

The Mooroolbark station creative committee hub is a great project at the Mooroolbark railway station; I believe it is one of three throughout Victoria that has been run as a pilot. It is extremely disappointing that despite my intense lobbying and the hard work of many key community figures the Brumby government has refused to fund any capital works for the Mooroolbark station creative community hub.

This project would have been of great benefit to the Mooroolbark community, but again it is so typical of the Brumby government to engage people, to get community leaders to devote hundreds of hours of time to planning and community consultation, to build

expectations, yet when it comes to capital funding for improvement works it starves the community of any funding, it shelves the project and the report gathers dust. Local residents have every reason to be very concerned about the Brumby government's failure to finish off and fund this valuable local project. However, I will not give up; I will continue to work hard to ensure the government funds this worthwhile project.

I have talked a bit about car parking facilities at both Croydon and Mooroolbark railway stations. The budget had no mention of funding for increased parking measures at those stations. This is typical of the Brumby government, which, time and again, has proved itself incapable of handling Victoria's public transport system.

In the case of Mooroolbark, I have put forward the solution for improvements to the car park, including better and safer access and egress at the site. But to date the Minister for Public Transport, the Brumby government and the Premier himself have ignored the need for urgent action there; I ask: why does the government not get off its backside and implement the plan that I have put forward?

Mr Kotsiras — Why?

Mr HODGETT — 'Why?', you have to ask. The solution is simple; it is a no-brainer, but the government is just lazy and incompetent; it will not get off its backside to implement the plan that I have put forward to deliver this valuable community project.

In relation to increasing resources and support for Croydon and Mooroolbark police stations, I have raised this issue of understaffing at our local police stations repeatedly over the last three years. Despite that and despite an admission in recent weeks, through the information sent out by the Police Association, that there is a severe shortage at Mooroolbark, to the point where the divisional van is unable to be put on patrol at many times during many shifts due to a lack of police numbers, the 2010–11 budget makes no specific mention of increasing police numbers for Mooroolbark or Croydon police stations.

It is unacceptable that the Premier has refused to pledge any increase in police numbers to our area despite the shortage; due to that attitude, people no longer feel safe on our streets. I am working hard to ensure the situation changes so that our police will receive the support they deserve and need so as to get the job done.

Turning to local traffic congestion, there is no specific funding announcement for road upgrades in my electorate. This means there is no budget funding for

upgrades on congested roads such as Canterbury Road, Mount Dandenong Road, Maroondah Highway and Dorset Road.

In relation to increased funding for graffiti removal and prevention, it is disappointing that the Brumby government has neglected to acknowledge or address the growing issue of graffiti in our local area, particularly around Ringwood East, Croydon and Mooroolbark, despite a rising number of complaints from local residents. Unlike Labor members, I get out from behind my desk, go out and talk to some of the local residents and conduct surveys, and get out in the community. Despite a rising number of complaints from local residents and my representations in this Parliament, the Labor government has not dedicated any money to graffiti removal or prevention in our area, but I will continue to pressure the government for action on this issue.

In relation to pedestrian crossings and road safety, I was extremely disappointed that no pedestrian crossings or road safety improvements were announced.

Mr Kotsiras — You are a very disappointed person.

Mr HODGETT — Indeed: there is nothing for our area at all — I continue to say that and to say that I will fight for a fair share of the state's road funding so that we can deliver pedestrian crossings and driver safety at intersections such as the Hull and Manchester roads intersection in Mooroolbark.

An article on the front page of a recent newspaper said a young child was reported as being hit by a car while crossing Manchester Road: the house can stay tuned for a petition on that issue. But will that also fall on deaf ears?

When are members of this Labor government going to get off their backsides, stop being lazy and get out and address some of these issues so that pedestrian and driver safety can be improved on Eastfield Road, Croydon South, and at such intersections as the one at Hull Road with Brice Avenue and Cardigan Road in Mooroolbark? Local residents want the issue of traffic congestion dealt with and addressed.

I turn to the issue of low-rider buses and public transport — and the list goes on. The government has given no indication of increasing the number of low-rider buses servicing bus routes throughout local areas, including Ringwood East, Croydon South, Bayswater North, Croydon, Kilsyth, Montrose, Lilydale and Mooroolbark. Government members do not care, and the shame of and disappointment with this 2010–11

state budget is that it is the budget of an arrogant, out-of-touch, tired and lazy government.

Turning to the issue of debt, when I think of the state's interest bill I realise that without it we could have had traffic lights at the intersection of Hull Road with Brice Avenue and Taylor Road in Mooroolbark. I can see that we could have had upgrades of sporting facilities at Barneong Reserve, where cricket, football, junior football and baseball are played. We could have already had new netball courts at Pinks Reserve and issues of traffic access and egress dealt with. We could already have been looking towards having a new pavilion or a redevelopment of the existing pavilion at Silcock Reserve, where many people participate in soccer and cricket and where we have a thriving local dog obedience club. There are hundreds of people in my community with many different needs, so it is extremely disappointing that the Labor government continues to ignore and neglect those of us who live in the outer east. Those people should rest assured that I will continue to raise matters in this place and fight for a fair share of funding.

The list of projects needed in my area goes on and on. I thought perhaps I should seek an extension of time to allow me to list them, but I do not think that time would be granted this evening. I look forward to further opportunities to express my disappointment with the state budget and its lack of funding for and the neglect of the outer east. The people will have a choice in November this year: they will be able to opt for another four years of the same or to vote with their feet and get rid of this lazy, incompetent, tired and arrogant Brumby Labor state government.

Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) — It is a great pleasure to rise to speak on the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill. I am particularly proud of the number of local initiatives in my electorate of Frankston which will be able to proceed apace because of funding in this budget. First and foremost I offer my congratulations to the Treasurer for handing down such a healthy budget. Without a doubt this budget continues to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family. This is a budget that invests heavily in services for Victorian families, cuts taxes, builds for the future and delivers in a range of vital service areas for local families.

The budget builds for the future as the government sets about the hard work of delivering on its plans to give Victorians job security, the best hospitals and schools, a safer state and a secure water supply as well as a transformation of our transport network. The global financial crisis was a difficult period of time, but I think it is fair to say the strong and very decisive actions of

the Brumby government have ensured that our state has led the worldwide recovery from that crisis. However, it is not only strong leadership that is at the core of Victoria's recovery, because there is no doubt that Victorians work hard and the government works hard to match that work, which is why the state has maintained its AAA credit rating and created and secured almost 100 000 new jobs, with Victoria generating 92 per cent of all of the full-time jobs in Australia over the past year. Our strong financial position has also allowed us to invest very heavily in infrastructure to secure even more jobs for the state of Victoria.

The Brumby government's strong central financial management has certainly been matched by the hard work of local people, and this is what has seen us lead the nation out of the global financial crisis. This is what has also allowed us to invest heavily in services that support local families. In terms of education it is fair to say that every single parent wants the best for their children at school. From kindergarten right through to when they complete their formal education there is no doubt that our children deserve the chance to develop their potential and to develop it close to home. That is why this government has pledged to invest \$271.3 million in the rebuilding, renovation or extension of 553 government schools by 2011 — 53 more schools than the target it pledged to fund.

The Brumby government is continuing to upgrade and build modern schools in my area, including in Frankston. As part of the 2010 budget the Brumby government has invested \$5 million to rebuild the fantastic Overport Primary School, which will provide students with the state-of-the-art classrooms and facilities that they need to learn and thrive. This money will certainly allow a great local school to become even better with modern state-of-the-art classrooms. I know that the very hardworking and dedicated principal at Overport Primary School, Julie Gleeson, is absolutely thrilled about this. In fact she told the *Frankston/Hastings Independent*:

With the new settings, our teachers can fully embrace the teaching styles they are trained in that meet with 21st century ideas.

She is thrilled and the entire school community is over the moon, because when combined with other funding this investment will mean that the entire school will be rebuilt. These new facilities are a great result for the Overport school community and the wider Frankston community and are a continuation of the building on the promises made to Victoria by Labor in 2006. As members will recall, in 2006 the state Labor government promised to rebuild, renovate or extend

500 schools as part of the Victorian schools plan. It is through this latest investment in the budget that we have now managed to fund more than 550 schools. We know that by supporting local schools we are going to ensure that children and students do not have to travel too far from home to get a quality education.

Another local school which is the beneficiary of funding in this budget is the Frankston Heights Primary School, which has received \$2 million. Combined with commonwealth funding, that money will allow the school to be completely rebuilt. When the announcement was made the principal at Frankston Heights Primary School, Simon Anderson, said that this was fantastic news. He is incredibly excited about the positive outcomes this funding will provide for his students.

But the budget is not just about those two schools. There is also the important work done at our special schools in Frankston. That work will be assisted by the provision of modern teaching and learning spaces. The Naranga Special School and the Frankston Special Development School will each receive \$300 000. The principals at both schools — Joan Linardos and Judy Lonza respectively — were also thrilled when I rang them on budget day with the news. I know that both schools do a terrific job of educating kids with extra needs. Improving the spaces where students learn and the spaces where the teachers teach will make a world of difference to both students and teachers alike. The budget also provides for a major new package of support for children and families right across the state, which includes early intervention services and an additional 3590 kindergarten places.

In health the budget provides a massive record boost to Victoria's health and hospital system, including \$1.1 billion for a world-class integrated cancer treatment and research centre. This budget will also allow new hospitals to be built and capacity to be boosted at existing hospitals to meet growing demand. Frankston Hospital will be sharing in this funding. In fact Frankston Hospital will be sharing in the increases in funding with a boost to funding for essential additional equipment to assist our sickest patients in the intensive care unit, which will be able to boost its capacity. This comes on top of the \$21 million stage 1 redevelopment of the hospital, with \$45 million for stage 2 of the redevelopment to be completed later this year and an \$8 million expansion of the maternity ward which is currently under way. Numerous other capital works projects are either completed or are under way at Frankston Hospital.

It is worth noting that Frankston Hospital staff are doing a tremendous job of running a very busy hospital on what is a construction site, which is no mean feat. However, that job is being performed admirably by the dedicated staff at the hospital. For this reason, as well as quite a few others no doubt, Peninsula Health and Frankston Hospital have won the prestigious health service of the year award not once but twice — in 2007 and 2009.

Making our streets safer is a major priority of the government, and 1966 more police on the front line represents the biggest one-off boost to front-line police in the state's history. The Brumby government is investing \$561.3 million for 1700 additional front-line police as well as \$112.3 million to redeploy 266 desk-bound and call-taking police to the front line. We know that investing in more police is by far and away the best way to keep our community safe.

This comes on top of the additional 1400 police who have ready been recruited since 1999. We are delivering an extra 470 police this term and are recruiting an extra 50 transit police to boost safety on the public transport network, because we know it is vitally important to boost our front-line police and also to give our hardworking police the powers they need to tackle crime. They need tough new search powers for knives and other weapons; the police must be able to move on or ban troublemakers from entertainment precincts.

Almost 100 000 new jobs have been created in Victoria over the past 12 months, which, as I said earlier, is almost half of those created throughout Australia. In fact, Victoria has the highest full-time jobs growth of any Australian state. Victoria's economic growth is forecast to grow at 3.25 per cent in 2010–11, which certainly reflects the resilience of the Victorian economy and the strong financial management of the Brumby government throughout the global economic crisis.

It is fair to say that it is this hard work and our strong economy which allows us to invest in a \$9.5 billion infrastructure program to secure an additional 30 000 Victorian jobs in the next financial year, with key projects such as the \$4.3 billion regional rail link brought to book.

In Frankston work is commencing on the \$759 million Peninsula Link project which is due for completion in early 2013. Local residents and businesses alike will benefit from the thousands of jobs and the contracts that will flow from that construction project. We have previously seen the positive boost that major

infrastructure projects provide to local economies as a result of new jobs and the flow-on effects from having a construction workforce in a local area.

Peninsula Link will significantly reduce congestion. It will make it easier for businesses to attract people and to move goods around the road network. Importantly, it is also going to provide a significant tourism boost to the Mornington Peninsula.

This is a great budget. It has been handed down by a terrific Treasurer of a fantastic government. It certainly delivers for Victoria and for Frankston. Without any doubt there has never been a better time to live in Frankston. When you look at our investment in health, in police and in schools, you see that right across the spectrum of the state's responsibilities Victoria is the beneficiary of a strong, hardworking and dedicated government which actually cares and delivers. It is a fantastic budget. It delivers for families right across the state, regardless of postcode. It certainly delivers for the people of Frankston.

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill 2010. When we hear government members talk about the achievements and the promises detailed in the bill, we need look at some of the deliveries.

Government members talk about water savings and the deliveries on water savings. The budget papers actually reinforce what we have been saying. The government projected that in the 2008–09 year there would be savings of 429 000 megalitres. The budget papers show that the actual savings were 327 000 megalitres, some 100 000 megalitres short of what the government had projected. Mind you, those are the government's own figures. That is not an audit that the Parliament of Victoria would settle for; it is just an audit that the government has used. There is some question as to whether they have actually saved the 327 000 megalitres.

As we know, the government has been making claims about water savings for the last three years that it cannot deliver. It has claimed it can save 520 000 megalitres out of the Goulburn-Murray irrigation district when in fact last year — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The time has come for me to interrupt the proceedings of the house. The member for Rodney will have the call when the bill is next before the house.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Colac Secondary College: funding

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — The matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Education and concerns the non-allocation of funding in this year's budget to complete stage 3 of the new campus at Colac Secondary College in my electorate. I want the minister to put a halt to the uncertainty that currently surrounds this project by immediately announcing the allocation of the remaining funds required to complete the work.

I would also like to invite the minister to come to Colac to look at stages 1 and 2 of the school. They were funded by the government of the day, which I acknowledge, and the community of Colac and the school community are grateful for that stages 1 and 2 funding. But at this point in time they face an uncertain future because no funding has been allocated to complete the school.

A government review in 2005 pushed for discussions about a merger of Colac College and Colac High School, and in 2006 the schools voted and agreed on the building of a new campus. One of the main reasons for this agreement was that both schools believed they could turn the situation to their advantage and promote the new campus as a leading rural centre for innovation and excellence. They took the regeneration project to heart and the whole community has been involved in their vision for a new education, recreation and community precinct.

What they see now is that this vision has been stalled. They are without several classrooms and without facilities for technology classes, arts, performing arts and food, as well as sports fields and landscaping. There is no funding for the demolition of the old Colac College classrooms. The college is holding an open night this evening, and parents of primary school children seeking information about enrolments next year will be unable to receive any assurances as to when this project will be completed. Without these assurances, they may well decide to enrol their children in schools outside Colac. This would be to the detriment of the entire education community.

With funding allocated for stage 1 in the 2007–08 budget and for stage 2 in the 2008–09 budget, and as construction was expected to finish by mid-2010, school representatives had every expectation that

funding for stage 3 would be provided this year, but that did not happen. Students at the college support the merger and believe it will create many opportunities for them. Should the government decide to announce funding for stage 3 as an election sweetener, the project would still be pushed back at least a year, with tenders unable to be called until the work is funded. The current dislocation of teachers and students alike would undoubtedly increase.

The Brumby government has been very keen to take credit for the school's vision for this new campus. Let me say there is not much goodwill in the Colac school community at the moment; it wants the project completed. What is required is for the minister to support Colac Secondary College and the Colac community and fund stage 3 of the project without any further delay. The community deserves this funding, and the students want the funding to be allocated.

Narre Warren South electorate: women's health

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) — The matter I wish to raise tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Health and concerns the Brumby Labor government's women's health and wellbeing strategy. The action I seek is for a consultation session on the updated strategy to take place in my electorate of Narre Warren South.

Women's health and wellbeing is a very important issue for me, both personally and in policy terms. The previous strategy worked well in improving the physical, social and emotional health and wellbeing of many Victorian women. I commend both the minister and the parliamentary secretary on seeking to build on this good work through the updated strategy.

An important women's health issue in my electorate is the availability of female doctors. Recently I was contacted by Mrs Catherine Dobson, who lives in Narre Warren South and who is concerned about the lack of female doctors. Mrs Dobson tells me the doctor's surgery that her family, friends and colleagues attend has no female doctors. This is a situation that unfortunately is common locally. With my recent health issues I was very grateful for the expertise and concern of a great team of caring female doctors. I realise many females, and young females especially — certainly Mrs Dobson's daughter — often prefer to have their consultation with a female doctor.

The lack of female doctors and the lack of doctors generally is really the result of years of inaction by the Howard government; it failed to train general

practitioners. Many young Australians, and I know many, were denied an opportunity to become a doctor because of the Liberal government's lack of planning and support for the university sector and for public health. I am really hopeful the Rudd Labor government's planned GP super-clinic in Berwick will go some way to addressing this issue.

I am very well aware that modern women are very busy attending to the demands placed on them — being a mum, a worker, a community volunteer and often now a carer of ageing parents. They are often the last to get special attention and many put off their health issues to care for other people in the family. Somebody once said to me that if you have time to have a haircut, you certainly have time to have a mammogram. I know that is not always a no. 1 priority for women, who will take the dog to the vet or the child to school or grandma to the doctor rather than go to the doctor themselves.

Having services locally is essential. I am very pleased the Casey Hospital has a great emergency department and a BreastScreen Victoria service. In a fast-growing local area there is an opportunity to provide new services, sometimes utilising innovative treatments, technologies and alternative methods for service delivery. I know there are many community groups and individual women who would enjoy a consultation session — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Gippsland intermodal freight terminal: dispute

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — I wish to raise an issue for the Minister for Public Transport. The action I seek is for the minister to intervene to resolve the long-running dispute regarding the Gippsland intermodal freight terminal project, otherwise known as GIFT.

The GIFT was the brainchild of Jeff Goss, a logistics expert, who in 1998 saw the development of an inland port as vital for sustainable development in the Latrobe Valley. He recognised the need to bring in new industries and to grow existing industries by opening up cost-effective freight lines to Melbourne and beyond. He entered into negotiations with the then coalition government to develop the project at Hazelwood.

In 1998 and 1999 various representations were made by the government of the day, which were relied upon by Mr Goss in developing the GIFT and which persuaded him to commit over \$2 million of personal funds to the project. These representations included assertions that

he would have a long-term lease over the site where the GIFT would be located; he would have a first right of refusal to purchase the site; the site would not be included in the privatisation of the rail freight system; the below-rail assets would not be part of the privatisation; and in particular he would be able to construct a track extension on the site. These key issues were enshrined in legal documents.

In 2002 the Labor government reneged on all the promises. As a direct result, the business entities operated by Mr Goss were placed in administration and then liquidation, resulting in crippling losses to Mr Goss and his family. After receiving a letter of demand from Mr Goss's solicitors, the government asked him to cooperate with an independent investigation into the government's conduct on the understanding it would abide by the recommendations arising from the resultant report.

Mr Goss cooperated fully with the investigator, John McMillan. The McMillan report was completed in March 2005 and was scathing of the government's conduct. The government promptly refused to abide by McMillan's recommendations — in particular, that it should settle the dispute expeditiously and in favour of Mr Goss.

The liquidators of the Goss companies have instituted proceedings for damages arising from the government's conduct. A fair result will not only satisfy obligations to the liquidator, it would also provide at least some recompense to Mr Goss. To date, all attempts to negotiate a mutually satisfactory arrangement have failed. Moreover, the government has totally disregarded its own model litigant guidelines and instead is using bullying and delaying tactics, hoping the legal case will go away. It is trying to starve out the Goss claim without any regard for legal costs, because governments have deep pockets.

The Labor government's conduct has been disgraceful. That the government should allow this matter to remain unresolved is reprehensible. That it should use its vast resources to obfuscate and delay the progress of the claim is unforgivable. I call on the minister to intervene in this sorry saga to ensure the negotiation and resolution of the claim on reasonable terms and allow Jeff Goss, his wife, Noelene, and their family the common decency of being able to pick up the threads of their shattered lives.

Planning: disability access

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — I appreciate the opportunity to raise a matter with the Minister for

Planning. The issue I ask him to address is the fact that so many new commercial buildings in the Pascoe Vale electorate appear not to meet the requirements of disability standards in Australia.

I have had the unfortunate experience of trying to find an electorate office that is classed as disability accessible. I have watched a range of buildings being built, and other members of this house have had similar experiences. You drive down streets and you notice new buildings going up, but you do not take much notice of them until you need to find a place that is accessible. The fact is that around Pascoe Vale a number of commercial sites have been developed, but they have steps. You cannot use those premises as electorate offices. I will be talking about Parliament's property people during debate on the appropriation bill.

In relation to access to sites, I cannot understand how a combination of the Building Commission, municipal inspectors and private surveyors are able to get away with so many new commercial buildings being constructed that appear to me not to meet the requirements. You have the municipal building surveyors, on the one hand, saying, 'It is not my responsibility' and then the private surveyors saying, 'It is the responsibility of the municipal surveyors'. Then you have the Building Commission saying, 'Sorry, it is not our responsibility'. People are left with little recourse other than to come to this house and ask for assistance from the minister.

I have spoken to the minister today, and I have requested that he make very strong representation to the Building Commission to request that one of its surveyors accompanies me and one of the municipal surveyors on an examination of new commercial properties in Pascoe Vale.

I wrote to the Building Commission in December 2009 and got a fascinating response. Members would be interested in this: I was provided with advice that I should contact the municipal district in relation to making sure that there was compliance with accessibility provisions of the building regulations. It kindly sent me a form to fill in a complaint — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Port Fairy: sheepdog trials

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — The issue I raise is for the Minister for Regional and Rural Development. The action I seek is for the minister to meet with the organisers of the 2010 Supreme

Australian Championship for sheepdogs and trans-Tasman test and to provide at least \$50 000 to assist with the running of this significant international event.

The Supreme Australian Championship is an annual event held in rotation in various states across Australia. This is a major event, which attracts the very best sheepdogs from across Australia, will be held in Port Fairy from 5 to 10 October this year. Immediately after the Australian championship the top four Australian dogs will take on the best dogs from New Zealand in the annual trans-Tasman test. This international event will bring even more spectators and greater interest to Port Fairy in October.

The trans-Tasman test is an extremely popular and hotly contested competition. While Australia has won the last two tests, the current overall score stands at New Zealand with 13 and Australia with 11, so there will be very real interest in both events. It has been estimated these events will bring over \$1 million to south-western Victoria in accommodation and other tourism-related expenditure.

When the trans-Tasman test was previously in Australia in 2008 — it is held in Australia every second year — the Tasmanian government provided \$20 000 to assist with the marketing of the event. I am advised that the voluntary organising committee put forward a funding application to the Premier in December 2009 and that application was then referred to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development for consideration and action. Since then the organisers have tried five times to contact the minister's office seeking a response, but nothing has happened.

The action I am seeking from the minister is to meet with the organising committee and provide \$50 000 to help fund this major event for regional Victoria. The organising committee has done a fantastic job of promoting Victoria and Port Fairy as the site for the Australian sheepdog championship and for the absolutely fantastic international event known as the trans-Tasman test. The committee has raised substantial private sponsorship but needs government support to make this event a really terrific one for south-western Victoria, for Victoria and for Australia. I urge the minister to meet with the organising committee and to provide the funding that is needed.

Volunteers: government support

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Community Development. I ask the minister to take action to promote even more the

benefits of volunteering so that it is easier for Victorians to volunteer in their communities and for more Victorians of all ages to come forward to volunteer in the community. We are all aware of the wonderful work our local volunteers do in our communities, whether it be coaching the local footy team, working the canteen at the local primary school, cleaning up rubbish in public parks or working with a community organisation. Our volunteers are an integral part of our communities, and without them a lot of community activities and services would not be available.

The sorts of organisations I am thinking of are the Alamein neighbourhood and learning centre; the Alkira Centre in Box Hill; Amaroo neighbourhood house; ARAFEMI, which does so much for the mentally ill and their families; sports clubs like the Ashburton Bowls Club, the Ashy Redbacks footy club, the three soccer clubs in Ashburton and the Ashburton basketball club; Autism Victoria; Ashburton Support Services; the Ashburton Community Bank; the Ashburton Traders Association; schools in Ashburton, such as St Michael's, Ashburton Primary School and Solway primary; and churches in Ashburton with their many volunteers, such as Ashburton Baptist Church, Ashburton Uniting Church, St Michael's Ashburton and the Ashburton Presbyterian Church.

I have only dealt with some of the As! There is also the Ashwood Sports Club, which combines the Ashwood Cricket Club and the Ashwood footy club, as well as the Ashwood Basketball Club. There is also Ashwood Secondary College and the Ashwood School. There is the A-Muse theatre group and the Ashburton Theatre Project. All these organisations are served by wonderful volunteers.

I could go on to the Bs, because we have Bennettswood, Boroondara and Burwood. When we get to the Cs we have Camberwell. Let me tell members that there are lots of volunteers there.

But there are also a lot of people who want to help but who do not know how to go about it or who may have limited time to dedicate to being a volunteer. Many of us are unsure of what we can do to help. Some people need help in identifying the skills they can share or in being matched with an appropriate organisation.

I have noticed some recent television advertisements promoting volunteering. I understand they are part of this government's effort to encourage volunteering and make it easier for Victorians to find the volunteering opportunities that suit them best. I am very impressed with the advertisements. I think they go a significant

way towards highlighting the range of contributions most of us can make in our communities. However, I would like to see the government do a little bit more.

The action I seek from the minister today is a commitment to expand on this excellent work to ensure that our communities continue to flourish as a result of the hard work of our volunteers. I ask the minister to help get the message out there that anyone can volunteer and help out in our community and that we will all be so much the better for it. The organisations that will be the better for it will be organisations like the Burwood Traders Association, the *Burwood Bulletin*, the Box Hill Hospital Community Consultation Committee, the Box Hill Hawks Football Club, the Friends of Same, the Friends of Back Creek Association, the Emmaus St Leo's footy club and the Eastern Lions Soccer Club. I could go on and mention many, many organisations in our local community.

Preschools: Mildura electorate

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. The action I seek is extra funding assistance for small remote kinders in my electorate. The electorate of Mildura has many small kindergartens but it has four in particular that are struggling, at Nangiloc Colignan, Werrimull, Underbool and Murrayville. It seems the state government's focus at the moment is on increasing the number of kindergarten places in metropolitan and regional centres. Whilst this is necessary, it is equally important to keep open the kinders that we already have.

Under the current funding model it seems inevitable that universal access to 15 hours of kindergarten per week by 2013 will mean the closure of small kinders. Nangiloc and district kindergarten cluster is managed by the YMCA and currently offers an 8-hour program. It will be required to raise \$18 000 to make the change happen. In fact over the past five years the kinder has raised over \$56 000 from a local community of around 400 people, just to keep the kinder open. Fundraising at this level is not sustainable, and it is simply impossible for us to raise sufficient money for a 15-hour program.

The imminent closure of small rural kinders raises two issues. Firstly, the loss of kindergarten places in the bush puts more pressure on kinders in regional centres, and secondly, universal access does not seem to apply to country kids. Some children in the far north-west already travel 60 kilometres to attend the Millewa Preschool and a further 60 kilometres to the larger Red Cliffs Kindergarten. These children and their parents

should not be expected to travel 240 kilometres return, which is what will happen if the Millewa community finally succumbs under the fundraising burden and closes the kinder. In reality many country children will not be able to attend kindergarten and all that the current per capita funding will result in will be the closure of the four kinders. This is hardly promoting universal access.

For rural kinders that pay all the staffing costs and basic operating costs, fundraising should only be for the no-frills, non-essential equipment and landscaping. The 'I love kindergarten' package was released at a bad time for small remote kinders, just as the communities were realising how hard fundraising is in small communities devastated by years of drought. In Nangiloc's case the kinder is government-funded on a per capita basis, with parents of children attending kinder paying fees. Due to a one-year drop-off in numbers in 2011, they will be required to raise \$30 000. Many isolated parents now believe kinder is bad for their child because the fundraising pressure that families are under will leave a very bitter taste which will last throughout their children's education.

Gisborne Secondary College: bus safety

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — The matter I wish to raise is for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport. Gisborne Secondary College is located on Melton Road in Gisborne, and funding is being provided to improve the way the school bus currently leaves the schoolgrounds. The action I seek from the minister is to ensure that these works are completed in a timely manner for the commencement of school next year, and that all the parties involved work together to ensure the best outcome for this project.

I am very pleased that this government through the Department of Transport is funding works to the value of \$250 000 to make the entrance to the college safer. Currently buses turning right from the school grounds onto the main road are currently within very close proximity to a bend in the road, and this makes it difficult for drivers to see vehicles approaching on the left-hand side. Despite the reduced speed limit at the front of the school — down to 40 kilometres, thanks again to this government's initiative — this still presents a risk to drivers and their passengers.

The Department of Transport and VicRoads, which will manage this project, need to work together with the college to determine the best option for redesigning the entrance to ensure safer passage for all vehicles exiting the school grounds. The local school community is well placed to know how the entrance works and what

changes are needed to improve it. I understand a number of options could be considered, including the widening of the existing entrance or the creation of a second entrance. There is a large tract of land in front of the school with considerable stands of trees, which any design would need to take into account. The configuration of the car park and the bus parking area within the school grounds would also need to be considered.

All these options would need to be considered through discussion with the school, VicRoads and the Department of Transport. Gisborne Secondary College is a great school, and under this government it has had considerable work done over the past few years. Work has also been done to improve the safety of students by changing the way buses access the school grounds and the way they park. These changes mean that buses no longer have to reverse within the grounds, making it a much safer environment for students. This additional funding will again improve safety by providing for better management of the way vehicles leave the college grounds. I ask the minister to ensure that these works are carried out in a timely manner and that the design of these works is done in cooperation and consultation with the school community.

Clearways: Kew electorate

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — I have a matter I wish to raise for the Minister for Roads and Ports concerning the new clearway times that apply in most of the shopping centres in my electorate of Kew. The action I seek from the minister is to meet with local traders and residents in Kew who are profoundly distressed about the new clearway times, with a view to restoring the clearway times to what they were. Not only is the arbitrary decision by the Minister for Roads and Ports to extend clearway hours effectively in every single major shopping centre in my electorate unfair, but it took place without proper consultation.

The minister's own code of conduct suggests that consultation should take place first with local businesses and local communities, but there was very little consultation and no direct consultation with the minister in this regard. Accordingly, my request is that he undertake that consultation with local businesspeople and residents to understand the impact this particular extension of clearway times will have on the local community. The absurd rationale the minister has put out publicly in the local area is that tram passenger travelling times from Box Hill to Port Melbourne on route 109 would be able to be reduced by some 96 seconds in both directions.

The new clearway times will also make attending local businesses more difficult due to the local parking availability and will encourage extra parking in residential streets. A survey commissioned recently by Boroondara council and released last month demonstrates that the estimated economic impact of the extension of clearway times in the Kew area alone could be as much as \$700 000 annually. Traders estimate a loss of between 6 per cent and 20 per cent of their business in relation to those matters. These businesses are a vital part of the local community, not only for the creation of jobs and businesses but also for the importance of strip shopping in the local area.

In recent weeks there have been a number of protest meetings. I have attended two of those, most recently on Sunday. I am very grateful that the member for Brighton, representing the Leader of the Opposition, and David Davis, who is an upper house member for Southern Metropolitan Region, were able to attend that meeting and learn firsthand exactly the impact the extension of clearways will have on our businesses and the local community in the Kew area. As I said, the minister must now finally adopt his own code of conduct and meet with traders and residents to find out firsthand the impact of this extension.

Consumer affairs: washing machine energy ratings

Mr SCOTT (Preston) — The matter I raise tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs. It relates to improving the provision of information to consumers who are contemplating the purchase of a new washing machine. The action that I seek is that the minister ask his department to investigate the accuracy of the information provided to consumers regarding the energy used in washing machines and ensure that consumers are informed that it may be cheaper and more environment friendly for them to choose a washing machine that is capable of being filled with hot water from the tap rather than one that fills with cold water and heats it using electricity.

My electorate officer recently had occasion to buy a new washing machine. He was disconcerted to find that the majority of front-loading machines appear to be cold fill only. This means that when selecting a hot wash the water will be heated using electricity, rather than using, say, solar heating or gas. Not only is this more expensive, but heating with electricity generates more carbon dioxide than other methods. On checking the energy rating website www.energyrating.gov.au, my office found that over 201 top-loading washing machines were listed and all have hot fill, but of the 223

front-loaders, only 86 made provision for filling with hot water from the tap.

Many people are now choosing to buy front-loading washing machines because they use less water and less power than top-loaders. Given that about two-thirds of the energy used for a hot wash is accounted for by the heating of the water, people may not realise that by choosing a cold-fill machine they may be increasing both their costs and the amount of greenhouse gas released into the atmosphere. Consumers should be able to understand the true nature of the product that they are purchasing. I urge the minister to ensure that consumers are well informed regarding this issue.

Responses

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Community Development) — I thank the member for Burwood for his ongoing enthusiasm for volunteering. I know he is very passionate about the contributions made by volunteers, especially those in his electorate. I certainly note the fine list of organisations in his electorate that he shared with the house. They are but a small sample of the terrific community organisations that do such invaluable work in Burwood. As the member for Burwood knows, a diverse and inclusive volunteer culture is a common feature of strong communities. For this reason the Brumby Labor government has worked hard to ensure that Victoria will have a vibrant and active volunteer culture long into the future.

The member for Burwood asked me to expand on the support that this government has already given to volunteers. He noted in particular the I Can Do That television and print media advertising campaign that was launched a few weeks ago by the Premier and me. This campaign forms a part of the Brumby government's \$9.3 million volunteering strategy, which aims to address some of the challenges being faced by many volunteer-based organisations. For example, we know that people are increasingly time poor and are not becoming involved in community organisations in the same way as previous generations. We know that people want to volunteer and make a difference but cannot always easily find suitable opportunities. We also know that as our population ages there will be an increased demand on many of the services currently provided by volunteers. For these reasons it is very important that we help volunteer-based organisations adapt to the changing volunteering environment and find new and innovative ways to be able to seek out and retain new volunteers.

The ad campaign is only one component of our plan to ensure that volunteering in Victoria continues to thrive.

Another major component of the strategy is the volunteering website www.volunteer.vic.gov.au. Phase 1 of the site is currently up and running. It provides information to volunteer-based organisations on grants and funding, government assistance and training information. The site also provides information for volunteers about finding volunteering opportunities, background checks and training requirements. I am delighted to say that since the website was launched on 9 May it has been peaking at about 1000 hits a day, with 60 per cent of these coming straight from people typing in the uniform resource locator they have seen in the advertising campaign, so it is certainly working.

Phase 2 of the website will be active from late September and will include a volunteer matching service, where volunteers can fill in their details and be matched to an organisation or opportunity that best suits them. It will be an interactive website. Similarly, organisations can use the service to find suitable volunteers for their activities. This service will make it a lot easier for people to find opportunities that both interest them and best match their skill set. To coincide with the addition of the matching service, the ads will be rerun in September, urging people to make use of the website and get involved in volunteering opportunities that suit their lifestyle.

I can assure the member for Burwood that the Brumby government's volunteering strategy will also provide targeted grants to local community groups and local government to help them attract and retain volunteers. The emphasis of these grants will be on helping organisations to build their capacity to provide effective training and management. As the member will see, a lot of exciting and very practical things will be happening in the time ahead, all designed to support Victoria's volunteers — and of course the volunteers in the good electorate of Burwood — and to get more people involved. I urge all community organisations and individuals interested in volunteering to visit the volunteering website because it is truly a valuable resource.

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — I will ensure that the remaining nine matters are raised with the relevant ministers for action and response to members.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 10.34 p.m.

