

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 9 June 2010

(Extract from book 8)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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Professor DAVID de KRETZER, AC

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
Minister for Housing, Minister for Local Government and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs	The Hon. R. W. Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary	Mr A. G. Lupton, MP

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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Andrews, Mr Daniel Michael	Mulgrave	ALP	Lindell, Ms Jennifer Margaret	Carrum	ALP
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Batchelor, Mr Peter John	Thomastown	ALP	Maddigan, Mrs Judith Marilyn	Essendon	ALP
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Cameron, Mr Robert Graham	Bendigo West	ALP	Napthine, Dr Denis Vincent	South-West Coast	LP
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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Delahunty, Mr Hugh Francis	Lowan	Nats	Pallas, Mr Timothy Hugh	Tarneit	ALP
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Duncan, Ms Joanne Therese	Macedon	ALP	Pike, Ms Bronwyn Jane	Melbourne	ALP
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
Holding, Mr Timothy James	Lyndhurst	ALP	Thomson, Ms Marsha Rose	Footscray	ALP
Howard, Mr Geoffrey Kemp	Ballarat East	ALP	Thwaites, Mr Johnstone William ⁸	Albert Park	ALP
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, 9 June 2010

The SPEAKER (Hon. Jenny Lindell) took the chair at 9.34 a.m. and read the prayer.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of motion: removal

The SPEAKER — Order! I advise the house that under standing order 144 notices of motion 46, 47, 109 to 113, 148 to 155 and 195 to 198 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:

Graham Street, Wonthaggi: traffic management

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

Graham Street, Wonthaggi, is a main street and is used by drivers to access roads to Melbourne, Inverloch, Cape Paterson and South Dudley, and for people to visit shops. Including regular traffic, many heavy vehicles access Graham Street and this is creating safety issues for pedestrians trying to cross the road, and also for vehicles reversing out of car parks. It has been observed that the construction of the desalination plant at Wonthaggi and the increasing number of tourists and shoppers to the Bass Coast region have significantly increased the flow of vehicular traffic along Graham Street.

We, the undersigned concerned citizens of Victoria, ask the Victorian Parliament and the Minister for Roads and Ports to support our petition and act immediately to install a suitable pedestrian crossing at Graham Street, Wonthaggi, and to consider allocating an alternative route for heavy vehicles.

By Mr K. SMITH (Bass) (41 signatures).

Rail: Manor Lakes

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the Manor Lakes Residents Association, residents and users of Wyndham Vale in the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the implications for the local community should the section of the regional rail link that runs through the centre of Manor Lakes be constructed at surface ground level, resulting in a traffic overpass being installed along Manor Lakes Boulevard.

The local community is severely concerned about the detrimental effect this will have on the developing community which lies in the centre of what is currently

Australia's largest growth area. It would result in the community being divided by an unsightly train line and overpass; a local school (with expected enrolments greater than 600 in 2014) would lose their sporting ground through acquisition of their land to build the overpass; access to Manor Lakes College and Our Lady of the Southern Cross Catholic Primary School, with an expected combined total of more than 3000 students in 2014, will be significantly restricted due to road closures forced by positioning of the overpass. The social and economic implications of a decision to put the rail line at surface ground level would be irreversible.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria ensure that the section of regional rail link that passes through Manor Lakes is constructed in a full ground cutting, as detailed in the regional rail link engineering design published by the Victorian government in 2009.

By Mr EREN (Lara) (4568 signatures).

Rail: Mildura line

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house 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) (28 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 rollout 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 NORTHE (Morwell) (80 signatures).

Tabled.

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Bass be considered next day on motion of Mr K. SMITH (Bass).

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

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

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Budget estimates 2010–11 (part 2)

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) presented report, together with appendices and transcripts of evidence.

Tabled.

Ordered to be printed.

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General:

Administration of the Victorian Certificate of Education — Ordered to be printed

Hazardous Waste Management — Ordered to be printed

Irrigation Efficiency Programs — Ordered to be printed

Personal Safety and Security on the Metropolitan Train System — Ordered to be printed

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 — Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 26 (*Gazette G22, 3 June 2010*)

Planning and Environment Act 1987 — Urban Growth Boundary — Victoria Planning Provision Amendment VC67, explanatory documents and maps

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Chattel Securities Act 1987 — SR 36

Road Safety Act 1986 — SR 35

Transfer of Land Act 1958 — SR 34

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Ministers' exception certificates in relation to Statutory Rules 34, 35, 36.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Communities in Control: conference

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Community Development) — I rise to congratulate the Our Community organisation for hosting a fantastic Communities in Control conference last week. The conference has been held annually since 2003, bringing together up to 1500 community sector workers, volunteers and supporters. The purpose of the conference is to provide opportunities for community sector workers to network and to develop skills and strategic capability for the sector as a whole.

I am very proud of what community organisations in Victoria have achieved, and I am aware of the value in bringing together a large and diverse group of community organisations to share innovative ideas and ensure that the sector remains progressive and viable.

Over the last six years, through A Fairer Victoria, this Labor government has invested more than \$6 billion in programs designed to reduce disadvantage in Victoria. The community sector has been instrumental in making sure our investment has paid off, and it certainly has paid off. In Victoria there are now more young people finishing school, more young adults in full-time study or work, more young children having health assessments, more help for people experiencing homelessness and more people who feel that they have an opportunity to have a say in their community.

I think it is fair to say these achievements have only been possible because of the partnership between this government and the community sector. For this reason I want to encourage the community sector to continue sharing ideas through forums like the Communities in Control conference and to continue its productive partnership with government so we can continue to achieve strong results for all Victorians.

Schools: closures and mergers

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — Buried deep in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's website you can find this government's list of schools it has closed or merged over the 11 years it has been in power: 42 schools have now been closed and a massive number — 144 — have been merged.

Incredibly, 45 schools have been merged since the last school year — an almost 50 per cent increase in the entire number of mergers over the past 10 years.

Labor governments have got form on this issue. The previous Labor government closed 123 schools including, to its eternal shame, Victoria's technical schools. This government does not care that children's education is suffering as it continues to close or merge schools after a sham process of community consultation. According to principals and parents, schools are either bribed or bullied into mergers. They are bribed with promises of capital funding for the new merged entity or bullied with threats that if they do not merge, they should not expect to receive any capital funding in the future. This often forces school councils into making decisions they should not have to make.

Another sign that the Brumby government is no longer interested in education is that the Minister for Education could only find enough material to speak for 3 minutes and 53 seconds in her speech in response to the budget. Incredibly, and tellingly, she then spent more time answering a Dorothy Dix question in question time the same day — sprinkled with her usual abuse of the opposition. I think the minister had her mind on her latest, and perhaps last, overseas trip the next day.

State Emergency Service: Wyndham unit

Mr PALLAS (Minister for Roads and Ports) — It was with great pleasure that I recently handed over the keys to a \$210 000 emergency response vehicle to the Wyndham Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) unit. The unit's new medium rescue truck will be used mainly during floods and storms, and replaces an older vehicle. This new vehicle seats five and is much better suited to assisting at emergencies in a growth corridor with housing estates, as it is smaller and has better manoeuvrability. Wyndham VICSES has about 35 active members who do a great job assisting the community during emergencies, responding to around 300 calls for assistance per annum.

The Brumby Labor government is committed to ensuring that VICSES volunteers have the resources they need, with nearly \$11.6 million in funding in the 2010–11 state budget allocated to the purchase of additional rescue vehicles, road accident kits and pagers. The Brumby Labor government is committed to ensuring that VICSES volunteers are not only capable of pursuing their important work but are provided with adequate tools to enable them do so.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Cr Heather Marcus, mayor of Wyndham; Ray Jasper, central region manager; Laurie Russell, Wyndham unit controller; and the Wyndham VICSES unit volunteers for their hard work, commitment and dedication to making Victoria a better and safer place.

Benalla electorate: health services

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — Last week I joined local residents at the opening of the Tristar Medical Group's upgraded general practitioner premises at Eildon. Together we welcomed new general practitioners Remi and Kenny Kehinde and their two lovely young boys, four-year-old Enoch and one-year-old Isaac. The Tristar group's practice fills a void created in Eildon by the departure of the previous GP. The practice will provide much welcomed bulk-billing services. Remi and Kenny hail from Nigeria, but they have already settled in well at Eildon and nearby Alexandra, where they live.

It has taken a lot of effort on the part of many people in the community of Eildon to make all this possible. I am sure the whole community will appreciate their efforts. Other communities in the Benalla electorate continue to battle for adequate medical services. In the King Valley, the community of Whitfield is still battling red tape to ensure continuation of its one-day-per-week medical service. At Moyhu, GP services have not returned since the closure of the GP practice in December 2009. At Euroa, we have the situation where Euroa Health continues to run at an operating loss, a matter which has been drawn to the attention of the Minister for Health. The community of Euroa and the Strathbogie shire as a whole are looking for government support for the development of a coordinated community service involving Violet Town, Nagambie and Euroa health services and aged-care facilities.

Soccer: Matildas

Ms BARKER (Oakleigh) — Congratulations to the Australian national women's football team or, as we know them, the Matildas, for their win at the AFC Women's Asian Cup in Chengdu, China, on Sunday, 30 May. On their second attempt to win Asia's biggest football prize the Matildas defied a rain-soaked and humid Chengdu night and a rapidly deteriorating pitch to become the first Australian team to win the Asian Cup. The Matildas had a tough encounter in the final against DPR (Democratic People's Republic) Korea, with Samantha Kerr putting the team in front in the first half with a great goal. Samantha is the youngest member of the team, and at only 16 years of age she

showed remarkable confidence and poise in scoring that goal.

Unfortunately DPR Korea drew level with a goal in the second half, and at the end of full and extra time the result was decided on penalties, with the final result 5 to 4 in favour of the Matildas. I congratulate the Matildas captain and goalkeeper, Melissa Barbieri, the only Victorian in the team. Melissa is an absolute credit to the sport, and watching the game I could see her absolute joy in winning the AFC Women's Asian Cup and hear her pride in the team that has not only won this prestigious cup but has also qualified for the FIFA Women's World Cup 2011 in Germany.

Congratulations also go to head coach, Tom Sermanni, his assistants and all members of the 23-player squad which travelled to Chengdu to compete. Women's football is already one of the fastest growing sports among young female athletes in Australia, and this outstanding achievement by the Matildas can only inspire more young women to get involved in women's football. While it may be a little way off yet, I wish the Matildas all the best in their preparation for the FIFA women's world cup and every success in Germany next year. Well done to this great group of young women.

Gaming: totalisator agencies

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — Recently I met with a representative from my local TAB agency in Templestowe. I have also spoken to a number of local residents who have advised me that this government is treating these agencies with contempt. I now seek an assurance from the state government that these locally based agencies will be part of the future — post-2012 — wagering operations in Victoria, irrespective of who is awarded the next licence.

Local agents, who are also local employers and small business operators, are concerned about the Victorian government's secret agenda. Tabcorp currently holds the offcourse totalisator wagering licence in Victoria. As members will be aware, this licence expires in 2012 and the state government is currently undertaking a process to select the offcourse totalisator wagering licence operator post-2012. My local TAB agent and staff are uncertain about their future in this process. This uncertainty is placing almost 100 small businesses and 500 jobs at risk across Victoria. I call upon this uncaring Labor government to stand up for local businesses that employ local residents and provide certainty and job security.

Crime: city of Manningham

Mr KOTSIRAS — I also condemn this lazy government for misleading city of Manningham residents. Assaults reported last year in Manningham were up to 21.9 per cent higher than the number of assaults recorded in the official crime statistics. In Manningham there were 380 assaults reported per 100 000 people in 2009 compared with the official Victoria Police assault rate of 260.9. The Premier has ignored crime in Manningham and has hidden its true extent in order to deceive Manningham residents about record rising violence.

Seymour: neighbourhood renewal project

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — I rise to congratulate the dedicated members of the residents action group from the Seymour neighbourhood renewal project. Seymour neighbourhood renewal has now been operating for eight years, and during this time it has made a significant difference to the lives of the people who live in the area, which has a large number of Office of Housing properties.

The residents action group members need to take credit for the success of the Seymour neighbourhood renewal. They have been well supported by the government departments and agencies, but their preparedness to spend countless volunteer hours providing services to local community members is outstanding. Programs such as the homework group, the Totally Out There Youth group, Vocal Nosh, a variety of activities that involve residents in positive activities, family outings to places like the zoo, fishing trips and much more have provided residents of all ages with the opportunity to be involved, meet new friends, develop new skills and improve their quality of life. For many residents these opportunities were not there before.

I look forward to continuing to work with these dedicated volunteers as they move into the next phase of their work through the mainstreaming process. Neighbourhood renewal has highlighted the benefits of local residents, government departments and agencies, and not-for-profit organisations working together, and there is now evidence of greater numbers of people participating in training and work.

Improvements in health and wellbeing are also evident. A key indicator of the success of neighbourhood renewal and other programs like The Seymour We Want is the most recent Jesuit Social Services report, which shows the Seymour postcode has gone from being the 10th most disadvantaged in Victoria to around the 110th.

Crime: defensive homicide

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — On 19 May a sentence was handed down in the tragic case of Jade Bownds, who died after being stabbed four times in the back with a fishing knife by Luke Middendorp. Middendorp was sentenced to 12 years jail with a minimum of 8 years after being acquitted of murder but convicted of defensive homicide.

The Attorney-General introduced the defensive homicide law in 2005. It is supposed to apply where a person believes their actions are in self-defence but without reasonable grounds. Without the 2005 changes the person would be guilty of murder, whereas if the person believed on reasonable grounds that they were acting in self-defence, they would not be guilty of any offence.

It is clear the defensive homicide law is not working as it should. It seems bizarre that someone like Middendorp could escape conviction for murder after inflicting such repeated injuries on a victim barely half his size, and that someone like Gordon Spark can plead guilty to defensive homicide after killing his grandfather with a baseball bat, dismembering him with an axe and pocketing \$8000 in cash.

The law urgently needs to be reviewed, not by Department of Justice (DOJ) public servants but by a practitioner experienced in the practical operation of the criminal law, someone who can examine exactly what has happened in cases to date and work out if the problems lie with the drafting of the law, how the cases are being conducted, or the directions to juries.

It is also concerning that the Attorney-General claimed before the PAEC (Public Accounts and Estimates Committee) that if defensive homicide did not exist, people could raise self-defence successfully and get off scot-free, when the Attorney-General either knew or ought to have known that that was untrue. He also failed to disclose the DOJ review to PAEC despite subsequently telling the *Sunday Age*, as reported on 30 May, that the review had started the previous month.

Emergency services: shire of Hepburn

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — I was pleased to join the Minister for Police and Emergency Services recently in Daylesford for the opening of the new ambulance and State Emergency Service stations. At the opening of the \$850 000 SES facility built to meet the needs of the recently established Hepburn shire Victoria SES unit, David Wellings, the SES unit controller, and his 29 active volunteers expressed their

delight with the new facilities, which will serve them and the Hepburn community well as they attend callouts.

Likewise, Barry Nicholls and Wayne Dawkins, the two paramedics at Daylesford, and the four community ambulance officers were very proud of their new modern \$1 million facility, co-located with the SES station on the Midland Highway site. The new ambulance station will allow for the Daylesford ambulance service to grow over coming years so that it can continue to serve the community well into the future.

Police: Daylesford station

Mr HOWARD — I was also very pleased to go with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to visit the Daylesford police station to speak with Sergeant Andrew Guiney and Senior Constable Ian Wallace about the recent budget announcement of a new \$2 million police station which will also be built on the same site as the new ambulance and State Emergency Service stations, establishing a new emergency services precinct. The Brumby government is clearly delivering well for Daylesford and the Hepburn community's emergency services, as it is also doing for education, health, sport and recreation facilities both there and across my electorate.

Mitchell River: proposed dam

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — In the last member's statement I made in this place I congratulated an honourable member for Eastern Victoria Region, Phil Davis, on his efforts to bring some common sense to the Mitchell River dam debate. In what can only be described as a push poll, he has obviously convinced The Nationals of their folly with the irrational dam plans. For over a decade The Nationals have played politics and misled community leaders and farmers in the Mitchell and Lindenow valleys on their capacity to deliver a dam on the Mitchell River. The Nationals now want to shoot the messenger.

At a recent function in East Gippsland the vitriol and anger directed at Phil Davis by one local Nationals MP had to be seen to be believed. Now that The Nationals have accepted the position that I clearly articulated in 1999 as the best and only environmentally sustainable solution to essential water security for the Mitchell River irrigators they should apologise to the people they have misled for so long.

Over 1000 jobs and investment in this irrigation area have been held to ransom by The Nationals' continual

promises that they knew they had no capacity to deliver and did not. Now hopefully the irrigators and the community can come back to investing in the essential industry for the future of our region.

Blue Hills Rise, Cranbourne East: facilities

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — It was with pleasure that I was part of the official opening ceremony for The Club at Blue Hills Rise retirement village. The multi-award winning Blue Hills Rise consists of approximately 273 units and 16 apartments designed for independent living. Blue Hills Rise is situated on more than 50 acres in the Cranbourne East area of my electorate and includes modern facilities such as a country club, a cafe and restaurant, a swimming pool and indoor and outdoor activity areas. It is more like a holiday resort than a retirement village.

Cranbourne: town centre access

Mr PERERA — It was also with pleasure that I represented the Minister for Roads and Ports recently in officially launching the Linking Cranbourne Town Centre to the Community project. Highlights of the project include pedestrian-operated traffic signals on South Gippsland Highway at the Cranbourne rail station; a pedestrian refuge and pedestrian crossings at Station and Arundel streets; an improved hard-standing area, shelter and bicycle rails at the regional bus interchange on Lyall Street; a dedicated bicycle path along the north side of Lyall Street; and a shared path along the south side of New Holland Drive linking to an existing shared path on Berwick-Cranbourne Road. This \$582 750 project was jointly funded by the Brumby Labor government's TravelSmart and Local Area Access program grants and the City of Casey.

Liquor licensing: fees

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) — Following extensive lobbying from the coalition on behalf of Victorian businesses and community clubs and organisations, the Brumby government has finally conceded that its risk-based liquor licence fee system is flawed. In a media release of Monday this week the Minister for Consumer Affairs stated that from 2011, bed and breakfasts, florists and gift-maker businesses will no longer have to pay liquor licence renewal fees.

Coalition members of this house have raised countless examples of small businesses and community organisations that have been caught up in the Brumby government's so-called risk-based liquor laws when it was patently clear that many businesses and community

clubs caused absolutely no risk in terms of alcohol-fuelled violence.

I have previously made representations on behalf of Tiffany's Florist and Gift Shoppe based in Traralgon, which on the odd occasion has provided a bottle of champagne to supplement a bouquet on a wedding day. For the privilege it suffered a 475 per cent increase in its liquor licence fees. Despite the minister's backflip on Monday, there are still many other non-risk-based businesses and clubs scratching their heads. For example, the Traralgon Croquet Club has seen its BYO licence fees more than double, while the Yinnar Art Resource Collective, which is an art gallery, has experienced a 326 per cent increase in fees under this government's risk-based liquor laws. They are hardly troublemaking venues, one would have thought.

One hopes that on further reflection the minister will ensure that the likes of the Traralgon Croquet Club and the Yinnar ARC are not further punished by his ill-conceived liquor licence laws.

Mordialloc electorate: Pierre de Coubertin sport awards

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — I would like to congratulate the outstanding recipients in my local area of the 2010 Pierre de Coubertin awards. These awards are a joint initiative of the Victorian Olympic Council and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

The awards have taken place on an annual basis since 1998. They were initiated to recognise student sporting achievements and student endeavours which are consistent with the aims of the Olympic movement — sportsmanship, teamwork, fair play and initiative. The awards are named after the founder of the International Olympic Committee, considered the father of the modern Olympic Games.

Every year all secondary schools across Victoria, including non-government schools, are invited to nominate just one recipient from years 10, 11 or 12 to receive the award. Each nominee must participate actively in the school's physical education program with a consistently positive attitude and must have represented the school in the sport and also submitted a literary endeavour. Congratulations to Maddie Payne from Cheltenham Secondary College, Melanie Killian from Mentone Girls Grammar School, Tegan Ward from Mentone Girls Secondary College, Marcel Walkington from Mentone Grammar, Gavin Scott from Parkdale Secondary College, and Courtney Price from Sandringham College. I would also like to quickly

acknowledge Trevor Stevens from Mentone Grammar and all his work in sport over many years of dedicated service as a teacher.

Roads: Kilsyth electorate

Mr HODGETT (Kilsyth) — When is the Minister for Roads and Ports going to commit some much-needed road funding to road safety projects in my electorate? Every time I write to the minister I receive the same standard response: that road projects will be considered in line with statewide priorities. That has been the same response for years.

I note contained in the interface councils' submission to the state budget were a number of very important road projects that many in my local community are waiting to see delivered. We know Melbourne will be home to 5 million people a decade earlier than previously anticipated. Through the policy document *Melbourne @ 5 Million* the state government has outlined the implications of this growth for Melbourne's future settlement pattern.

These population projections and growth at current rates will see interface areas like Yarra Ranges face greater challenges in the future. One of these challenges is the road network and traffic congestion. Therefore I urge the state government to focus on the adequate and timely development of community infrastructure including public transport links and adequate road infrastructure.

In relation to road-based transportation we continue to see increased congestion in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, and we urgently need investment in our outer suburban roads. The 2009 interface arterial-city shaping roads list outlines the following projects for priority construction: Liverpool Road to Mount Dandenong Road on Canterbury Road, Montrose — the construction of a third lane on both carriageways; Brice Avenue and Cardigan Road on Hull Road, Mooroolbark — intersection signals at an estimated cost of \$1 million; the Swansea Road intersection on Mount Dandenong Road, Montrose — traffic lights with or in place of the existing roundabout at an estimated \$3 million; the Cambridge Road intersection with Swansea Road, Lilydale — installation of traffic signals at \$1 million.

This priority list has been presented to Minister Pallas. I call on the minister to invest in the arterial roads to manage the increased congestion in our local suburban areas.

Youth: night driving curfew

Mr HODGETT — On another matter, young drivers in my community are disturbed that the government has been considering a night curfew for young drivers.

Ben Eccles

Mr CRUTCHFIELD (South Barwon) — I have great pleasure in informing the house of a wonderful sporting achievement by one of my young constituents. Torquay 15-year-old golfer Ben Eccles recently smashed the Torquay Sands golf course record with an astounding round of 63 on what is a tricky layout. The year 10 student who plays off a handicap of plus-3 clearly has a professional career in the making. He put himself in the position of having to add shots to his score rather than taking off shots like the average player or hack. Ben's score beat his previous best of 66, which is simply outstanding.

Ben also recently represented Victoria at last month's Australian schools championship — a fantastic achievement considering he has only played golf for six years. Such is Ben's passion for golf that despite the remarkable record score he showed up for work that afternoon at The Sands pro shop, cleaning carts and picking up range balls. I believe from media reports that Ben's father, Mark, is no slouch with the golf clubs either, yet Ben was able to outscore him at the tender age of 13.

Ben was recently quoted in the *Geelong Advertiser* as having said, 'It's good to get out of the house'. I applaud that, as I believe sport is a great way for people of all ages to keep themselves mentally and physically fit and healthy. I am sure keen golfers in this house will applaud Ben's achievements to date and would not be surprised to one day see him on the professional tour with the likes of Australian golfer Adam Scott or world champion Tiger Woods. I certainly congratulate Ben for his remarkable achievement and wish him the best of luck as he pursues his dream of a professional golf career.

Soccer: Matildas and Socceroos

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — I also congratulate the Matildas for their success at the AFC Women's Asian Cup. On behalf of the very strong soccer community in my electorate of South Barwon, the Surf Coast Soccer Club, Barwon Heads Soccer Club and Barwon Soccer Club, I wish the Socceroos the best of luck in the World Cup.

United Firefighters Union: printed material

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) — I wish to raise a matter of concern regarding the activities in my electorate of the United Firefighters Union. It has come to my attention, after I was approached by concerned residents, that the UFU has been distributing material in Rowville, attacking the competency and dedication of local CFA (Country Fire Authority) volunteers, many of whom risked their lives fighting fires right across the state on Black Saturday.

I, like many in my community, am appalled by this scurrilous attack on the hardworking CFA volunteers. I stand in this place, proud of the hard work of these dedicated men and women, and call upon the UFU to apologise to the many volunteers throughout Knox who have given freely of their time to protect our local community.

Hospitals: waiting lists

Mr WAKELING — Recently a constituent who contacted my office was deeply concerned for the welfare of her husband at the Angliss Hospital. After a short stay in the Angliss he was moved into transitional care, and then he was moved into a nursing home. During this period, his injured foot had become increasingly worse to the point that his specialist diagnosed him with gangrene in his foot, which was moving into his leg, and prescribed immediate surgery.

He waited for more than two more weeks at the Angliss Hospital, which had failed to move him to Box Hill Hospital for surgery, due apparently to its inability to find a bed. At this time the gentleman's wife became concerned for his life and contacted my office. On hearing her story I was naturally appalled and intervened immediately on her behalf, speaking to the relevant authorities at the Angliss. Within 3 hours her husband was seen by a surgeon. The same day he was moved to Box Hill Hospital, and the next morning he received the potentially life-saving surgery he was in need of.

This is an appalling situation. Injured Victorians should not have to contact their local members of Parliament to ensure that they receive necessary medical treatment.

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

National Seniors Australia: Frankston morning tea

Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) — On Friday, 28 May, National Seniors Australia's Frankston branch

held a very special event as part of the cancer council's Australia's Biggest Morning Tea. I was very pleased to be able to attend and take part. Members of the club did a tremendous job of collecting auction and raffle prizes from local businesses, which in turn generously contributed. The club raised \$3486 for cancer research — a huge effort from a fantastic group of local seniors.

It is important to acknowledge the extra special efforts of president Carol Pulis and her husband Joseph and also the committee and members, who provided so much. A highlight was auctioneer Roy and his trusty assistant Dick, who not only sold all the donated items but provided so much entertainment as well.

Frankston electorate: government funding

Dr HARKNESS — In recent weeks a number of very exciting announcements have been made in Frankston. The sports minister visited Frankston to announce \$100 000 from the Brumby Labor government's Strengthening the World Game program for the \$1 million redevelopment of the soccer pavilion at Baxter Park.

The minister also met with Frankston High School students and provided \$100 000 to be shared amongst nine local schools, allowing the promotion of young Victorians' involvement in volunteering and youth-led projects.

Frankston City Council has received \$109 800 of funding from the Victorian government as part of the taxi rank safety program to improve closed-circuit television, lighting, seating and shelter at the Davey Street taxi rank. I encourage the council to apply for funding for the Young Street taxi rank as well under round 2 of this program.

Police: confidential information

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) — There are very real problems today in Victoria Police. Today's revelations that Simon Overland has become embroiled in further scandal does nothing to restore the status of the office of chief commissioner and further adds weight to the coalition's call for a properly constituted and properly resourced independent, broadbased anticorruption commission.

Today's latest revelations come on the back of a sudden and unacceptable change in the conduct of the Victoria Police FOI unit, which has succumbed to pressure from the Brumby Labor government to circumvent coalition attempts to find out exactly what is going on because it might be embarrassing to Labor. It is of grave concern

that Labor is being advised of and monitoring opposition FOI applications to any Victorian department.

Labor's influence on this supposed independent process is clearly part of a concerted strategy to frustrate applicants' attempts to uncover evidence that could be embarrassing to Labor in the lead-up to the election. Earlier this week there were further revelations that official police statistics did not even come close to correlating with 000 statistics.

Victoria deserves better than the wholly incompetent approach to policing of the Premier and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Victoria deserves better than a government which puts politics before proper policing. As a former serving member of Victoria Police, I lament the further tarnishing of that great organisation's name and reputation. Victorians and hardworking front-line police deserve better than this when it comes to the management of the police force.

Crime: exploitation

Mr SCOTT (Preston) — Recently I received a phone call from a family member regarding the Cumbria murders that members may be aware of. It turns out distant relatives of mine — a husband and wife — were murdered during those tragic events. I raise this matter solely because it brought home the impact murder and other despicable crimes have on families. It also made me reflect upon the industry which has developed essentially around the pornography of crime and violence whereby true crime books, novels and television programs seek to profit from glamorising the crimes and despicable acts of drug dealers, murderers, serial killers and persons who commit acts of random violence. While we have laws which restrict the ability of persons to profit from their own crimes, an industry has developed which frankly glamorises terrible and shocking crimes, which have terrible impacts on families not only in this state but across the country and the world.

I think there is a moral obligation, if not a legal one, on some persons who profit from glorifying crime and despicable activities to at least consider donating some of the profits from their publications and programs to the victims of the crimes they seek to exploit for their own profit.

Melbourne Theatre Company: *Richard III*

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for the Arts) — Simon Phillips, the Melbourne Theatre Company

artistic director, and the MTC have once again succeeded, with the current compelling production of *Richard III*. *Richard III* is one of Shakespeare's great essays on power, and this production is completely at home in its West Wing setting in the corridors of power and amidst the rules of today's global political landscape.

Richard III is another example of the artistic excellence we have come to expect from Australia's oldest professional theatre company and one of our flagship performing arts companies. Simon Phillips, who is the director of *Richard III* and the artistic director of the MTC, is one of Melbourne's great creative talents who is sought after all around the world. As soon as *Richard III* opened Simon had to fly to New York to direct a workshop for a new musical, *An Officer and a Gentleman*. While he was there he launched the Toronto season of *Priscilla Queen of the Desert — The Musical*, which will open later this year, and he conducted auditions for the Broadway production of *Priscilla*, which will open in 2011. Before then he has two more MTC plays to direct, including a new work entitled *Song for Nobody*. He is also using the Broadway model for the first time: the play will have an out of town tryout at the newly refurbished Geelong Performing Arts Centre. This is a great opportunity for Geelong residents to be the first in the world to see Simon's newest production. I encourage them all to attend. It will be a great event not only for them but for the MTC.

Breast cancer: Rose Clinic screening service

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) — Congratulations to David Jones, the Brumby Labor government and St Vincent's Hospital on the establishment of the Rose Clinic breast screening service in Melbourne's CBD. Located on the lingerie and womenswear floor at DJs, the service will screen 7000 women a year. Free walk-in appointments are available. This is a great initiative for the better health of the women of Victoria. Thanks also to Megan Gale for her beautiful support.

Soccer: Matildas

Ms GRALEY — Go girls! Congratulations to the members of the Matildas soccer team on their outstanding victory in the AFC Women's Asian Cup. They are a great group of young women leading the way and showing that sport is a terrific way to not only keep fit but to experience great leadership and skills on the soccer field.

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

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Liberal-Nationals coalition: regional growth fund

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The Speaker has accepted a statement from the member for Gippsland South proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house congratulates the Victorian Liberal-Nationals coalition on its far-sighted policy commitment to establish a \$1 billion regional growth fund for the benefit of regional and rural Victoria.

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — It is with great pride that I raise this matter of public importance today, because this is an enormous step for rural and regional Victoria. We are very proud of what we have been able to announce, proud of the fact that we have developed the policy in company with the Liberal Party, proud of the fact that the Liberal-Nationals coalition will take this policy to the next election, proud of the fact that we have again led the field in relation to this important issue and proud of the fact that I was able to make this critically important announcement in the course of The Nationals' state conference at Wangaratta last weekend.

This is by any standards a magnificent initiative. I want to outline the primary features of it. This is a \$1 billion fund to be committed to over a period of eight years, which will be the first two terms of our government should it be — and hopefully it will be — that we win the election in November this year. The 48 councils which are defined in the Local Government Act as being rural and regional municipalities will be able to share in this fund. This includes the bigger ones, the smaller ones and those in the middle; all 48 of them will have access to this great fund.

The fund will be very flexible in its application. It will fill the gaps. How frustrating it has been for our people over the years to hear that after putting forward a good idea they have not been able to have funding supplied because apparently it did not fit within departmental guidelines. They are strict guidelines through which funds are often provided, and they run in silos. This new fund will be flexible, and it will fill the gaps. It will be enshrined in legislation. Its objectives will be appropriate to the cause. This will come about by creating jobs, improving career opportunities for

regional Victorians and creating increased investment in regional Victoria through leveraged funding — I emphasise leveraged funding. The fund will strengthen the economic base of our communities. It will provide better infrastructure facilities and services in partnerships with communities, private enterprise, local government and the commonwealth. In all of that there will be non-government organisations in all their various forms. They are the broad objectives of this fund.

Importantly, this fund will be driven from the ground up using the services of the existing five regional development committees throughout country Victoria. They do great work. We intend to build upon that work by empowering these committees.

These committees will not only be able to propose projects they believe are important for their areas, they will be able to drive investment into those projects through the use of this fund. I instance the committee we have in Gippsland. It comprises Richard Elkington, Angela Hutson, Alex Arbuthnot, Paul Buckley, Jennie Deane, Steve Kozlowski, Jon McNaught, Richard Rijs, Owen Trumper and Nicola Watts. All these people individually make terrific contributions to the various elements of their involvement with community and collectively they perform a very important role as a regional development committee. We intend to ensure that regional development committees continue their good work, but not only in the way they have been established at the moment. In addition to simply nominating ideas and promoting those ideas to government, these committees will be empowered to allocate the funding that is going to be used for the purposes of leveraging additional investment into the implementation of the respective projects.

This is a major shift in the way these committees have previously been able to work, and the other four committees in rural and regional Victoria will likewise be able to do this. The committees will have the use of 40 per cent of this \$1 billion fund over the eight years. Accordingly, allowing for the unders and overs, over that eight years each of the five committees will be able to employ in their own areas about \$10 million a year to back what they prioritise as being important to them for the purposes of the advancement of rural and regional Victoria. These will be local projects that are pertinent to their respective areas.

In addition to that, the chairs of the five committees will come to the table in company with the minister for the purposes of being able to deal with the remaining 60 per cent of the fund. This remaining 60 per cent will be dedicated to more statewide strategic issues, and the

chairs will have their place at the table, advising government directly as to how that funding would best be used. If I were appointed to this critical role, as minister I would have the task of signing off on all these projects, because of course that is a ministerial responsibility. Auditors-general require accountability from government, and in the incoming government there will be accountability. It will separate us from that lot over there at the moment, because they do not understand the meaning of the word. Accountability is something which escapes them.

We are going to be accountable for it, and we will make sure that Victorians get the very best value for their money. The projects will have to meet evaluation criteria. The projects will be based on the back of leveraging additional funding. We want this \$1 billion to become \$2 billion, to become \$3 billion. We want to use it as a catalyst for the purposes that will be able to add to the growth of country Victoria. It will supplement existing funding. It will be in addition to existing departmental funding. It will be added on top of the funding that is there now. It will not pay recurrent costs, it will not pay salaries and wages and it will not pay the full cost of projects. It will be used to leverage additional funding. It will not pay for retrospective commitments and retrospective projects. It will not pay down that debt of local government or any other enterprise. That is not what it is intended for. It will be for the regional cities all the way through to the small towns.

When I spoke last Saturday I emphasised the importance of population growth and the importance of that whole debate for our great state. We should not shy away from that debate. The growth of population in regional and rural Victoria is vital to our future. When you look at who we are and what we are, you see that so often it is the people who have come to us from other countries around the world who are at the core of our communities. We need to encourage those people to come to us and to live with us, and this fund will be an implementing factor in making sure that happens. It will, as I say, be a catalyst for growth. We are going to knock down the barriers to that growth. We are going to make sure that we have the best opportunity in regional and rural Victoria to make our way in the future.

In my own electorate there are numerous instances among a vast array of projects that would be appropriate for the services of this fund at either of its levels — through the local work of the committees or alternatively in the more strategic area. I know that as my colleagues speak this morning in support of this great initiative, they will give many examples of where

the fund can be used to help the future growth of regional and rural Victoria.

I am delighted that this announcement has been welcomed so warmly across the whole of the state, and understandably so. In my electorate, for example, the Long Jetty at Port Welshpool has been the subject of discussion over a protracted period of years. This fund would bring to fruition the aspirations of the people who want to see the jetty restored and in future used in different ways by the South Gippsland community.

This regional growth fund would address the issue of natural gas connections right through South Gippsland; it would extend the state's capacity to connect natural gas. It would enable a marina to be built at Loch Sport and would assist in the construction of a much-needed child-care facility at Yarram. The fund would not simply pay the recurrent costs or salaries of people who work in that facility but would be used to actually build it.

Through the fund we in opposition want to be able to leverage the additional money so that those types of projects can be brought to fruition. This fund will make possible the establishment of a vast array of projects to help young people access education through rural and regional Victoria and for Victorians generally to better access health care. As I have said, there are many projects across the state where the fund's money would be injected in a way that would further cement our place as the primary driver of the Victorian economy.

Rural and regional Victoria contributes to an extraordinary degree to the fortunes of the state; I make that point because it is critical to the operation of the fund, which is not only about the people who live outside Melbourne; it is not only about the rural and regional communities who live beyond the metropolitan fringe: this is about the state's interests as a whole, because if we could inject this sort of funding on top of the departmental funds that are already provided in their different forms, we could better enhance the capacity of our rural and regional areas to contribute to the state's fortunes.

As I have said, understandably the announcement has been strongly welcomed right throughout Victoria, and I have a bundle of press clippings here. I will not go through their approximately 25 pages, but I am sure my colleagues will do so.

The leading press report is interesting. I see the Minister for Regional and Rural Development is at the table — I will come back to her contribution to this in a

moment. The leading one is from Regional Cities Victoria; it says:

Regional Cities Victoria welcomes the ... coalition's commitment to regional Victoria ...

Just last week, with the member for South-West Coast in his role as shadow minister for regional cities, I spoke to Regional Cities Victoria. The people at that meeting were absolutely delighted with this announcement. We explored this policy carefully; they were thrilled with what it promises for them.

'Getting "fair share"' is the headline in an article in the *Shepparton News*. Another article, written on the Australian Associated Press 'NewsWire' site, is headed 'Coalition's fund puts pressure on Brumby'. The press articles from across Victoria are all there to be seen — they reflect how the people have welcomed this great initiative.

There are a few voices in the wilderness. The *Weekly Times* made a contribution, and no doubt some members will refer to that article this morning.

Our proposed fund will be the existing Regional Infrastructure Development Fund plus a lot more. This will be the Provincial Victoria Fund of this government — plus a lot more. Unlike this government and the Minister for Regional and Rural Development, who insists she is going to commit the whole of the fund by 30 June — when the government's own budget papers show \$56 million of the money remains uncommitted and has now gone into forward estimates — we would fully commit this fund.

Despite what the government's own papers show the minister continues to say she is going to commit the lot of it. The Provincial Victoria Fund, with its \$100 million, was allocated in 2005. As at December last year the government had spent \$48.2 million of it — less than half of it. We, the opposition in government, would commit the money; we would spend it. The fund would be flexible and would be driven from the ground up.

Amongst the voices in the wilderness has been the contribution by the Minister for Regional and Rural Development. I refer to the press release that she issued on 29 May. It must be said that it contains some of the most puerile, hysterical rubbish I have ever laid eyes on in my 18 years in this Parliament. Also, in my 20 years in business before I came to this place, I saw and heard some rubbish from Labor governments, but without a shadow of a doubt this takes the cake.

Such a press release demeans the minister, who sits at the table, and it demeans her ministerial role. It is an absolute disgrace. I wonder whether I could trouble the minister, amongst other things, to work out if the coalition's proposed fund is in fact 'a \$1 billion slush fund', as she says, or have The Nationals 'rolled over for their Liberal Party masters'? She cannot have it both ways. Is all this money going to be spent in safe seats of The Nationals on the one hand or are members of The Nationals rolling over for their Liberal Party masters? Of course it is neither.

This minister has absolutely and utterly lost the plot. She says we are playing 'footsies' with the Greens. That one hurts. That is as bad as me being accused of barracking for Collingwood. I am not going to wear that one, because that is just not the case. She says there is no detail in the policy we have announced. As a matter of fact I have with me today, in big print, the policy which this government announced in 1999 regarding the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. Even in big print it runs for half of a page — it is 282 words over 29 lines. That was the government's policy, yet it now accuses the coalition of not having enough detail in its policy.

The simple fact is that, just as it has done in so many instances, this government should embrace this concept. This government should support a fund that would have \$1 billion for regional and rural Victoria. In February last year the Premier told us that the long-awaited regional blueprint was coming — it was coming like Christmas, except Christmas came but the blueprint didn't! — and the simple fact is that in February this year the Premier said we would be seeing the blueprint, apparently by the end of June.

The government should do what it has done with so many other policies of the Liberal-Nationals coalition: just like police numbers and just like the independent, broadbased commission, the minister should embrace this idea, because it is a ripper!

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Regional and Rural Development) — I am very pleased to join this debate on the matter of public importance initiated by the member for Gippsland South, because it is a rare debate we are having today about regional and rural policy. You can imagine my shock, Deputy Speaker, when I heard there was going to be a debate initiated by the member and that I needed to come into the house to be able, finally, to hear about this far-sighted policy. As we have heard for the last 15 minutes, there is very little that is far-sighted about the policy being put forward by The Nationals.

We also have to remember that initially there were rumblings about this policy going way back to 27 February 2008, when the Leader of The Nationals put out a media release informing people that he had:

... written to all rural and regional councils ... as the new coalition begins the process of developing policies ...

He said 28 months ago that he was developing this policy. You would have thought after 28 months he would have had some detail; you would have thought after 28 months he would have had some substance. As we know and as the spokesperson for the Leader of The Nationals was quoted in the *Weekly Times* last week as having said:

... there was no policy document, but the press release captured 'the gist of it'.

That shows absolute disrespect for regional Victoria. There has been a three-page press release that captures the gist of it — and we know what is in the gist of it. We know they have copied a bit from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and a bit from the failed policies of The Nationals federally and its regional rorts program. We know they have copied our 2005 policy with our Provincial Victoria Growth Fund. We know that no detail sits behind this policy. It is not far-sighted at all, and we are not the only ones to have exposed his fraud. As the house has already heard mentioned a couple of times, the *Weekly Times* has exposed this fraud. It said:

How can The Nationals ... deliver such a slim piece of policy ...

It goes on to say:

It's as though Peter Ryan has forgotten the most important lesson of Victorian politics: 'Don't take the bush for granted'.

Regional Victoria must be treated with more respect. What we have seen released from The Nationals — and let us not forget their mates in the Liberal Party are sitting right on their shoulders, and I will come to them in a moment — shows a complete lack of respect for regional Victoria on the part of the Liberal-Nationals coalition.

As we have seen, the Leader of The Nationals has time to find and pull out the 1999 policy of the Labor Party on the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund — the fund they opposed when we introduced it to the Parliament, but he does not have the time to do his own policy detail work. It gets worse.

Not only is there no policy; they have not done the work on the costings either. This is 101 in developing policy. Obviously you have to have an idea, but you

have to be able to pay for it, and you have to be able to tell people clearly, openly and transparently how you can pay for it. They have not done work on the costings either.

Can I share with the house the comments of the Leader of The Nationals in what I thought was a very confused interview on ABC Gippsland radio, when he gave two very different answers about whether or not this fraud fund had been fully and properly costed. His first answer to a question about costings was:

We'll release all that detail a few nights before the election. All of our programs have to be costed, have to be audited, have to be available for public scrutiny, and I can assure you all of that will be done ...

He later went on to say:

We have looked at this, costed it very, very carefully, and what they want to do about this, that's up to them.

Is it or is it not costed? We know, because there is no detail, there is no policy document, it is not costed, and they are crowing about \$1 billion. It reminds us all of that Dr Evil moment, 'The billion dollars' that has been put on the table. Just as Dr Evil sends shivers down the spine, so is the Liberal-Nationals coalition sending shivers down the spines of regional Victorians because it cannot detail the policy behind it. It cannot detail the costings that sit behind it, and this reminds us of those bad old days of the 1990s when we saw cuts and closures right across regional communities. I will come to that in a moment.

The Leader of The Nationals has made a big deal about how flexible this fund is going to be and how it is going to deliver this, deliver that and support local communities. In their haste to put this three-page press release together and have something to crow about when they were in Wangaratta a couple of weeks ago, they have taken straight from the federal Nationals copybook — the John Anderson and De-Anne Kelly copybook — the former failed federal government's regional rorts program, which was known as the Regional Partnerships program and universally condemned as a shameful administration of public money.

It was universally condemned and exposed by the media and by the Australian National Audit Office for the way it pork-barrelled in The Nationals' electorates. We all remember that. We are seeing with this proposed fund that we have a new De-Anne Kelly. Come on down, the member for Rodney, the new De-Anne Kelly of the Victorian Parliament, because he is out there already crowing about how people in Rodney can line up for this treasure chest, line up to the

pork-barrel buffet that is put on by The Nationals! He is saying it is a perfect opportunity for a range of projects in Rodney.

We have already had a forecast by the Leader of The Nationals that the rest of The Nationals cheer squad is going to come out and list all the projects they want to have in their local electorates. We will be writing down every one of those. We will be listening very closely to every one of those projects they list. It will be more evidence that this is all just another repeat of what happened with the failed federal government policies.

We make these points because we well know that people are judged on their record. We have worked very hard over the last 10 years to invest in regional communities, and it is important that the only comparison we have for the Liberal-Nationals coalition is its time in office when the former Premier called regional Victoria the toenails of the state. The coalition privatised the state railway network, closed schools, closed hospitals and shut down country rail lines.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms ALLAN — They might get upset about this, but these are the facts, and the reason I make this point is that the very reason we introduced the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund was to have it sit on top of all the things we delivered in education, health and core services. It was in addition to all those activities, and that is why this \$611 million fund has to date funded 351 projects worth more than \$1.4 billion across regional Victoria. I can assure the house that we will see a very unhappy Leader of The Nationals on 30 June. His prediction will not come true. We will absolutely commit every single dollar of that \$611 million in funding.

As a result of this work, as a result of the reinvestment in services and also through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, we are getting results. Members on our side of the house and those of us who represent these regional communities well remember the double-digit unemployment of the 1990s. When you cut, close and wind back services the end result is always going to be double-digit unemployment. We have turned that around. Unemployment in regional Victoria today is at historically low levels. We are seeing more people, more jobs and more investment coming into regional Victoria. That is what you get when you sit down, do the hard work and have the policies and programs in place to support regional communities. We are seeing people move back to regional communities.

I want to speak briefly about investment in core public services. This is an important point, because the Leader of The Nationals has made some comments about this fund being used for core services. I want to put on the record that the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund sits in addition to those investments this government makes in education and health services. To date over our time in government we have invested nearly \$1 billion in capital spending on regional schools. That has seen around 430 regional and rural schools being rebuilt, upgraded or modernised right across the state, and we are doing more. This budget delivers funding for a further 39 regional schools to be funded and upgraded.

In the vital area of health infrastructure we have invested more than \$1.5 billion on 87 capital works projects across health services in regional Victoria, and the budget this year provides that mammoth injection of \$646 million for regional Victoria — more than double that provided in the seven years between 1992 and 1999 under those opposite. That is the contrast: a government that invests in services, in schools and in health and at the same time provides regional infrastructure versus the record of those opposite, which saw over 170 country schools, 6 country rail lines and 12 country hospitals closed, people leaving the regions in droves, jobs in decline and the result that former Premier Jeff Kennett labelled regional Victoria as nothing more than the toenails of the state. Our worry on this side of the house is that those opposite are lining up to do all this again. They have laid this bare on the table.

This regional growth fund is an incredibly weak piece of policy scribbled together on the back of a napkin, probably as the Leader of The Nationals was in the car — he was not driving of course — on the way up to Wangaratta, which is a nice drive of a couple of hours, depending on which part of the state you are coming from. It is not only a dismal and shamefully weak piece of policy, the details of which were scribbled out on the back of a napkin, but it is dangerous. It is a dangerous piece of policy because of the way the Leader of The Nationals has said this fund will be used to fund core services in education and health. Let me quote directly from the Leader of The Nationals. This is what he said in Wangaratta on Saturday, 29 May. Members of The Nationals were there, so I am sure they were cheering in the background when he said this:

The regional growth fund will be established to supplement — not replace — existing provision by government of core services, facilities and infrastructure ...

That is what he said, but what happened between that Saturday and the following Monday? Obviously there

had been a bit of chatter over the Sunday. I reckon Ted might have got on the phone. I think the big fella of the Liberal Party jumped on the phone, rang The Leader of The Nationals and said, 'Peter, what are you doing?'. Less than two days later, the Leader of The Nationals said in a press release stuck out on Monday morning:

The regional growth fund will promote a grassroots approach to funding upgrades in infrastructure, community facilities and core education and health services ...

The Leader of The Nationals let the cat out of the bag. To use another figure of speech, a leopard never changes its spots. This is what we saw in the 1990s, and the regional growth fund is nothing but a Trojan Horse that has been set up by the Liberal Party and The Nationals for their agenda to cut services across regional and rural Victoria.

Further evidence that the dead hand of the Liberal Party is sitting over the top of the policy is, as has been revealed, that the Leader of The Nationals will not be responsible for administering this fund. He also revealed this in his speech at The Nationals conference that Saturday with all his cheerleaders in the background. He said — —

Mr Delahunty interjected.

Ms ALLAN — You will want to listen to this. He said:

... this fund will be administered through me, as minister, in concert with Denis Naphine ... and Wendy Lovell ...

The numbers on that committee will be two from the Liberal Party and one from The Nationals. Let me be clear: when it comes to a battle between the Liberal Party and The Nationals, regional Victorians know who always wins, who always gets the upper hand. The Nationals members bow down to their Liberal Party masters. They are happy to sit in the top pocket of the Liberal Party leadership and get a few crumbs from the table. They will roll over and do whatever the Liberal Party wants them to do. This is further evidence that The Nationals are very much the junior coalition partner. The Leader of The Nationals is the deputy deputy leader of this coalition. He was got to by the Liberal Party and told that this fund has to be about cutting. It has to be used for core education and health services so that the Liberal Party can continue its agenda of cuts and closures in regional Victoria.

In the short time still available to me, I put on the record that regional Victorians will soon be left with a clear choice. The government will be releasing its blueprint for regional Victoria. We will be showing a clear policy, backed with detail, that will provide

regional Victorians with a clear choice. I thank the Leader of The Nationals for announcing his regional fraud fund, because it lays bare the opposition's plan for regional Victoria in the coming years. It plans to go back to the future — back to the 1990s — and cut vital core services. As we have seen from the *Weekly Times*, it completely takes the bush for granted. The Leader of The Nationals shows that he is planning his agenda to start chop, chop, chopping at services in regional Victoria. He wants to chop away at the limbs of regional Victoria.

Regional Victoria is a vibrant, dynamic, thriving place. This will all be put at risk with this program of chops, cuts and closures that will chip away at regional Victoria until all that is left is the toenails of the state, which is exactly what happened when the coalition was last in office.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — I rise with a great deal of pleasure to speak on this important matter of public importance proposed by the member for Gippsland South. I am proud to support this matter of public importance, which congratulates the Victorian Liberal-Nationals coalition on its far-sighted policy commitment to establish a \$1 billion regional growth fund for the benefit of regional and rural Victorians. I have just heard the minister flounder for 15 minutes because she did not have much to talk about. The reality is that she has been exposed by the facts. The facts are that this government promised to spend \$611 million over 10 years from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund but has spent only \$482 million; \$56 million is still in the forward estimates. The \$100 million Provincial Victoria Growth Fund was announced in 2005 but only \$48 million has been spent.

The government says we opposed the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. I looked at the record in relation to bills introduced in Spring 1999. The Regional Infrastructure Development Fund Bill was introduced by the then Treasurer, now the Premier, and its first reading was in November 1999. The bill was passed without amendment before going to the Legislative Council. The Council made amendments and the bill and the amendments came back to the Legislative Assembly. The amendments were not accepted by the Legislative Assembly, but the evidence is there that the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund was never opposed. The other fact we need to remember is that this Labor government is behaving true to form. The minister spoke about a leopard never changing its spots; this Labor government is true to form. It cannot manage money and cannot manage projects. Even the Auditor-General's reports that were

tabled today say the government has been telling porkies. The government is acting true to form.

The Auditor-General's reports highlight that the government cannot be trusted. Most Victorians say that you cannot trust it. Back in 2006 government members said they would not take water from north of the Great Dividing Range. They said they would not build a desalination plant. They said they would keep the Scoresby freeway as a freeway. They lied to the community of Victoria and they will be judged on 27 November this year.

Those on this side of the house heard Labor members say, 'They are ugly, ugly people in country Victoria — they are quasi-terrorists'. These are the words used by the minister, who said they were 'ugly, ugly people in country Victoria' and were 'quasi-terrorists'. This government has much to talk about but reality does not support it.

I was proud to be at Wangaratta with many of my Nationals colleagues and hundreds of delegates to witness the announcement of the \$1 billion regional growth fund. One of the motions put forward at that conference addressed strategies and policies for the regionalisation of Victoria. Delegates from right across Victoria are concerned that we are being forgotten.

The announcement by the member for Gippsland South has been welcomed by many people right across Victoria, and I will return to that shortly. The regional growth fund's \$1 billion will deliver funding over eight years for building and upgrading local services and, importantly, infrastructure as well as investing in local skills and industries to promote jobs. That is the thing that we need to have in country Victoria; we need to have jobs. By growing regional cities and rural communities we can take the pressure off Melbourne. The Minister for Housing, seated at the table, knows about Melbourne's growth — 110 000 people came to Melbourne last year; house prices have gone up 28 per cent, but that is economically and environmentally unsustainable for Victoria.

The regional growth fund would take the pressure off Melbourne; it would compensate for the fact that rural and regional Victoria contributes much to the Victorian economy. In fact, \$20 billion, through food production, together with \$3.5 billion from tourism, year after year, is contributed to the Victorian economy from rural and regional Victoria.

Rural and regional Victorians need this support. This \$1 billion will expand capacity, create new prosperity and, more importantly, create new jobs and a better

quality of life in rural and regional Victoria. Accordingly, this announcement was very welcome. The Leader of The Nationals spoke about regional cities, and Regional Cities Victoria welcomed the announcement. There are other examples reported in the media including, from Australian Associated Press, a report entitled 'Coalition funds put pressure on Brumby', which reads:

Victorian Farmers Federation president Andrew Broad said the Victorian government had paid 'lip-service' to boosting rural Victoria's production for a long time.

It reports Mr Broad as saying that it had not delivered. It goes on to say that the:

Municipal Association of Victoria president Bill MacArthur welcomed the proposed new fund, saying MAV estimated that there was an annual shortfall of \$133 million in government spending on infrastructure maintenance and renewal.

This theme is continued in other rural and regional newspapers including one report on 31 May 2010 in the *Ballarat News*, which reported that the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of The Nationals went to Ballarat and spoke to the community. It reported that:

Committee for Ballarat chief executive officer Doug Lloyd said potential priority projects included the Ballarat West Growth Zone, which included the Western Arterial Road Link and Ballarat West Employment Zone, and the Community Leadership Program.

...

Ballarat mayor Judy Verlin said ... 'We don't want to be a dormitory, we want to be a sustainable community. We have the tools, the policies and the processes in place to do that. We now need funding to be able to get on and deliver those objectives' ...

On 3 June 2010 the *Hamilton Spectator*, a great paper in my electorate, carried a headline that reads 'National Party promises big for rural areas'. The article says:

The National Party has promised a big spend for the south-west if it wins the election in November.

It goes on to highlight the many benefits arising from this announcement. Right across Victoria we have seen enormous support for this announcement.

As members would know, the fund would have two components: a community fund comprising 40 per cent and a strategic fund comprising 60 per cent. Under the community fund, regional development committees (RDCs) will have the opportunity to develop projects and submit them to the minister for approval. They will be about building and upgrading community infrastructure, developing local industry and business infrastructure, promoting new investment and,

importantly, job growth. RDCs would be responsible for developing priority local projects with individual communities and assisting with their identification, assessment and approval.

The other component of the fund is the strategic fund for projects of regional or statewide significance. There will be input from the five chairs of the current non-metropolitan regional development committees. The strategic fund covers a wide range of opportunities for country Victoria, for example in roads and transport.

I want to highlight a couple of projects that need funding: the Wimmera Regional Intermodal Freight Hub at Dooen in my electorate, regional airport upgrades in Hamilton and across the state, and, importantly, upgrades to strategic road networks and bridges. We have enormous growth in the timber industry in south-western Victoria but, unfortunately, roads — particularly roads for which the state is responsible — are not up to standard. There would be many opportunities for this fund to benefit rural and regional Victoria.

I now want to focus on the Grampians region, which has 11 councils. The regional development committee is chaired by Jo Bourke and includes representatives from Rupanyup, Bacchus Marsh, Daylesford, Ballarat, Ararat and Horsham. In relation to developments sought by these communities, Ballarat council is seeking airport infrastructure and development of the Ballarat aquatic centre, Moorabool Shire Council is seeking development of the Bacchus Marsh community learning centre and local redevelopment of the Western Highway, Golden Plains Shire Council is seeking development of planning projects, rural land use strategies, urban design frameworks and the Meredith-Lethbridge structural plan review.

The Shire of Northern Grampians and Yarriambiack Shire Council are seeking to develop projects, and the Rural City of Horsham is seeking to develop the Horsham North Urban Design Framework, the freight hub at Dooen and the Western Highway bypass and industrial land.

The Shire of Yarriambiack is a good example because it is seeking the opportunity to work with government, whether it be for greater community involvement, tourism, industrial estate development, alternative energy projects or, importantly, leadership development. Threats to Yarriambiack are highlighted here — drought, water restrictions, negativity and competition from other areas. They have a buy local campaign there, which is strongly supported by The

Nationals. The community is seeking to maximise business opportunities and develop residential housing.

The same thing applies in the Hindmarsh shire. The greatest impediment there is getting enough housing development to cater for the people who are coming into the area. West Wimmera Shire said in its council plan for 2009–19:

The Council's sustainability is dependent upon a well managed budget ...

and support from the state and federal governments. It goes on to say:

... we will continue to work hard to ensure we receive our share of these grants for the benefit of our communities.

Again there is widespread support. All 11 councils are supporting this \$1 billion regional growth fund.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — 'It's a ripper', said the Leader of The Nationals. It is a ripper all right, because this mob, The Nationals, are going to rip money out of country Victoria through this fraudulent fund that they want to set up — if they ever get to this side of the house. All that these frauds on the other side of the house do — The Nationals, the Vic Nats, who are rats — for country Victorians is rat on them. It is from a great height that they tip buckets on country Victorians, yet they come in here and cry crocodile tears. They come in here and announce a \$1 billion fund over eight years, \$25 million a year, that is going to be controlled not by The Nationals but by the Liberal Party, by their masters — like mini-me.

Who is going to control the mini-mes of the Victorian Parliament, the boys of The Nationals? The member for South-West Coast and a member for Northern Victoria in the Council, Wendy Lovell, who has no policy on housing but who has put out press release after press release in regard to public housing, criticising what we are doing but having not one idea whatsoever. Two beats one all the time: they are very basic figures. Two Liberals beat one of The Nationals all the time. Yet they come in here and say that this \$1 billion country fund, this rorting fund that they want to set up, is the best thing since sliced bread.

Let me tell you, Deputy Speaker, their record does not prove that. They closed 12 country hospitals in their dirty term of the seven long, dark years of the Kennett government. That government closed six rail lines, yet here The Nationals are saying, 'Aren't we good? We've got to be good boys and girls' — the mini-mes of the Victorian coalition — 'We are going to be investing \$1 billion'. They closed over 150 schools in country areas in the seven long, dark years of the Kennett

government. Yet they are saying this \$1 billion is about core services and providing the infrastructure for schools when all they did while in government was close them.

The Kennett government closed the six country rail lines: Bairnsdale, Mildura — you keep on going through them. It closed the one to Ararat which we had to reopen, as with Bairnsdale. The Nationals hate country Victoria. These people should have a proud legacy from the early part of the last century when they formed the government in Victoria under the leadership of the then Premier, Sir Albert Dunstan, putting in place infrastructure and supports for country Victorians. That legacy goes out the window in their quest, their desire to get into the plush leather seats of the white cars so that they can go roaming the country as they flog off schools and railway lines, as time and again they put down country Victorians.

They continue to do it. Who opposed the regional rail upgrade to Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong up through the Seymour corridor? The Nationals! Who opposed the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund that has been so successful in providing investments, jobs and infrastructure above and beyond the core provision by governments? It was The Nationals. Who are the people who continue to put down country Victoria time and again, who do not recognise the great things that happen in country Victoria? It is The Nationals. They are the toadies of the Liberals, the mini-mes of this Parliament, who repeatedly just grind down country Victorians. ‘What a ripper’, the Leader of The Nationals says. ‘What a rip-off’, I say.

What is their philosophy? As in the Kennett years, the philosophy of The Nationals is that regional and rural Victoria is the toenails of Victoria. It is sell-out after sell-out, and it is about not really putting in the hard work, because developing policy needs hard work. The Nationals have had nearly 11 years to develop policy, and what have they done? They have not developed policy; they have developed a press release on this fraudulent fund that they announced on 29 May, the fraudulent fund about which it was said in the *Weekly Times* on 2 June:

In contrast, the coalition fund’s details consisted of a three-page press release.

document, but the press release captured ‘the gist of it’.

They were not even telling the truth to the *Weekly Times*. They do not tell the truth to country Victorians. I went onto The Nationals website and had a look at the press release they had put out. It is not three pages. When I printed out the press release on The Nationals

website it was two pages. They could not even do the work to put together three pages of a press release; they could only put together two pages. The fraudulent fund itself will not assist country Victorians in any way whatsoever.

All The Nationals do is oppose. They continue to backflip, to flip-flop to their masters in the Liberal Party. What happened with the Mitchell River dam? The Leader of the Opposition went out there and announced that they were not going to go ahead with that proposal. He said they were going to slap The Nationals around, and they have withdrawn that one. That was announced by the Leader of the Opposition about a week ago.

This is the other beauty of a question: if The Nationals got into government would their priority be country Victoria? No, it would not. Metropolitan Melbourne is where they are going to put the police, not country Victoria, which they are supposed to be representing. These people sell out country Victoria at every opportunity they get. Time and again the Victorian Nationals continue to do that; they are supposed to represent country Victorians but they do not do that at all.

They oppose the Regional Development Infrastructure Fund (RIDF) that we established. I was here when they were on the other side of the house voting no to country Victoria, and we were here supporting the RIDF that has promoted employment and put in infrastructure. Even the member for Murray Valley says that the RIDF and the things this government is doing are great things for his electorate and he has never seen so much money going into his electorate as he has seen going in through this government — a Labor government that is here and governs for all Victorians.

To see that you only need look at the amount of money that we have put into country Victoria: over \$1 billion in schools and \$1.5 billion in health. As Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Ports I can report that \$3 billion has been provided for roads. We have completed 59 major country road projects at \$2 billion. We have 18 roads projects worth about \$1.9 billion.

This slush fund is just appalling. The Nationals have had 11 years to put together a policy. This two-pager from The Nationals, this press release — it is not even a policy — which people can see on their website, says:

Over the coming months we will be meeting with communities, local government, health and education associations, industry and business groups to discuss local priorities and how the fund could help grow their individual regions.

This is a press release. Why did The Nationals not talk to country Victorians beforehand? Why did they develop a policy in a vacuum without discussions, without talking to country Victorians? Because they knew they would be exposed. They know they are lazy and can only cobble together a two-page press release. They cannot develop policy. It is a ripper all right — ripping off country Victorians.

Mr BURGESS (Hastings) — It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Melton. In fact it is very interesting to listen to the government's selective memory of the history of politics in Victoria. Members of the government appear to have a memory that lasts a very short period of time, and they conveniently forget that this state was left on the verge of bankruptcy. That is a clear matter of history. This state was left on the verge of bankruptcy by those that sit opposite. The Kennett government had to tape things together and put in place strategies that would actually enable it to pay the bills this state had accumulated. But they certainly seem to have forgotten about all those things. This government has made a habit of ignoring regional Victoria and of failing to put serious dollars into serious problems.

The announcement by the Victorian Liberal-Nationals coalition of the establishment of a \$1 billion regional growth fund to stimulate regional growth in Victoria is recognition of the need for support for rural and regional Victoria. This policy will be a key driver in delivering real improvements to regional areas and real economic prosperity to this state. Not only has this government failed to invest in regional Victoria but it has also made active attempts to conceal the dismal results of poor policy. This is a government that has abandoned its Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and caused unacceptable delays to the delivery of a regional blueprint. It was originally due to be released in February 2009, but it is now set for release in June of this year.

By contrast the coalition's announcement of a \$1 billion fund aims to correct the city-centric policies of this Labor government. The fund will supplement the basic services, facilities and infrastructure. This plan will provide funding over eight years to deliver building and upgrades to services and infrastructure in local areas, as well as making key investments in skills and industries to increase jobs. The regional growth fund provides a clear approach to local community projects in need of funding through the regional development committees (RDCs). These will be enabling projects that will better local communities by improving infrastructure, facilities and services, strengthening a community's economic base, promoting job creation

and enabling career development for locals within regional areas.

The regional development committees will be able to identify gaps in services and infrastructure as well as delivering real solutions to unemployment within these townships. The funding split will see 40 per cent being directed to local projects and initiatives. These projects will be prioritised according to the community, with funding driven from the grassroots, by the community, with the guidance of the RDC. Sixty per cent of the funding will go towards large-scale, strategic infrastructure projects for regional areas. The RDCs will play a pivotal role in advising the minister on what the key priorities are for regional centres in relation to these projects. This model ensures that funding is allocated according to the priorities of the local community, and not those of any government.

Regional and rural Victoria has been faced with a state government that is out of touch and out of energy and that has been unable or unwilling to deliver for 11 years. It is time to end the disinterest of our state government. For regional Victoria to continually be the victim of underspending demonstrates complete mismanagement by the Brumby Labor government. Regional Victoria makes a vital contribution to this state, with more than \$20 billion in food production and \$3.4 billion in tourism each year. Regional centres remain a cornerstone of Victoria's economic future and development. For a state government to neglect the engine room of our economy is totally irresponsible. By continuing to ignore regional Victoria and by denying it the funding it needs and deserves, the Brumby government betrays Victoria as a whole.

The 2010–11 budget provides an example of the extent to which regional areas have been forgotten by this government, with the overall budget for the Department of Sustainability and Environment being slashed by 3 per cent and funding for the Department of Primary Industries being cut by 2.5 per cent. This Brumby government tactic is a very clear indication of its do-whatever-it-takes approach to retaining its marginal metropolitan seats in this year's state election, even if that means ignoring what would be best for Victoria.

The perfect example of Labor's approach of do and say whatever it takes to winning elections was the north–south pipeline. Labor made a promise before the 2006 state election that it would never bring water over the Divide. Then immediately the government was returned it started to build the north–south pipeline. The Brumby government has dramatically underestimated people from Victoria's regional areas if it thinks they have forgiven or forgotten such a betrayal.

The Victorian Liberal-Nationals coalition's announcement of a \$1 billion regional growth fund will ensure that rural and regional areas finally receive their fair share of funding and that their important position within our economy is recognised and secured. What is more, the coalition's strategy puts the critical funding decisions in the hands of those that know best in terms of what each area needs — and that is local people.

The Liberal-Nationals coalition's regional growth fund will improve the quality and accessibility of key services in regional Victoria. There is a general feeling throughout regional areas that they have been ignored by the state government and treated as less important than communities in the metropolitan area. Not only has regional Victoria been mistreated by the Brumby government, but the government has taken active steps to mislead and deceive communities about what it is really doing and to conceal its mismanagement. The government sought to hide the results of its failure to deliver on regional investment at the Rural and Regional Committee's parliamentary inquiry into the nature and extent of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria. The Brumby government did not provide the funding that the inquiry needed and then burdened the committee with another inquiry in order to deflect the resulting damning findings.

Rural and regional areas need the state government to deliver on key services, including health, transport and public housing. The provision of regional infrastructure is another area where the state government has tried to underhandedly conceal its lack of investment. Ministers have covered up disproportionately high road tolls on regional roads. They have then appeared before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in a blatant attempt to hide this government's disgraceful lack of funding.

If the government were completely transparent about its spending on roads, it would expose a damning result. The state government is failing to deliver key improvements for rural and regional roads. The Brumby government transport plan's Better Roads program will deliver only \$9 million for regional road projects next year. This is simply not nearly enough to fix the major backlog in regional road upgrades created by 11 years of Labor government neglect.

The government's attempts to avoid the exposure of its massive underspending in regional Victoria are also underlined by its refusal to implement the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's recommendation of separately documenting, in budget papers, details of project funding in regional Victoria. The pathetic excuse offered for this refusal was that it is too hard to

provide this information. This is not the leadership Victorians need, deserve and expect from this government. Victorians in regional areas expect their government to be formulating real solutions to the problems and challenges they face on a daily basis. The coalition's commitment will seek to ensure that this situation is corrected, and the \$1 billion regional development fund is a good step in that direction.

Regional centres will also benefit through key improvements made to their local infrastructure, including that of industry and roads. A key step in making sure that real benefits are delivered to regional communities is making sure that those communities are adequately consulted to ensure that any government money spent will make a real difference where it is needed. That is why the coalition will be meeting extensively with key community stakeholders, including local government, industry and business groups as well as health and educational associations, to determine what the local priorities are in a community and how funds can best be directed to make sure that the desired outcomes are achieved.

The five current non-metropolitan regional RDCs of Loddon Mallee, Grampians, Barwon South West, Hume and Gippsland will play the key role in identifying and providing input into the projects that will be established from the 40 per cent share of funding. Local communities will be strongly represented by the chairs of the five non-metropolitan RDCs, which will become high-level regional policy advisory groups. These are measures the coalition will implement to ensure that regional Victoria has a voice and that the interests of local communities are properly represented. These groups will be there to tell the government what their communities need, not the other way round, as is currently the case.

This policy advisory group will give advice and make recommendations to the state government. It will also inform the minister about the priorities for Victorian regional projects that are included in the 60 per cent split of the regional growth fund. Unlike the situation with the coalition's policy, funding from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund cannot be allocated to key community services such as health care and early childhood learning, nor does it enable training and development to assist with employment. Not only have there been massive delays in the allocation of funding, but the fund has not been subject to appropriate levels of public accountability.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — Order!
The member's time has expired.

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — It is impossible to speak positively in support of the notion put forward in this matter of public importance, which seeks to congratulate the Victorian Liberal-Nationals coalition on its recently announced regional policy, because this so-called policy is not all it is cracked up to be. When we compare it to the record of this government, the Brumby government, and before it the Bracks government, we see clearly that our government has committed strongly to supporting regional Victoria, through not just our Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) but also through our spending in health, education and so many other areas.

Even ahead of our coming to government in 1999 we had put forward the proposal for a regional infrastructure development fund. At that time the present leader and other members of The Nationals and the Liberal Party criticised it. They said it would not be delivered; it was no good; it was useless — whatever. What have we seen? Over the term of our government we have seen more than \$500 million delivered through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund to support more than 350 projects. Those projects have been worth not just \$500 million; they have leveraged nearly another \$1 billion, so there has been \$1.4 billion worth of investment in regional Victoria as a result of the Brumby and Bracks governments' Regional Infrastructure Development Fund.

Why did we say back in 1999 that we would introduce this? Because, as I well remember as a member representing the Ballarat area of regional Victoria, the regions had become Jeff Kennett's toenails. We cannot forget that, can we? We know how the money was ripped out and that the record of The Nationals MPs, including the Leader of The Nationals, who was there at the time, was to roll over belly up to the Liberal Party. They voted so many times to have schools shut and hospitals closed and privatised in regional Victoria. Regional Victoria was going backwards at a rate of knots under the previous government.

Former Premier Steve Bracks and current Premier John Brumby said, 'We want to turn around the belief that you just have to support Melbourne and somehow or other the regions might benefit by focusing on Melbourne', as Jeff Kennett clearly said in his toenails speech. The supposed policy that was announced last weekend, which is some sort of attempt to copy RIDF, has certainly thrown in a big number, but when you look at that big number you see that it will be delivered over eight years, and when you ask the Leader of The Nationals more about it you find that it includes core education and health spending. When you look at that you see that this so-called wonderful policy, which

seems to have the Leader of The Nationals all puffed up, is nothing but a soufflé that has gone flop. It has faded badly.

It was not well received in the media. It is interesting to note that sadly the Leader of the Liberal Party, the Leader of the Opposition, was not even there at the release of this so-called policy. It was just The Nationals trumpeting away about their soufflé that has since gone flop. The little bit of detail they have provided says, 'This is a policy, but you've just got to trust us. We've thrown out a figure there. We can talk up all these big projects across regional Victoria; we are not actually committing to them'. It is a bit like the movie *The Castle*, where people who went to court had to trust in the vibe of the constitution — it was all in the vibe of the constitution! We have to just trust in 'the vibe' of this so-called policy and believe it will suddenly do a whole lot of things for regional Victoria, which certainly did not happen when the Leader of The Nationals was last in government in this state.

I do not want to spend too much time being negative. I do not like being negative when I am on my feet speaking in this house. I want to be positive, so I will have to stop talking about the sad story of this so-called policy that the Liberal-Nationals coalition has put forward to try to trick or excite voters ahead of the next election. As I said, it is going down like a sad soufflé. Instead, to be positive, I will talk about what we, the Bracks and Brumby governments, have delivered across my region and what we will continue to do. I will focus on what we have delivered through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund in education, in health, in transport and in recreational projects in my part of regional Victoria.

For a start I will go to RIDF. Millions of dollars has been delivered in my region. Recently I went with the Premier and the Minister for Regional and Rural Development to the opening of the new IBM centre at the University of Ballarat Technology Park. This government contributed over \$5 million to the development of the centre. There are another 300 jobs in the technology park, and with the great support from our government through other RIDF grants, some 1400 people are now working daily on the new IT projects that are being developed out there — whether that be at IBM or at the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority centre that was further funded to enable the police communications to move in as well as ambulance communications over the coming year. Huge development has taken place and many jobs have been provided out at the technology park through Regional Infrastructure Development Fund support and other assistance our government has provided.

Recently \$3 million was provided to Sovereign Hill for the development of the Reinventing the Magic project, and the new Trapped exhibition has now opened, which will see more tourism. The strategic approach to support projects put up from our region will see tourists flowing into our region and will provide jobs.

We have also seen \$8 million provided for the redevelopment of the Hepburn Springs bathhouse, a tourist icon for the spa region of this state. It is great to see that completed. It is a great project which is underpinning tourism and employment opportunities in the spa region of this state.

Other projects include the \$3.8 million provided by our government for the upgrade of the Ballarat Mechanics Institute, a great building in Sturt Street, Ballarat. It is great to see that it will be upgraded and restored to its former glory through further support from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund.

Also CMI, a component manufacturer in Ballarat, was able to attract funding recently from our government. As a result of that total investment of \$6.15 million it is providing 75 new jobs in Ballarat and 50 jobs in Horsham, and it is securing the jobs of the 70 people already employed in Ballarat.

Great projects are happening. There is the goldfields super-pipe and the natural gas supply to Creswick. There is the allocation of \$5 million to the Australian centre for democracy, the Eureka Centre, with a further \$5 million allocated by the federal government, to see another great icon of our region attracting people and sharing the history of Australia. The new Maryborough rail link is also under way, with a station in Creswick under construction. They are great developments.

Added to that is the Small Towns Development Fund for smaller towns across regional Victoria with populations below 10 000. They think this is absolutely fantastic. They have seen so many projects go ahead that simply would not have happened without the support of the state government. They have leveraged huge additional investment, which has been of great benefit by underpinning the positive feeling within those regional communities.

Added to that is the health funding that we have provided. I see I am going to run out of time, but I look at the Daylesford hospital, Trentham's new \$11 million hospital and the \$13 million we have contributed in the budget for the \$55 million Ballarat Cancer Research Centre. Why did we need that centre? It was because ahead of our coming to government no radiotherapy was provided in Ballarat. We have provided it in

Ballarat, we have provided it in Bendigo and we have provided it in Gippsland, because it simply could not be provided under the former government. We have provided it, and we are developing it so that people do not have to travel to Melbourne to have this important treatment.

In education so much funding has been provided. There has been the \$3.3 billion for capital works in government schools since 1999. Our government has made great contributions which have flowed on to schools right across regional Victoria. They know that our government continues to deliver for them. They know that the Liberal-Nationals coalition do not represent anything positive in regional Victoria.

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak on the matter of public importance:

That this house congratulates the Victorian Liberal-Nationals coalition on its far-sighted policy commitment to establish a \$1 billion regional growth fund for the benefit of regional and rural Victoria.

So far this morning we have had the hysterical rant by the Minister for Regional and Rural Development and we have had the member for Melton and now the member for Ballarat East. They have all been calling it a regional rant and a slush fund for The Nationals to spend in their own seats. Government members have also said that indeed The Nationals do not have any power within the coalition and that they are told what to do by the Liberals. They need to make up their mind. It is The Nationals members who have had the strength to go out and convince the other members of the coalition of the importance of regional Victoria, as we have done. The Liberals have listened, and we have a good outcome for regional Victoria.

We need to look at this fund. It will be \$1 billion over the first two terms of the coalition government to be accessed by the 48 regional and rural councils currently defined under the Local Government Act. The fund will be established by legislation. The objectives of the fund are to create jobs, improve career opportunities — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr WELLER — The fund will create increased investment in regional Victoria through leveraged funds, strengthen the economic base of communities and provide better infrastructure facilities and services in partnership with communities, private enterprise, local government and the commonwealth. The five

regional development committees (RDCs), which have already been mentioned — Loddon Mallee, Grampians, Barwon South West, Hume and Gippsland — will be strengthened with additional resources. The RDCs will be responsible for working with individual communities to identify, assess and approve priority to local projects under the 40 per cent component of the fund which is going to be driven by local decision making. It will be driven from the grassroots up, which is what we should be looking for in this area.

Of course the other component will be the 60 per cent strategic component for projects of statewide regional significance. They will be transport projects —

Mr Wynne — What is the criteria for that?

Mr Northe interjected.

Mr WELLER — That is right. The member needs to learn to listen. They will be upgrading strategic road networks and bridges, helping food producers and manufacturers to access markets, providing strategic economic projects to create new industry and career opportunities in regional Victoria, building and enhancing basic services and utility regional networks, and improving economic sustainability.

Not only that, we will actually have an evaluation process to make sure these projects are going to be good. The proposed project will be required to meet evaluation criteria, including project feasibility and delivery, additional funding sources, socioeconomic benefit, economic benefit and financial viability. They will go through a rigorous process before funding is given out, and those are the evaluation criteria they will have to meet.

It will be a very transparent process. Some of the things that will be covered in relation to roads and transport, to mention just a few, include intermodal freight facilities, which are very important in getting stuff from road onto rail and into the port so we can help ease some of the congestion problems at the port; regional airport upgrades, which are very important in this day and age; upgrades of port access and infrastructure; and upgrades of strategic road networks, as I have mentioned.

In relation to economic development we will have strategic economic projects that will create new industry, like the rollout of natural gas pipelines — which this government promised in 1999 and has failed to deliver.

Mr Delahunty — Along with the other promises.

Mr WELLER — It is another one it has broken.

Mr Crutchfield interjected.

Mr WELLER — The gas pipeline? It hasn't come to Nathalia and it hasn't come to Heathcote, I can tell you that.

As to economic and social development, there will be broadband accessibility, which has not happened under this government, and the development of electricity access and networks for industry, and transport access for students attending education facilities. The list goes on. In relation to community development there will be community media and technology centres, cultural arts and facility precincts and the upgrading of sporting facilities. There is indeed in country Victoria a need for a lot of sporting facilities to be upgraded. In relation to economic development there will be industrial estates. There are towns in my electorate that are working on getting industrial estates up in their areas; they are failing to do so under this government. They need assistance, and this government is not providing that assistance.

There will be regional tourism initiatives, walking and bike trails, planning and economic development, feasibility studies, and business plans for assisting local communities to plan their growth and to grow their capacity.

There has been talk about what has been said in the media. Let me go to the *Shepparton News* of 4 June, which states:

Regional Cities Victoria, which counts City of Greater Shepparton as a member, has welcomed the National and Liberal coalition's \$1 billion commitment to regional Victoria.

RCV believes the fund is an acknowledgement by the parties that Victoria's regions are important for the future prosperity of the state while also being a solution to the challenges of population growth.

'Providing regional Victorian cities with quality infrastructure and services means equality for all Victorians', RCV chair and Ballarat mayor Judy Verlin said.

'It also provides confidence to people considering a move outside of Melbourne that their family's needs will be met in our regional cities, which is a high priority for our member councils.' Nationals leader Peter Ryan announced at the weekend a policy to establish a \$1 billion regional growth fund to boost jobs and upgrade local services and infrastructure.

'We are delighted our advice to the coalition is reflected in this commitment and in the statements from Peter Ryan', Cr Verlin said.

The government says we did not consult, but here we have the mayor of Ballarat saying she is delighted that the coalition has listened to her. She also said:

‘RCV has been advocating for increased government spending to support regional growth and increased flexibility for allocated state resourcing in the regions for a long time’.

Regional Cities Victoria has been advocating this for a long time, and we, the coalition, have listened, which the government has failed to do.

Then there is the *Wangaratta Chronicle*. The opening line of its article says:

The Nationals’s \$1 billion plan to grow regional Victoria can only be good news for Wangaratta.

Further down the article says:

But what is important about The Nationals’s announcement is that it provides a way forward.

We do not have a way forward with this government. The article goes on:

As of yet, the government has not come forward with its own plans to grow regional Victoria.

The people of Wangaratta are no fools. They know this government does not know a way forward.

In another article the leader of the Victorian Farmers Federation said the government had only been paying ‘lip-service’. The VFF is pleased to have a party and a coalition that will listen.

Another article refers to the mayor of the City of Greater Geelong and states:

Mayor Mitchell said the city would be following up on the fund and be putting a strong case about the region’s needs.

...

But South Barwon MP Michael Crutchfield said the opposition had a lot of work to do if it wanted to match his party’s commitment to the region.

This is typical of the government’s approach over the last 11 years. It is spin and no substance. There is nothing about what it is going to do in the next term. All it does is talk about the 1990s — about what is passed. It is not looking forward. This state needs a party and a government with a vision, and in this statement we have given the Victorian people a way forward. They have seen the way forward for regional Victoria. They want substance, not spin.

The *Weekly Times* has been quoted a lot here this morning.

Mr Crisp — Give us the opening paragraph.

Mr WELLER — We will go to the second paragraph, which reads:

The announcement, by Nationals leader Peter Ryan, trumps the government’s own blueprint for regional growth, which is due out this month.

It is due out this month, but if you read the 2009 annual statement of government intentions, you see that it says:

The government is developing a new long-term plan for the sustainable growth of regional Victoria ...

This was in February 2009! The February 2010 annual statement says:

A blueprint for regional Victoria and long-term strategic plans for each region will support diversification of local economies ...

And it has not delivered it yet; the government is still only promising it.

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — It gives me great pleasure to follow the member for Rodney in his contribution. As some members interjecting from this side of the house said to the member for Rodney, ‘Don’t deviate from your notes, because you get into deep trouble when you do that’. We have just seen that happen to the member for Rodney. It is a little embarrassing, because he talked about Wangaratta and I think quoted from an article from one of the local papers up there. He was suggesting that people in Wangaratta could see no way forward under this government and that government members all just want to talk about the past. I am not sure that 22 May is too far in the past; in my recollection it is about three weeks past. I know three weeks ago is not exactly ancient history, but we have up there the local member, the member for Murray Valley, who is quoted as saying on 22 May this year:

In years gone by, we were the poor relation to many other cities in country Victoria, but not now. Wangaratta’s really on the move.

That was said just over three weeks ago in response to the opening of the Wangaratta Technical Education Centre. So I would ask the member for Rodney: is that spin or is that substance? And is it also spin that the member for Rodney only a short time ago was happy to take all the accolades for the Cohuna Secondary College? He was happy to stand there and say that this was a fantastic project and say, ‘Thank you, thank you, thank you’. He officially opened the Cohuna Secondary College. I ask the member for Rodney — he has gone silent now and is just ignoring me, and he and his fellow members are going on talking amongst

themselves — whether that is spin or substance. I am sure that for all the people who attend that school and who live in Cohuna and Wangaratta, that is absolute substance. There is no spin about that at all.

Mr Crisp interjected.

The member for Mildura had better not interject saying what he knows or what he does not know. I am not even sure he lives in this state, so I am not surprised he does not know what this government is doing —

Mr Crisp — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I ask the member for Macedon to withdraw that comment. I find it offensive.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — Order! The member finds the comment made by the member for Macedon offensive. Will the member withdraw it?

Ms DUNCAN — I am happy to withdraw the comment, if the member for Mildura has moved to Victoria.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — Order! I ask the member for Macedon to withdraw her comment.

Ms DUNCAN — I withdraw the comment. I am pleased to speak in opposition to this matter of public importance. Firstly, I would like to say to the Leader of The Nationals — I think I have heard him say this in this chamber many times — self-congratulation is not the way to go. The Leader of The Nationals congratulated himself for putting out a three-page press release announcing this fund after some 28 months of so-called community consultation. As other speakers on this side of the house have said — and I listened to the member for Rodney's contribution — it is a little bit like saying my fund is bigger than your fund and therefore we win.

You can announce anything in the lead-up to an election. What people will look at and what you will be judged on is not what you say you will do but what you actually do. We can only look at what The Nationals and the Liberal Party did to regional Victoria when they were last in office. I think during his contribution the member for Hastings said, 'The last time we came to office this state was in a poor economic situation; we were stuck in that situation, and we could not do anything other than to cut and slash'. That seems to be their rationalisation for their appalling record in government.

I will refer to some of the figures in relation to when The Nationals and the Liberal Party were last in office.

The member for Hastings said that when they were last in office they had to make drastic cuts because of the financial situation they were in. I will refer to unemployment rates across regional Victoria between October 1992 and October 1999. Those figures went one way and that was up.

The Leader of The Nationals stands up in this place and boasts about this new fund. He does not admit that when the Liberal-Nationals coalition, led by Jeff Kennett, was in government the unemployment rate was more than 5 per cent higher than the rate today in his area of Gippsland. In contrast to when the coalition was in government, in the last 12 months in regional Victoria 25 000 new jobs were created. That is not spin; that is not ancient history — in the last 12 months under this government 25 000 new jobs have been created in regional Victoria.

If we compare the unemployment rate in country Victoria to the rate in Victoria as a whole, we see that in February 1994 unemployment in Victoria generally was 13 per cent and in country Victoria it was 13.75 per cent. By October 1999 that gap had increased even further: unemployment in Victoria as a whole was 6.6 per cent but in country Victoria it was 7.29 per cent. Under the Liberal-Nationals government, led by Jeff Kennett, we saw unemployment in country Victoria rise exponentially compared with the rest of this state. We saw regional Victoria go backwards under the Liberal-Nationals coalition. It is all right for members of the coalition to stand in this place today and brag about their three-page press release that has no detail in it at all.

When you listen to some of the contributions from members on the opposite side of the house and when you think about the Federal Fund the former Howard federal government created and what the Auditor-General said about that fund, you worry even more about rorting. It makes it easy for people to make that accusation about rorting and no accountability when all they can produce and bring to this chamber is a matter of public importance which is a three-page press release. That is the level of the detail provided. Apparently that reflects the gist of it. We are just to take it as a given that that is what members opposite would do.

All I can say to anyone who was listening to the debate is that they should not judge those opposite on what they say, because they say all sorts of things. They should be judged on what they did when they were last in office. As a government we have a very proud record. This government's unemployment and job creation figures speak for themselves.

The electorate of Macedon has done extremely well from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, whether through the Small Towns Development Fund or the rollout of gas across seven towns in the Macedon Ranges. I ask members who were critical of the gas rollout and funding that was available to allow it to occur to come to the seven towns in the Macedon electorate and see the way it has been accomplished. It continues to be rolled out to this day. Once we have got that infrastructure in the town, we will see that infrastructure grow, as it does throughout metropolitan Melbourne. We have delivered to this state everything we said we would — and in many areas we have gone beyond that.

Returning to what the Leader of The Nationals said when announcing this funding proposal, I ask people to judge those opposite on their record and not on what they say they are going to do. There is a great discrepancy between what they say they will do and what we know they will do. The Leader of The Nationals has already said that this fund will be used to fund core services. If that is correct, if this fund is going to be used to fund core services in health and education, then this \$1 billion over eight years represents a dramatic cut to services in regional Victoria. If you counted the funding this government gives in the delivery of core services in health and education and through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, you would see that a lot more than \$1 billion has been spent over eight years. If the opposition were to get into office, this fund would result in a dramatic cut to services across regional Victoria.

Mr K. SMITH (Bass) — It is a great pleasure to be able to support the member for Gippsland South's matter of public importance, and this house congratulates the Victorian Liberal-Nationals coalition for its farsighted policy commitment to the establishment of a \$1 billion regional growth fund for the benefit of regional and rural Victoria. And is it not about time that rural and regional Victoria actually got something from the state government after being ignored for 11 years by this contemptuous government that we have had here in the state of Victoria? What an absolute disgrace. Their contribution to rural and regional Victoria has been basically trying to prop up seats in Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo for their failing members of Parliament who are down here. We had the shrill contribution from the member for Bendigo East, the Minister for Regional and Rural Development, who is in charge of trying to feed out the money for rural and regional Victoria. Her contribution was an absolute bloody disgrace in this chamber this morning.

Mr Crutchfield — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I find the member's language to be offensive to the minister. Can I ask — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — Order! I have not called the member for South Barwon.

Mr K. SMITH — The member should sit down and not waste my time.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — Order! The member for South Barwon finds the comments of the member for Bass offensive. Does the member withdraw them?

Mr K. SMITH — No. How can he find them offensive? What is wrong with him?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — Order! It is normal procedure when a member is offended that the other member — —

Mr K. SMITH — What is going on? The word 'bloody' is not unparliamentary. It is a word that has been used in here many times.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — Order! I ask the member for Bass to cease for a moment. When a withdrawal has been asked for, the member should withdraw the words.

Mr K. SMITH — I withdraw. The little boy over there — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — Order! The member for Bass!

Mr K. SMITH — Can I just say, Acting Speaker, that we have wasted a minute of my time because of the little fellow from Geelong who cannot make a contribution himself. Why does he not wake up to himself? If he does not like it, he should get out of here. If he does not like to get into the real debate of the chamber, he should not be in here. He is a bit of a wimp. He is a wimp in Geelong, and he will be gone at the next election anyhow, so he should make the most of it while he is here.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs Fyffe) — Order! I ask the member for Bass to address the motion.

Mr K. SMITH — We can only congratulate the opposition parties for the great contribution that they are going to make. I keep hearing the arguments and the whingeing from the other side about what former Premier Kennett did and all the damage that he was supposed to have done. Not once have I heard one of those Labor cronies over there mention that Victoria

was regarded as a rust-bucket state. We were in debt up to our ears in this state because of Labor Party policy and the neglect of governments led by Cain and Kirner, but they never ever talk about the billions of dollars of debt that we had to fix up. Victoria lost its AAA rating because of the disgraceful government that was in place.

Have a look at what we have got now. Have a look at the government now. It talks about \$1 billion. What about the \$1 billion that has been wasted on myki? Its members should think a little bit about that — that \$1 billion could have gone to rural and regional Victoria instead of being wasted on the dreams of the Minister for Energy and Resources. Under a previous portfolio he was responsible for public transport in this state. He was responsible for all the railway sleepers that went to waste. He is now responsible for the not-so-smart meters. It is the same minister.

The Leader of the House is in charge of government business. What is he doing? He is wasting our money. We want to get some money in here, and the Leader of The Nationals has come up with what I think is an excellent policy on behalf of the coalition. We are in fact going to make some investment in regional and rural Victoria. We are going to provide some infrastructure facilities and services in partnership — and ‘partnership’ is a word that this government bandies around but does not believe in. We are going to work with other communities. We are going to work with private enterprise, local government and the commonwealth government in getting money for this fund. It will not just be \$1 billion. We will boost that up to a large degree by working in coalition with these other people, and I think that is going to be the best way to go.

This government cannot talk about having done any of that. I keep thinking of what is needed in my area that could have been provided by government to benefit my constituents. Instead the government has wasted the money. It has thrown it at Geelong to try to prop up some of the incompetent members in that area. The Labor members in that area are not much good. The government has done the same in Bendigo. Have a look at the Minister for Regional and Rural Development. She is going to be gone at the next election. Here she is today trying to prop herself up. She has been critical of the Leader of The Nationals and this great policy that we will put into place. We have got a great policy. Where is the Labor Party’s policy? It just talks of more of what we have had for the last 11 years. What a disgrace.

We are going to work with the local communities. We are going to have regional development committees, including some in Gippsland, looking at some of the things that we have needed down there for such a long time. We want to boost the Gippsland economy, where it is going to help us and not help the Labor members in Geelong or in Ballarat or Bendigo. We are going to help other people around Victoria, not just prop up incompetent ministers and incompetent members of Parliament. They are hopeless people. This Labor government has been so contemptuous in the way it has thrown our money around. It is an absolute disgrace.

Regional Victoria contributes more than \$20 billion through its food production and \$3.4 billion in tourism, and that is a lot of money. Much of that comes out of my electorate, but we get no help from this regional and rural development fund that this mob has put in place. We have asked for bridges to be replaced in Manks Road in Clyde, where we needed to be able to get trucks in to be able to move asparagus out; some \$40 million a year of asparagus moves out of that area. I was on bended knees asking the minister to do something about those roads and to do something about the bridges. All he did was move the weight limit down further to make it more difficult for trucks and other vehicles to get over there. What a disgrace.

Eventually the government conceded that I was right and it should actually do something about it. But it took a long time and a lot of begging to get that. That should have just happened as a natural course. That was an opportunity for something to be done quickly for the economy down there, but no, the government decided to put a few more timber pylons on the beach at Geelong! There will be a little bit of money for that lot. That is fine. We will get a few more votes for the Labor Party people down there, for the incompetent members in that area.

We are going to do things with our regional growth fund that will be available for all of regional Victoria, not just for the electorates represented by these incompetents. We are going to be able to provide better infrastructure and facilities and services for people. We are going to strengthen the economic base of communities, and we are going to create jobs. That is a very important thing. We are going to create jobs to improve the career opportunities for rural and regional Victorians, not just for the Labor members in those areas that the incompetent ministers and others are trying to prop up. We are going to do it for all of Victoria. We are going to make a proper contribution. We are going to make sure that everybody gets looked after, certainly more than what this government has done in its last 11 years.

The money that this mob has absolutely wasted is a disgrace, particularly when it could have been making contributions to the Victorian regional economy. Funds could have been going to Gippsland, not just in my electorate but right across the Gippsland area, which is probably the best agricultural country that we have anywhere in this state. But the government has neglected it. Labor has neglected the infrastructure. It has neglected the services. It has neglected local government. It has neglected local communities. The government talks about gas. The minister and one or two Labor members have talked about natural gas and supplying it around the state.

The government put some money into Gippsland. It put a little bit of money into Korumburra, Leongatha, Wonthaggi and Inverloch, but my God, what about Phillip Island? It is the tourism Mecca of the state of Victoria. The government says, 'No, it is all right. We can just roll out the bottled gas down there. It does not matter how much the tourists have to pay'. We should have natural gas there. We should have natural gas in Koo Wee Rup, an area that has got a huge secondary college, a hospital and businesses that could thrive if they were in a position where they could have some natural gas, but no, this mob did not even think about putting on natural gas down there.

I cannot believe how incompetent this government is. It deserves to be thrown out on 27 November. The members down in Geelong are going to be the first to go.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD (South Barwon) — I think that is a good example of why, as a member of Parliament, you do need to keep a sense of humour. That was very humorous. Sad, but humorous — the incoherent contribution of the member for Bass. I will certainly be taking elements of that speech and passing them on to my constituents, because the member for Bass certainly congratulated the other Geelong members and me for getting our fair share of funds for regional Victoria. I thank him for his positive thoughts with respect to our lobbying in Geelong.

On the substantive issue, I do not support the matter of public importance as it was submitted. I believe it is indeed smoke and mirrors and hollow rhetoric; the consultation has not been extensive and there has been very little detail. In contrast with the coalition's policy, just prior to 1999, when I was on the Greater Geelong City Council, Mr Brumby, the then shadow Treasurer, along with other members of the then opposition, spent months travelling around regional Victoria. They were asking, consulting and inquiring on a continual basis over a period of, I suspect, at least 18 months.

Mr Brumby found a level of anger in the community, particularly in regional Victoria, that convinced him he needed a fund to supplement the basic core funding for infrastructure and services. He understood that the attacks on health, education, infrastructure, transport and other areas of service in regional Victoria were unprecedented.

In the 1999 election campaign the Bracks Labor government committed to RIDF, the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, which was then a massive investment in and commitment to regional Victoria. It was unashamedly biased towards regional Victoria. It was a fund that was to be an addition, supplementing basic core services in education and health. This investment was particularly well received, and I would argue, as would other members of the Bracks government of the time, that it resonated with country Victoria. The Bracks government understood that the Liberal-Nationals coalition had pillaged regional Victoria to its detriment and for the betterment of metropolitan Melbourne.

Like the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, the regional blueprint was based on extensive levels of consultation. The then Premier Bracks and Treasurer Brumby spent months on an extensive circuit of regional Victoria consulting on the regional blueprint. What has happened with the regional plan, which we will announce in the next few weeks, is that, again, there has been considerable consultation. I was lucky enough to be a member of one of the consultation groups; it was focused on Geelong and western Victoria, all the way through to the border. That particular meeting was very positive. Mayors and CEOs from all those councils were effusive in their compliments. Yes, there was more to be done, and, yes, they had particular projects, but they said at that forum that the RIDF program was one that they wanted to see continue.

What stands in stark contrast, and it is a bit like pumas in the Otways, is that to my knowledge, there has not been a member of The Nationals who has made a contribution to a meeting or round table with G21 (Geelong 21st Century) or with the Committee for Geelong, and certainly very few Liberal Party members have done so.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — I mean a member of The Nationals as distinct from a member of the Liberal Party. That is my understanding. I will stand corrected, but there has been very little consultation. Have members of The Nationals met with the Surf Coast

Shire Council? Have they met with the other councils? My understanding is that they have not. I will certainly stand corrected if I am incorrect, but there have been very few if any deliberate consultations with respect to this particular document. That is what resonated with the *Weekly Times*, which certainly identified a lack of detail. It accused The Nationals of taking the bush for granted and believing they can put up an ill-thought-out document and expect people to believe it when the detail is scarce at best.

Where did this policy come from, and why was it rushed? I think its genesis is the point at which the Liberal Party overruled The Nationals in respect of the Mitchell dam. Clearly that hurt that constituency of The Nationals. Those members of The Nationals who have long argued for dams throughout Gippsland and indeed throughout Victoria have based some of their support financially on the commitment of The Nationals to a dam on the Mitchell River in particular. Well, they rolled over. What happens? A few days later they decide, 'We need a plan — an ill-thought-out plan — for our own constituency. Something that we can use as a slush fund; something we can use as a regional rorts fund to look after our own, because we have just been done over by the Liberal Party in its search for green preferences'. That is why this policy was rushed. That is why there is very little detail, and that is why there are questions about the seriousness of the Liberal-Nationals coalition in delivering on this front.

I want to focus on a couple of the comments made in a press statement of 31 May, in which the Leader of The Nationals says this fund is not a supplement to funds that are targeting education, health, railways and those other core services; they are included in this particular fund. Whilst \$1 billion is a lot of money in anyone's language, it is not such a lot of money over eight years, and there is a paucity if you include basic services like education and health. I will read to the house a number of examples of where this government has contributed to capital works in my electorate since 1999.

Mr K. Smith interjected.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — Again I thank the member for Bass for complimenting me on my advocacy for my electorate. I acknowledge that, and I will certainly take back to my constituency and to the ministers involved his compliments and the fact that he acknowledges that. A snapshot of what this government has been contributing in education includes \$165 million funding in Gippsland, \$142 million in the Grampians region and \$187 million for 85 schools in the Hume region. I realise time is short, so I will not go into the additional investment in health. These are a supplement to what is

unashamedly a regionally biased fund, the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund.

We will be announcing additional policies in respect of regional Victoria in the near future, but in terms of my patch, investment related to the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development has facilitated well over \$1 billion in the almost three-year period regarding 46 investments, and that has generated some 1857 jobs. In the time since 1999 this regionally biased fund, RIDF, and the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development have focused on projects like the Barwon Heads natural gas project, the Portarlington natural gas project, the small towns grant which has benefited the Surf Coast shire, the scout hall in Torquay, \$750 000 for an important community facility at the Torquay Angling Club and \$2 million to the City of Greater Geelong for the proposed expansion of the Geelong Ring Road employment project — a critical project that has the potential to generate some 10 000 jobs.

In closing I re-emphasise that people attending the forums, to a person, have urged the government to continue the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund — a fund that is focused on regional Victoria. I was at the announcement of the two private-public partnerships for Armstrong Creek when international and interstate investors said one of the reasons they are investing in Geelong and Victoria is the focus the Brumby government gives to the whole of Victoria and the ease of investing in regional Victoria.

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — It is a very sad reflection on the member for South Barwon and all Labor members who have contributed to this debate, and it is a tragedy for Labor Party members and for Victoria that they continue to run conspiracy theories as a substitute for genuine debate on this issue. It genuinely shows Labor's real contempt for regional and rural Victoria.

Labor treats regional and rural Victoria as a political plaything and does not have a genuine interest in decentralisation or balanced development or a real understanding of the important role that regional cities and rural Victoria can and should play in the growth of the Victorian economy and in terms of having proper, balanced growth in this state.

I want to support this matter of public importance. I want to talk about what this fund is all about, how it will work and make some comments on this initiative, what this current government has done and some of the projects that are likely to benefit. The fund would be a \$1 billion fund, which is a large amount of money that

can be accessed from the grassroots up by 48 regional and rural councils to create jobs, improve career opportunities in regional and rural Victoria, create investment in regional Victoria through leveraged funding, strengthen the economic base of rural and regional communities, and provide better infrastructure facilities in partnership with communities, private enterprise, government and the commonwealth.

It would work in conjunction with and through regional development committees that are already in place and have been established by both state and federal governments, and 40 per cent of the funds would be spent by the local regional development committees, with local people making local decisions for the benefit of local communities in regional and rural areas. Sixty per cent would have a statewide strategic component to look at projects of state and regional significance. These projects will be advised by the chairs of the regional development committees, working with the relevant ministers in the Baillieu government.

I make it clear to members opposite who continue to try to misrepresent this fund that it is not a substitute for normal government funding for education, health, transport and government services. This would be \$1 billion for regional and rural development because we firmly believe, as we live there and love regional and rural Victoria, that regional and rural Victoria and regional cities have a major role to play in the growth and development of the state.

Regional Cities Victoria, with whose representatives I have met a number of times, states in a press release:

Regional Cities Victoria ... welcomes the National and Liberal coalition's commitment to regional Victoria through their ... \$1 billion regional growth fund.

That has been widely quoted by other speakers. The Victorian Farmers Federation has said in correspondence under the heading 'Farmers back opposition's regional growth fund pledge' that:

The ... (VFF) has backed a commitment by the state opposition to introduce a \$1 billion regional growth fund ...

It goes on to quote Mr Broad, the president of the VFF as saying:

Particularly pleasing is the focus the opposition's policy has placed on local decision-makers. No-one knows better than local people the order of importance in which investment should be made.

The *Australian Financial Review* of 31 May says:

Victorian Farmers Federation president Andrew Broad said the Victorian government had paid 'lip-service' to boosting regional Victoria's productivity for a long time. The proposed \$1 billion fund to be spent over eight years 'will really put pressure on the Brumby government to step up to the plate and put some real money into developing the productive capacity of regional Victoria ...

The *Geelong Advertiser* says:

Mayor John Mitchell says Geelong will battle for its share of a whopping \$1 billion regional growth fund to be set up by the state opposition ...

I am looking forward to working with the Greater Geelong City Council and the Geelong community to make sure we get good projects up in Geelong through this fund. The *Weekly Times* of 2 June says:

The Victorian coalition has made its first strike in the election battle for country votes, promising to spend \$1 billion on a regional growth fund within the first eight years ...

It says this is a blueprint, and there are similar quotes from other newspapers across the state. In contrast, what has Labor said? Labor has duded regional and rural Victoria. The annual statement of government intentions of February 2009 says:

This year will see:

... the development of a new blueprint for regional growth to develop strategies for each region in close consultation with regional communities.

That is what the government said, and then it said in a press release that the blueprint will drive a new era of regional growth. That is what Premier Brumby said in February 2009, but there was no action. That is treating regional and rural Victoria with absolute and utter contempt. Then there was another announcement in the annual statement of government intentions of February 2010:

This work will culminate in the release of the blueprint in 2010.

Then it says the government is consulting. In the budget speech Treasurer John Lenders said:

The government will release a new *Blueprint for Regional Victoria* by 30 June.

Regional Victoria has been waiting 18 months for this announcement, and it is still waiting with bated breath. Members of the opposition have said you judge people by what they do, not by what they say. The people of regional and rural Victoria have judged this government as failing to deliver on the blueprint. They have only to look at page 119 of budget paper 3 under 'regional

development' to see that in 2009–10, \$154 million was spent, and the budget for next year is \$97 million — a cut of nearly 40 per cent.

Pages 126 and 127 of the budget papers show that last year the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund spent nearly \$80 million but that next year's allocation is only \$56 million — a cut of 30 per cent. It also shows that last year \$59 million was spent on Regional Development Victoria's economic investment program and that in the next year \$41 million is to be spent — a cut of 29.9 per cent. In tourism, which is important for rural and regional Victoria and for jobs across country Victoria, \$95.2 million was spent this year; next year \$76.6 million is to be spent — a cut of nearly 20 per cent.

The people of country Victoria can judge this government by what it does; it fails to deliver a blueprint and it cuts every regional and rural program in this year's budget, with the funding cuts of 20 per cent being massive. That is what they can expect under this government — that is, cuts to country programs. This Labor Party treats regional and rural Victoria with contempt. It goes out to country Victoria for photo opportunities — it flies in and flies out, gets a photo — but does not really care, does not listen and does not understand. It does not care about country Victoria; it treats regional and rural Victoria with contempt.

Members of the Liberal-Nationals coalition, on the other hand, proudly live and work in regional and rural Victoria; we love country Victoria and that is why I look forward to working with this program, in government, to do things like upgrade our single wire earth return lines to improve productivity in the dairy industry and create more jobs; bring natural gas to Heywood; and improve recreational fishing facilities in Portland, Port Fairy and Warrnambool.

It is not just about recreational fishing — this is about economic development because tuna fishing brings hundreds of people and millions of dollars to those regions to take advantage of that fishing. If we had appropriate facilities, we would create more jobs and more opportunities. We would put a pedestrian overpass over the ring-road in Portland to get our trucks in and out of the port more efficiently and safely. I look forward to working with regional cities and country Victoria to deliver on this great program.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2010–11 (part 1)

Mr NOONAN (Williamstown) — It gives me, as a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC), great pleasure to make some comments about part 1 of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's report on the budget estimates 2010–11, which was tabled in the last sitting week. I acknowledge, for the record, that part 2 of the report was tabled this morning.

At the outset I want to acknowledge my fellow committee members. Some of them are in the chamber today: the members for Scoresby and Benalla. We certainly got to know each other pretty well through the course of the budget estimates process. In particular, I want to acknowledge the committee's chair, the member for Burwood, who I see is now entering the chamber. The chair certainly had his work cut out for him during the estimates hearings and found himself on his feet on many occasions, seeking to quell overzealous committee members, whom I will not name.

I sincerely thank the committee's executive officer, Valerie Cheong, and her team of research officers including Christopher Gribbin, Vicky Delgos, Ian Claesson, David Lacy, Rocco Tottura and Joe Manders for their exemplary work on this report. In particular, I thank the team for turning around such a large volume of work and having it ready so that members could be better prepared to speak on the appropriation bill before the Parliament. I also thank Melanie Hondros for the work she did in assisting the committee during the estimates hearings.

Let me turn to the report, which focuses on week 1 of the budget estimates hearings. Week 1 included appearances from the Premier, Treasurer, presiding officers and ministers, together with senior public servants. I think it ought to be recognised that both the Premier and Treasurer were each questioned about the budget for a least 3 hours each.

The report provides some very valuable background on the budget and is a rich source of information which comes from face-to-face hearings and departmental questionnaires which were returned to the committee. The report also provides a summary of the key matters raised at the hearings, detailed questions taken on notice and details of documents tabled by ministers at the hearings.

Chapter 2 is a very valuable part of the report. It provides a summary of the key aspects of the 2010–11 budget. It has been written in a reasonably succinct way but provides information on areas such as revenue and expense estimates, funding for infrastructure investments, net debt projections, new funding initiatives and contingency provisions. Chapter 2 also lists the 11 budget themes for the 2010–11 budget — namely, more jobs and a resilient, competitive Victorian economy; putting patients first; promoting community safety; more support and services for children and families; investing in our schools; maintaining Victoria’s livability; A Fairer Victoria; delivering the Victorian transport plan; new support and investment for regional Victoria; sustainability and the environment; and bushfire reconstruction and recovery.

The report also notes, and welcomes, two additional budget information papers that supplemented the standard papers for the 2010–11 budget. Previous years’ equivalents of the 2010–11 budget information paper no. 1, entitled *2010–11 Public Sector Asset Investment Program*, were published about five months after the previous budgets were presented but this year we had it in advance of that. However, the paper seemed to be the source of confusion for some opposition shadow ministers who used it to disseminate some inaccurate post-budget media releases.

Budget information paper no. 2, entitled *Putting Patients First*, was also acknowledged and welcomed by the committee in part 1 of the report.

There were many highlights in the first week of the budget estimates hearings, particularly in the appearances of the Treasurer and Premier. I will resist the temptation to go through those highlights, but what remains with me from that first week came from both the Treasurer and the Premier: both of them made the strong point that this budget delivers on all of the commitments that Labor made in the lead-up to the 2006 election.

The Premier stated:

There are 172 output initiatives and those are fully funded, and on the capital side there are 93 asset initiatives, which are fully funded.

In simple terms this is a budget that delivers on Labor’s promises.

Amongst other things, I think that irritated some of the opposition members on the committee. They spent much of their time asking questions that were not necessarily relevant to the budget estimates hearings. When the chair tried to redirect some of those

members’ questions to the budget estimates he was attacked on a number of occasions, despite his being impartial, and was accused of trying to shut down the hearings. In my view, this was one of the very few disappointing outcomes from what were otherwise very valuable hearings.

I look forward to working with the committee on the preparation of part 3 of the report, which will probably be tabled, as has been the case in previous years, in September. I very much commend the report to other members; it makes terrific reading.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2010–11 (part 2)

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — I would like to speak on the *Report on the 2010–11 Budget Estimates — Part Two* which was tabled today by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. The duties of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, which are clearly stated on page xvii of the report, are:

... to inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on:

...

the annual estimates or receipts and payments and other budget papers and any supplementary estimates of receipts or payments presented to the Assembly and the Council.

I would have thought it was common decency that if a question were asked by a committee member to a minister responsible for a department, we would receive an answer. Based on what I have read this morning in this report, the blatant lack of clear answers to straightforward questions is breathtaking. Unfortunately, in my opinion, the public hearings have become a bit of a farce.

I refer to evidence given by the Minister for Community Services on 19 May. Opposition members listened very carefully to the minister boast about her department’s achievements dating back to 1999. Not once in this transcript did the chair rule this part of her evidence inadmissible. It is clear, from reading this report that all of the information given by the minister was accepted.

The crucial question put to the minister by committee members from the opposition was in relation to the best interests case plans, and the questions asked how many should have been completed in 2008 and how many were completed. You would think that the government, which prides itself on social justice and social policies, would want to explain how it handles one of the most crucial responsibilities of government — that is, the

protection of vulnerable children. The minister eventually stated:

I will answer the question and attempt to relate it to the budget estimates ...

But she then went on to give a long list of excuses, but we were not given any answers, according to this report. The minister kept referring to a 'draft case plan' in the report. The question referred to her statutory obligations under the law, not the draft plan. She followed her comments on the draft plan, once again, with a long list of excuses.

Having read this report and having read the transcripts from the hearing, it is clear to me that the very purpose of having a public hearing is 'to inquire', as I said initially. The minister failed to provide straightforward, sensible answers. Consequently I maintain that the minister should be recalled to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee to provide proper answers to the committee.

There is a precedent for this, as I understand it. Witnesses can be recalled before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee if the committee is not happy with the information that has been given to it. In addition, just two years ago, under the Westminster system, the head of the British post office was recalled to a committee because the evidence she gave to the committee was insufficient.

However, in the case of the Minister for Community Services, it gets a lot worse, because we suspect that during the hearings her spin doctors, believe it or not, called a media conference for 1.00 p.m. on the same day. The hearing concluded at 12.15 p.m., so just 45 minutes later the minister went out and answered questions from the media that she had refused to answer in the public hearings.

Based on the evidence in this report, if the minister is not recalled to give proper answers, then the government and its ministers are treating the committee with absolute contempt. This government promised that it would be open, honest and transparent, and this is a chance for the government and the minister to insist that the minister be recalled so the evidence can again be put to the committee.

I believe it is not good enough for a minister to come before a committee and give answers to all the Dorothy Dixers, but when committee members from the opposition ask a decent question there be an attempt to shut them down.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2010–11 (part 1)

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) — It is a pleasure to make some brief comments on the very substantial first part of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) report on the 2010–11 budget estimates. What this report demonstrates is this government's total commitment to transparency and accountability in the budget and budget estimates process. The report highlights that for the first time the publication of the budget information paper on the 2010–11 asset investment program has been brought forward — a move towards greater transparency that has been welcomed by most members.

A separate information paper has also been released for health services funding in the budget, including massive investments secured by the Premier at the Council of Australian Governments.

Given this unprecedented level of disclosure of information, it is quite laughable that those opposite and minor party members of PAEC have criticised the entire process and labelled it as orchestrated and secret. Nothing could be further from the truth. Looking to the future, I know that this high level of transparency will be built upon. PAEC is of the view that a separate budget information paper on rural and regional Victoria should be provided in the future.

The report includes the key themes of this year's budget, which reflect the values and priorities that the Brumby Labor government shares with Victorians. I was very pleased to see reported in the paper that the government has delivered on every one of its 2006 election promises. The themes highlighted provide a blueprint for the government's strong investment in Victoria in jobs. They also reflect the government's assessment of areas of government responsibility requiring funding emphasis. One thing that most of us agree upon is the importance of this process.

As members of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, we spent many hours, days and weeks reviewing the budget, questioning various aspects of the \$44.9 billion of government expenditure, and questioning ministers on their individual areas of responsibility. While most of us agree that this is a significant process in ensuring the transparency and accountability of government, I was concerned to read the very silly remarks of Richard Dalla-Riva, a member for Eastern Metropolitan Region in the Council, who is a member of PAEC. When I read his remarks, I thought, 'Goodness me, surely this is an error', but that was what was said.

What his comments demonstrated was that the opposition does not really take PAEC or the budget estimates process very seriously. Indeed in some circumstances they make a mockery of the process. Mr Dalla-Riva was talking about scones, jam and cream. Were his thoughts chiefly on his mind or on his stomach? I think there was a lot more important information to be digested and a lot more important questions to be asked.

I also note that in her remarks, Sue Pennicuik, a member for Southern Metropolitan Region in the Council, was right when she said the opposition abuses the processes by grandstanding, but I think she is wrong when she says that the budget estimates process lacks proper scrutiny. The opposition and minor parties have full opportunity to question ministers on the budget. They may not like the answers given to them, but they are always given the opportunity to scrutinise each area of responsibility.

I would have to disagree with Ms Pennicuik when she said the questions were sometimes insincere Dorothy Dixers. I can say that the questions I put to ministers during the hearings were sincere and about important matters that affect Victorians. In an answer to my question on the Victorian schools plan — to be found in appendix 2, which contains the transcripts of evidence — the Minister for Education advised of the Brumby government's budget allocation of \$334 million for the modernisation of existing schools, replacement schools and new schools for growth areas. My electorate of Narre Warren South has nine new schools being built and two opened this year.

In an answer to my question to the Minister for Health about radiotherapy services, something that I have a strong belief in and personal experience of, the minister divulged to the committee there is greater capacity in radiotherapy services today than we have ever seen before. The minister advised that this budget includes 10 000 additional treatments to keep pace with growth.

The report was put together with lightning speed and the supporting officers did a terrific job. I commend the chair on the way he conducted the hearings.

**Education and Training Committee:
geographical differences in the rate in which
Victorian students participate in higher
education**

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — I rise to speak on the Education and Training Committee's final report on its inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher

education. I am not a member of this committee; most members in this place who speak on committee reports normally speak on inquiries that they are involved in. But I believe this is a very good and positive report, and it exemplifies the important role committees play in our Parliament.

I would particularly like to focus on the issue of the deferral rates and the barriers to tertiary education, which are clearly outlined in this report, and the bipartisan recommendations of the committee that have been made as part of this report. This also goes back to the inquiry into retaining young people in rural towns and communities that was conducted during the previous Parliament; it made similar recommendations.

This report looks at the barriers to tertiary education for rural students. I would particularly like to focus on that because this week the 'On track' data was presented. The reports from both of these inquiries are focused on the importance of the 'On track' data and identifying the differences across Victoria for students leaving secondary school and entering into tertiary education, TAFE or employment.

I would encourage members to have a look at that data because there is a really clear difference identified between the deferral rates for rural students and metro students. If you go through the data for all of the rural secondary schools, there is a much higher rate of deferral. There are also a few differences, a couple of high spikes, in some of the metro schools. But quite often across those regional schools there are student deferral rates, or students not entering tertiary education, of between 20 to 30 per cent — even higher in many cases.

What you also notice is there is a very high employment rate — students leaving school and going into the employment or apprenticeship system. That is a good, positive thing. But it often highlights that there is a real barrier for those rural students entering into tertiary education, including the higher cost of living away from home. Members will also notice that there is a higher proportion of students looking for work or who are unemployed in many of those rural areas. There are some real differences.

If members look at the secondary schools in the 'On track' data, where students come from low socioeconomic areas — either metro or rural — there are some real barriers to opportunity. This is very important for my community and for many rural areas — to make sure that we give students the opportunity to access tertiary education, the TAFE system, and the training required, so that they gain the

skills that will enable them to then participate fully in our employment system and provide the value that we need in our communities.

I encourage both state and federal governments to respond better than they have so far. Both inquiries have made very strong recommendations about what the state and federal governments should do. I know there has been a lot of debate about the youth allowance, methods of delivering better pathways and lowering the cost of disincentives or barriers to rural students entering the tertiary education system. Whilst many people might think that that has been resolved, it has not been resolved to the satisfaction of rural students. Governments must do more to ensure that rural students leaving year 12 have a pathway into tertiary education.

I know that you, Acting Speaker Howard, were the chair of that inquiry. All members of Parliament must continue to work hard to deliver opportunities for all students, no matter where they live in our community — to make sure that students can, if they so desire, go to university. As a father of four teenage children I understand that this is a challenge, to make sure that they — —

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

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee:
budget estimates 2010–11 (parts 1 and 2)**

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — I wish to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee reports on the 2010–11 budget estimates. To date the Parliament has been presented with parts 1 and 2 of the report. Essentially those two parts cover the responses that each department has provided to the extensive questionnaires that the committee gave them, as well as the hearings which ministers and presiding officers attended, spoke at and answered questions in terms of the budget estimates and their programs.

The member for Williamstown has already pointed out that part 1 also includes a very valuable chapter summarising the basic trends and content of the budget. The committee thinks it is very important that this information be delivered to the Parliament as soon as possible in order to help members participate in the debate on the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill — whether it be on the bill in general or for the Parliament's appropriation.

The process that the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee has for the estimates hearings in this

Parliament has been well and truly set. It is a dramatic change from what occurred under the previous government, when the Liberal and The Nationals' ministers, the conservative ministers, refused to be accountable or to attend public hearings. The then Premier refused to attend. The conservative ministers refused to be accountable, or to explain the budget, the estimates or their programs. They refused to answer any questions — and it is a bit hard to answer any questions if you are not actually there! They have form on this particular matter.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr STENSHOLT — They have form; you were not around. They do not wish to be accountable. They have form, and the form continues. They wish to avoid scrutiny.

The process of the operations of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee today is very clear. There is a very clear process for the estimates hearing, as set out in the functions under section 14 of the Parliamentary Committees Act. We have separate reporting on performance outcomes. We look at a large range of annual reports. We also follow up on the audits, which was not done before in a systematic way.

There has been a 50 per cent increase in the funding available to the secretariat of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. The previous government cut everything more and more in order to avoid any scrutiny. Of course there is the continuation of special and own motion inquiries, whether it be into the Audit Act or the financial management framework.

I want to comment on the proceedings. As I have said, the process is to inquire into the estimates. As chair of the committee I require the questions to focus on the estimates in accordance with the requirements in the act. Normally the processes of the committee, by convention, are similar to the process for questions without notice in the Assembly. On occasions, though, ministers have provided overly long answers, and I have pointed that out to them. On occasions some members have attempted to ask questions that were not related to the estimates. Indeed, some of the questions were so far from the estimates that I was left wondering if they fell into the category of what a member of the upper house described as mere grandstanding.

As chair over the four years I consistently ruled again and again that the questions and the answers needed to be succinct, to be direct and to relate to the estimates. I pulled up ministers — and I probably even pulled up the Minister for Roads and Ports on occasions in this

regard — and reminded them that members and witnesses need to be relevant to the terms of the inquiry.

It was disappointing that at times the conduct of the hearing was not in the best tradition of the Parliament. A hearing in a room around a table is quite different to the conduct of proceedings in the house, and some members, and on occasions witnesses, sought to engage in across-the-table interjections and arguments. On many occasions I made it clear that such behaviour was unparliamentary and not in the best traditions of the Victorian Parliament.

An honourable member — It was disrespectful.

Mr STENSHOLT — It was very disrespectful indeed. I reject the commentary by the member for Scoresby here today. Rulings that I made were consistent and appropriate over the four years. I ask members to read the transcript. I particularly ask the member for Scoresby to reflect on his poor behaviour and lack of respect in terms of the process, which at times came across as self-evident in terms of the conduct of the proceedings.

It is very important that there be proper procedures and respect for the processes of the Parliament.

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

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2010–11 (parts 1 and 2)

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — The gloves are off as I make my contribution to the report on the 2010–11 budget estimates hearing. I start by thanking Valerie Cheong and other staff for an outstanding effort in organising all the interviews and putting together 1100 pages of reports so far. In addition to their massive input, the MPs from the Labor Party, the Liberal Party, The Nationals and the Greens committed around 48 hours to interviews and extensive additional preparation and review time.

With all of this effort, it is therefore extremely disappointing to me to witness the contempt with which the Brumby government ministers treated the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) post-budget interview process. Mr Wells, the deputy chair, has outlined the deeds of the Minister for Community Services, which are the subject of ongoing action.

In the brief time available to me I wish to provide some other examples of contempt for the process by Brumby government ministers.

I look at the confidentiality of transcripts. Transcripts of evidence are confidential until they are verified by the witness and PAEC committee members and made public a few days later. In spite of this, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change made it clear when he was interviewed that he had seen the transcript of the Premier's evidence from a couple of days earlier. He stated:

In fact I noticed your interaction with the Premier. I have actually read the transcript.

To make matters worse, he then attempted to cover up.

The Minister for Regional and Rural Development attempted to mislead PAEC in relation to the number of jobs saved and new jobs created at Carter Holt Harvey at Myrtleford as it undertook a major upgrade. The minister was exposed for double counting jobs and inferring a net increase of jobs at Carter Holt Harvey, when in fact there had been a net decrease in jobs.

The whole process seemed to be one based on double standards. I raised a point of order on the last day of the hearings, and I will read the point of order that I raised:

... Chair. I refer to your ruling at the start of proceedings today when you said there will be no points of clarification and no supplementary questions. I understand the need for you to chair the meetings firmly, but in making this ruling I feel that you have put at risk the integrity of this PAEC ... process.

I further stated:

Over the past two years ministers have been able to make wide-ranging responses, often in response to Dorothy Dixers from government members of the committee.

I then stated:

When non-government members of the committee have sought to get specific answers to specific questions, you have often instructed the minister to confine his or her reply ... as it relates to the forward estimates and to limit points of clarification when the minister has provided an answer which the questioner considers unclear, misleading or evasive. This approach has certainly frustrated and disappointed me as I have endeavoured to fulfil my role as a member of PAEC to ensure that the government of the day is fully accountable for the spending of over \$45 billion of Victorian taxpayers money, so I request that you direct the minister to answer the questions and ensure that he does so.

In conclusion, I was profoundly disappointed with the Brumby government ministers' contempt for the PAEC interview process. Their display of contempt for the process is unfortunately not isolated, as the Premier and

particularly the Minister for Water have been doing it for the past four years in the PAEC interview process. With the release today of the Auditor-General's report into irrigation efficiency programs, we will now see why they were evading answering the questions.

The Brumby government has repeatedly displayed contempt for the overall parliamentary process and for the public of Victoria in general. Whilst PAEC has been frustrated in its attempts to hold the Brumby government to account, the public of Victoria will have their chance on election day on 27 November this year to truly hold to account the unelected, unelectable, arrogant Premier and his government. Bring on 27 November — and plug the pipe!

WORKING WITH CHILDREN AMENDMENT BILL

Statement of compatibility

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) 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 Working with Children Amendment Bill 2010.

In my opinion, the Working with Children 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 main purpose of the bill is to amend the Working with Children Act 2005 to make further provision for applications for working with children checks, the revocation and surrender of assessment notices and offences under part 4 of the act.

Human rights issues

1. Human rights protected by the charter that are relevant to the bill

Right to privacy

Section 13 of the charter provides that every person has the right:

- (a) not to have his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with; and
- (b) not to have his or her reputation unlawfully attacked.

The confidentiality of personal information lies at the heart of the privacy right. The protection of privacy is not, however, absolute. Disclosures that are authorised by law and not arbitrary are permissible under the charter.

Clause 5(2)

Clause 5(2) provides that where an applicant for an assessment notice has not provided all information required by section 10 of the act with their application, the secretary may require the applicant to provide any missing information within 28 days (or such longer period approved by the secretary).

In my opinion, this clause does not limit the right to privacy. The provision only allows for the secretary to set a time frame on the provision of information which is already required to be provided in support of an application under section 10 of the act. The secretary cannot require that any additional information be provided under this section. Consequently, clause 5(2) does not limit the right to privacy under section 13.

Clause 6

Clause 6 provides that the secretary may, in considering an application for an assessment notice, make enquiries to or seek information on the application from any person or source that the secretary thinks fit, including the Director of Public Prosecutions and any employee within the meaning of the Public Administration Act 2004.

In my opinion, any interference with the right to privacy caused by such enquiries will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. The enquiries will be specifically authorised by the act, and will assist the secretary in accessing as much relevant information as possible in assessing whether a person is suitable to work with children. For these reasons, I do not consider that clause 6 imposes an arbitrary or unlawful interference with the privacy right under section 13.

Clause 7

Clause 7 provides that the secretary must not consider an application for an assessment notice by a person who has received a negative notice unless the secretary has been notified, or the applicant provides information with the application, that there has been a change in the circumstances which gave rise to the negative notice. This engages the right to privacy by requiring information about a person's personal circumstances to be provided to the secretary.

In my opinion, any interference with the right to privacy will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. The requirement is specifically authorised by the act. Applicants will only need to furnish information to the secretary in circumstances specifically prescribed — namely, where it is necessary to show that there is a reason to depart from the previously issued negative assessment notice. Consequently, clause 7 does not limit the right to privacy under section 13.

Clauses 15, 17, 19, 21 and 25

Clause 15 engages the right to privacy by requiring a person who has a current assessment notice or who has an application for an assessment notice pending to notify the secretary of a change in any person by whom he or she is engaged in child-related work or any agency with which he or she is listed.

Clause 17 requires that if the secretary suspends a person's assessment notice, the secretary must notify any agency or person that the secretary is aware has engaged, or proposes to engage, that notice holder in child-related work. Clause 19

imposes the same requirement on the secretary where an assessment notice holder surrenders his or her notice.

Clause 21 engages the right to privacy by requiring persons who are exempt from a requirement to hold an assessment notice by reason of their being a member of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to notify any person by whom he or she is engaged in child-related work or any agency with which he or she is listed of any suspension or termination of their employment with the AFP. Similarly, clause 25 amends the Child Employment Act 2003 to provide a person who is permitted by reason of his or her membership of the AFP to supervise a child in employment (other than as a member of the AFP) must notify any person by whom he or she is employed in that supervision of any suspension or termination of employment with the AFP.

In my opinion, any interference with the right to privacy which results from these provisions will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. The requirement on applicants and on the secretary to share information in the above circumstances will be specifically authorised by the act. The instances in which sharing of information must occur are clearly delineated by the bill, and in each case the information is necessary to ensure that agencies and people who employ persons in child-related work are kept informed of the status of the person's assessment notice (or application for an assessment notice). The provisions enable those people and agencies to ensure that they only engage persons who are fit and proper to work with children. Consequently, in my view the clauses do not result in an arbitrary or unlawful interference with the right to privacy.

Clause 23

Clause 23 extends the circumstances in which a person may disclose information acquired as a result of the carrying out of a working-with-children check or under specified provisions of the act. Clause 23 allows such information to be disclosed to a person or body in another Australian jurisdiction who possesses functions or powers that correspond with the functions or powers of the secretary or the chief commissioner under the act.

Any interference with the right to privacy under this provision will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. The sharing of information will be specifically authorised by the act, and serves the legitimate purpose of helping to ensure that unsuitable persons are not engaged in child-related work in other Australian jurisdictions. Therefore, clause 23 does not limit section 13 of the charter.

Clauses 7 and 17 — consequences on engagement in a profession

As well as requiring the disclosure of information in particular circumstances, as discussed above, clauses 7 and 17 may restrict certain persons from engaging in child-related work. Clause 7 provides that the secretary may refuse to consider applications for assessment notices if (a) a current assessment notice holder has applied for a new assessment notice but has not surrendered the current assessment notice document to the secretary, or (b) a person who has previously been given a negative notice has applied for an assessment notice and has not notified the secretary of any relevant change in circumstances since the issue of the negative notice. Clause 17 provides that the secretary may suspend a person's

assessment notice for up to six months where a person has failed to provide information required by the secretary.

Persons affected by such decisions will not possess a current assessment notice and so will not be able to engage in child-related work.

The equivalent right (to private life) under article 8(1) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) has been held to comprise, to a certain degree, the right to establish and develop relationships with other people. For that reason, broad measures banning individuals from employment have been found to limit this right where they affect an individual's ability to develop relationships with the outside world to a very significant degree and create serious difficulties for them as regards the possibility to earn their living (e.g., *Sidabras and Dziautas v. Lithuania* (application nos. 55480/00 and 59330/00)).

In my opinion, it is unnecessary in this context to decide whether the privacy right in the charter is of similar reach. The measures in the bill are not comparable to the more far-reaching restrictions that have been found to engage article 8(1) of the ECHR, as the provisions at issue only restrict persons from engaging in child-related work. I therefore consider that clauses 7 and 17 do not limit section 13 of the charter.

Conclusion

For the reasons given in this statement, I consider that the bill is compatible with the charter.

Rob Hulls, MP
Attorney-General

Second reading

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Working with Children Amendment Bill 2010 aims to enhance the operation of the Working with Children Act 2005 through addressing a number of practical and technical issues raised during the first four years of its operation.

The purpose of the Working with Children Act is to assist in the protection of children from physical or sexual harm by ensuring that people who work with, or care for, children have their suitability to do so checked by a government body.

The Victorian community has demonstrated its commitment to protecting children by embracing the working-with-children check scheme. Since its commencement in 2006, over 613 000 applications have been received, clearly demonstrating the value placed by the community in the protection of children. Another measure of the success of the working-with-children check is its effectiveness in preventing those people who are not suitable people from working with children. As of 30 April 2010,

422 people have been issued with a negative notice, thereby preventing them from engaging in child-related work.

The working-with-children check is now in the fourth year of a five-year phasing in period and will ultimately apply to paid or voluntary child-related work in 20 broad occupational groups.

A review of the Working with Children Act at three years

When the Working with Children Bill 2005 was first introduced, I committed to a review of its operation after three years. To this end, in late 2009, the government invited key stakeholders and members of the public to make submissions toward a technical review of the Working with Children Act.

My commitment to review the act further reflects the government's position of protecting our children and ensures that the working-with-children check is fulfilling its purpose.

I am able to report that feedback from the public and stakeholders was positive.

The review of the Working with Children Act identified a number of measures that could improve the efficacy and clarity of the act. These measures can be grouped into three categories: additional protections; streamlined administration; and better information sharing. The bill also introduces three new offences and makes a number of technical and miscellaneous amendments to further clarify and refine the act.

Purpose of the bill

The purpose of the bill is to:

- streamline the existing working-with-children check application and assessment processes by introducing additional flexibilities and clarifications to the act;

- improve the operation of the working-with-children check and reduce the regulatory burden;

- improve the flow and exchange of information to further enhance the working-with-children check; and

- create additional offences to ensure persons not considered suitable to work with children do not receive an assessment notice.

Additional protections

The bill provides further protection to children by inserting three additional offences. These offence provisions further strengthen the enforcement powers of the act.

Importantly, the bill amends the act to make it an offence for sex offenders registered under the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 and persons subject to extended supervision, supervision or detention orders to apply for an assessment notice under the Working with Children Act. This is in keeping with the government's rigorous regulating of sex offenders.

Currently, sex offenders are prohibited from obtaining a working-with-children check. This amendment extends that prohibition and makes it an offence for them to even apply.

A category 1 application is one where the applicant, as an adult, has committed a serious offence of a sexual nature against a child. This category also includes child pornography offences. Under the act, the secretary has no discretion to issue a category 1 applicant with an assessment notice. The bill reduces the time a category 1 applicant has to make a submission on a proposed negative notice from 28 days to 14 days. This will have the effect of allowing a negative notice to be issued sooner.

Streamlined administration

A key function of the bill is to introduce a streamlined renewal process.

As you are aware, an assessment notice lasts for five years so, in 2011, the first renewals will be received by the Department of Justice. This amendment introduces a simplified renewal process that reduces the burden on the Victorian community whilst maintaining all appropriate safeguards.

The bill will allow the working-with-children-check card to be used as proof of identity by people who are renewing their assessment notice, given that the proof of identity documentation was previously provided when they first applied for an assessment notice. To facilitate this, the department will issue a renewal notice.

As you are aware, an important aspect of the working-with-children check is ongoing monitoring. The bill enables the secretary to issue a new assessment notice without again considering offences that have already been considered as part of the current

assessment notice where there has been no change is that person's criminal history.

At 10 years, a new application will be required with all the proof of identity documentation.

As you are aware, the purpose of the bill is to protect children. Following from discussions with the child safety commissioner, and recommendations from employers and members of the community, employers will now benefit from the provisions in the bill that require assessment notice holders to notify the secretary of a change in their employer or volunteer organisation details within 21 days.

A further issue raised by the child safety commissioner was that people could surrender their assessment notice without notifying their employer or voluntary organisation. The bill addresses this by amending the act to require the secretary to notify employers and volunteer organisations when a person surrenders their assessment notice.

Upon reassessment of an assessment notice, the bill creates an additional power for the secretary to suspend an assessment notice if the person undergoing reassessment fails to provide requested information. The bill will also require the secretary to notify that person's employer, agency or volunteer organisation in writing of the suspension. A person who engages in child-related work while the assessment notice is suspended will be treated as if they do not have an assessment notice.

The bill also allows for the reinstatement of the assessment notice upon the provision of the requested information so that an applicant does not have to reapply and incur an additional fee.

As identified by the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, the interaction between the exceptional circumstances provisions of the act and when a charge is pending could possibly allow the secretary to issue a negative notice based on charges that had been withdrawn or dismissed.

The bill now amends the act to clarify that charges that have been finally dealt with, such as by way of being withdrawn or dismissed, cannot be considered by the secretary in assessing an application or in deciding whether to revoke an assessment notice.

Further to this, the bill clarifies the act to recognise that a charge is no longer pending once a diversion order is completed under the Criminal Procedure Act 2009 and thus does not form part of the secretary's consideration in respect of some applications.

The bill amends the reference to 'community services' by inserting the term 'out-of-home care services' to reflect changes to the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005.

For the purpose of clarification, denominational hospitals will be prescribed by the bill as places where contact with children may result in child-related work as defined by the act.

The act currently provides examples to illustrate the meaning of 'direct supervision' and 'participating on the same basis'. The bill enhances these examples to provide further guidance for the community.

Better information sharing

As you are aware, there are working-with-children screening units in other parts of Australia.

The bill allows the secretary to share information about negative notice holders to assist other jurisdictions in their assessment of the suitability of those people to work with children.

The bill also amends the act through expanding the obligation on the Chief Commissioner of Police to notify the secretary of a broader category of offences that present a significant risk to the safety of children. This information will assist the secretary in determining whether or not to revoke an assessment notice.

Miscellaneous amendments

The bill adds members of the Australian Federal Police to the category of exempt persons and carries with it an offence provision should a member be suspended or terminated from employment and fail to notify that person or agency with whom they are engaged in child related work. This is consistent with the exemption of Victoria Police.

Finally, the bill makes a number of technical and miscellaneous amendments to further enhance the clarity and efficiency of the act. These amendments include:

- clarifying what happens to a negative notice after an applicant successfully applies for and is given an assessment notice after a relevant change of circumstances, for example, when the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) issues an assessment notice;

- providing a streamlined process for dealing with simultaneous applications when submitted by the same person;

in preparation of the prescribing of the health professions boards, allowing the secretary to take into consideration the suspension or cancellation of a registered health practitioner's registration by VCAT.

Consequential amendments to the Child Employment Act 2003

The bill makes consequential amendments to the Child Employment Act. These consequential amendments ensure that the child employment and working-with-children check schemes continue to be aligned. In particular, the bill amends the Child Employment Act to exempt sworn Australian Federal Police officers and makes provision for the suspension of assessment notices.

The Working with Children Amendment Bill delivers on the government's commitment to review the act three years after its commencement. This bill is an important step in ensuring the ongoing protection and wellbeing of our children and continues to promote the government's dedication to safeguarding the rights of our children.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte).

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 23 June.

Sitting suspended 12.52 p.m. until 2.04 p.m.

ABSENCE OF MINISTER

The SPEAKER — Order! I advise the house that the Minister for Education will be absent from question time today. Any questions for the Minister for Education will be answered by the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

The SPEAKER — Order! I extend a welcome today to the former member for Frankston, Andrea McCall.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Police: confidential information

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to paragraph 46 of the affidavit signed

by the now Chief Commissioner of Police, Simon Overland, dated November 2007, in which he stated that the terms of reference for the strategic reference group associated with Operation Briars included that:

The Chief Commissioner of Police provide any necessary advice to the Premier —

and I ask: was the Premier briefed by the Chief Commissioner of Police in regard to the allegation that Mr Overland had leaked confidential information obtained in a telephone tap, and if so, when, and if not, when did the Premier first become aware of these allegations, and who advised the Premier?

Mr Brumby — What was the date of the affidavit?

Mr McINTOSH — November 2007.

Mr Brumby — About an incident that occurred when?

Mr McINTOSH — Two thousand and seven.

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I am not aware of that affidavit.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask members to come to order, particularly the members for Warrandyte and Narre Warren North.

Mr BRUMBY — I am not sure why I would be aware of that affidavit. I suspect there are lots of affidavits that are sworn in Victoria.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — So I am not aware of that affidavit, and I am not aware of any briefing I have had in relation to that matter, but I will ask my department to check.

Tourism: government initiatives

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the government's commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: can the Premier update the house on the latest figures on international visitor numbers in Victoria and what strategies the government has to attract even more visitors to Victoria?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for her question. This morning the latest tourism statistics from Tourism Research Australia were released. They show a great story for Victoria, a great story for this year and a great story for this

decade. It is quite a contrast, by the way, to what was occurring in the 1990s. They show that more international visitors have come to Victoria over the last 12 months than ever before by a long way, despite the impact of the global financial crisis, swine flu and the terrible bushfires of 7 February 2009.

Victoria recorded the strongest growth rate in tourism of any state in Australia — 4.2 per cent growth in international visitors, which exceeded the rate in all other states. With 1.54 million overseas visitors, Victoria is now close to catching Queensland in terms of international tourism numbers. If you had said back in the 1990s that Victoria was going to challenge Queensland for that number, people would have laughed at you; people would have said, ‘You’ve got rocks in your head’. But the fact is that all of the steps we have put in place as a government have turned around the tourism industry in this state and brought record numbers of tourists to our state.

I see a former Minister for Tourism in the 1990s nodding her head in furious agreement with the great steps that we have put in place to bring tourists to Victoria. It is particularly rewarding — and I know the Leader of The Nationals will appreciate this — that expenditure by international visitors in regional Victoria grew by 7.5 per cent last year. What a great result — a fantastic result. The visitors are staying longer and spending more time here, with overnight stays increasing by 10.8 per cent and total expenditure growing by 4.3 per cent. That is a great result, because having all of those tourists means additional jobs across the state — they mean jobs in the aviation industry, they mean jobs in the hotel industry, they mean jobs in the restaurant industry and they mean jobs in the event industry.

This morning at Victoria Golf Club, with the Minister for Tourism and Major Events and the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs, I was pleased to announce that Tiger Woods will be returning to Melbourne for this year’s Australian Masters, also known as the JBWere Masters, and returning to defend his trophy. We all remember last year’s JBWere Masters. It was a great event for our state. There were 107 000 paying guests, 38 000 visitors from interstate and overseas and a \$34 million injection into the Victorian economy. Many of the hoteliers and restaurateurs in Melbourne indicated that this was one of the best weeks they had ever had in terms of major events in our state.

I remember that at that time we on this side of the house were very supportive of this major event in our state. There were those on the other side who were critical,

who opposed this event and who were negative about the benefits of this for our state. The fact is that that was the most successful JBWere Masters we have ever had; it was the most successful Australian Masters. In terms of single one-off events bringing tourists to our state, there has been nothing to match it. We also saw a huge resurgence of interest in golf in our state. We saw young people taking up golf and people visiting driving ranges, and all of that provided a major benefit.

The confirmation that Tiger Woods will be here to defend his trophy builds on the great raft of major events that we have in Victoria. Coming up in the next little while we will have the Australian premiere of *Mary Poppins*, which is of course building on *Jersey Boys*. We have the Melbourne Winter Masterpieces exhibition coming up. We have the four largest annual sporting events coming up this year, including the 150th anniversary of the Melbourne Cup.

In regional Victoria there is the Rip Curl Pro, the World Superbikes Championship, the Audi Victoria Week sailing festival and the MotoGP event, for which we recently re-signed and for which Sydney has been bidding so aggressively. Again we succeeded. There is also the Jayco Herald Sun Tour.

The peak industry body, the Tourism and Transport Forum, recognised the importance of today’s announcement. It said:

This is another success story for the Victorian government and Victorian Major Events Company, whose outstanding calendar of events draws tourists to Melbourne year round.

You cannot get a better endorsement than that. This has been achieved by our government going out, winning these events, bringing them to Melbourne and producing — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — You have got to be kidding. We would never ever copy you.

Ms Asher interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Back in the 1990s the member for Brighton was Minister for Tourism and a member of the tourism council. These figures today are the strongest figures — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to cease interjecting across the table in that manner. I ask for cooperation from all members in the chamber. I remind the Premier that he has been

speaking for some time. He should conclude his answer.

Mr BRUMBY — We have had the strongest figures and the strongest growth in the industry and more international tourists coming to our state. This is a great news story for Victoria, topped off by the announcement today that Tiger Woods will be back to defend his trophy in November this year.

Hazardous waste: management

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question too is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to today's Auditor-General's report into hazardous waste management, in which the Auditor-General found that there is little assurance that hazardous waste is stored and disposed of appropriately, and further:

Neither VAGO —

the Auditor-General —

... nor the EPA can provide assurance about the effectiveness of its enforcement activities.

I ask: can the Premier now guarantee that as a result of this government's mismanagement of the Environment Protection Authority Victorian families, communities and the environment have not been exposed to the harmful effects of hazardous waste?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I thank the member for his question. The government welcomes the Auditor-General's report. We want to see the Environment Protection Authority continue to improve the way it works and achieve best practice environmental regulation. The report makes nine recommendations in relation to EPA's record keeping and the tracking of hazardous waste, and the EPA has accepted all of those recommendations.

Actions to address seven of the recommendations are already under way or have been completed as part of the EPA's long-term work to strengthen its performance to protect the environment and the community. Implementation of the final two recommendations will begin immediately.

In relation to the Leader of the Opposition's question, the report tabled today is the result of a desktop audit of EPA's internal systems and administrative practices for hazardous waste management. The report does not make any finding about the actual management of hazardous waste by industry, and while the EPA is working to improve these systems, the community can be confident in the EPA's on-the-ground regulation of hazardous waste.

To ensure that there is further emphasis on the assurance measures, the EPA will be allocating an additional 15 staff to front-line enforcement and compliance activities, and obviously many of the reforms and the system improvements identified as important by the Ombudsman in his previous report have been under way for some time.

Finally, the EPA, under Mick Bourke, commenced a reform process two years ago which included an organisational restructure, a culture change program and increasing strengthened government arrangements. The authority has also gone to tender for a new business system that will address a number of the other recommendations relating to the data and the record. And, Speaker, as you would see too from reading that report, the overall levels of hazardous waste which have been taken to landfill as a result of changes in policy and reform programs put in place have declined significantly.

Tourism: Australian Masters

Mr LIM (Clayton) — My question is to the Minister for Tourism and Major Events. I refer to today's announcement regarding the Australian Masters golf tournament, and I ask: can the minister update the house on how this announcement is viewed by industry stakeholders?

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Tourism and Major Events) — I thank the member for Clayton for his question, because, representing the community of Clayton, which is part of the region where so many of our fantastic sand-belt golf courses are, he understands the importance of golf tourism to Victoria's tourism strategy.

It is for that reason that I was very pleased this morning to join with the Premier and the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs to celebrate the announcement that Tiger Woods will be part of the Australian Masters event, also known as the JBWere Masters, in November this year. This is great news for our golfing enthusiasts in Victoria, it is great news for our golf industry, it is great news for Victoria's tourism and major events industry and it is also great news for everyone who wants to see Victoria and Melbourne showcased on an international stage, because that is exactly what these major events do for Victoria.

The member for Clayton asked me about the reaction to this announcement from industry stakeholders. I am very pleased to inform the house that the Victorian Events Industry Council, through its chairperson, Mr Peter Jones, had this to say:

This is a triumph for Victoria. Tiger Woods' participation in last year's Masters delivered an outstanding boost for

Victoria's events industry in tough economic times, and I am delighted that he has agreed to return to Melbourne.

Brett Gale from the TTF, the Tourism and Transport Forum, as the Premier mentioned in his response a few minutes ago, said:

This is another success story for the Victorian government and Victorian Major Events Company, whose outstanding calendar of events draws tourists to Melbourne year round.

He also said:

There is no doubt that his return to defend his JBWere Masters title will again attract huge crowds, including visitors from interstate and overseas, and provide significant international exposure for Melbourne.

International visitors and international exposure are very important to us, because not everybody believes the JBWere Masters is a truly international event. Last year the Leader of the Opposition dismissed the proposition that this was an international event, so I am very pleased to inform the house that at least one former Leader of the Opposition understands that this is an international event — none other than the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Cr Robert Doyle.

In his comments this morning, Cr Doyle had this to say:

Last year Melbourne came alive as hundreds of thousands of visitors from interstate and overseas came to Melbourne to watch Tiger win the Australia Masters. I am delighted he will return to Melbourne this November.

....

I congratulate the Victorian Major Events Company on this tremendous coup. I look forward to welcoming Tiger Woods to Melbourne and wish him every success in defending his title.

So this is great news. We recognise this as an international event, but the Leader of the Opposition does not. He does not believe that this is an — —

Honourable members interjecting.

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

Mr HOLDING — It will be news to the 380 million households to which we broadcast the Australian Masters last year that this is not an international event. We will have to cut the feed because it is not supposed to be an international event! When the international visitors arrive at Melbourne Airport from overseas we will have to send them away. We will have to send them off to see Brian Eno in Sydney, because this is not an international event, according to those opposite.

We make it very clear that this is an international event. We make no apologies for investing Victorian taxpayer resources in securing the very best sporting talent to populate our major events calendar in Victoria. It is absolutely critical to our tourism industry success. There are some who went on radio. I was asked about industry stakeholders and their comments. One commentator in particular went on radio and was quoted in the newspaper as saying that there should be a moral reason, a moral bar, to our investing Victorian taxpayer funds in bringing Tiger to Melbourne. This is a very slippery slope. It was none other than the Leader of The Nationals who said that. Fancy getting a lecture on morality from The Nationals!

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will not use question time to attack members of the opposition. The minister has been speaking for some time, and I ask him to conclude his answer.

Mr HOLDING — We have worked hard with the Victorian Major Events Company to build the very best calendar of major events anywhere in the world. We have the Australian Open; we have the Australian Formula One Grand Prix; we will have the 150th anniversary of the Melbourne Cup as part of the Spring Racing Carnival later this year; we have the footy finals; we have the Boxing Day test; we have all the great musical theatre; and we have the Melbourne Winter Masterpieces. From last year, we can add to that the Australian Masters golf with the participation of Tiger Woods, giving us enormous international exposure. This is a great coup for Melbourne and for Victoria — and we would love to have the opposition on board supporting this part of our strategy.

Hazardous waste: management

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the Auditor-General's report into hazardous waste management, and I ask: is it not a fact that it was a conscious decision of this government to redirect the Environment Protection Authority's priorities, resulting in a massive drop in the number of compliance inspections on hazardous waste producers and therefore increasing the threat to public health and to our environment?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — This is essentially the same question as that asked by the Leader of the Opposition. The EPA (Environment Protection Authority) and the government have accepted the recommendations made by the Auditor-General. Seven of those recommendations were already under way and

with two of them implementation will begin immediately. As I have said, the report tabled by the Auditor-General today was as a result of a desktop audit of the EPA's internal systems and administrative practices. The EPA has more resources and a bigger budget than at any time in its history.

Judicial commission: establishment

Ms HENNESSY (Altona) — My question is to the Attorney-General. 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 Attorney-General update the house on the government's plan to establish a judicial commission to handle complaints against judicial officers as part of a robust integrity and anticorruption system, and are there any alternative proposals?

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I thank the honourable member for her question. We as a government are committed to a modern, transparent and accountable system of democratic government that is supported by a robust integrity and anticorruption system. We have actually backed that commitment with action. On coming into government —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I suggest to members of the opposition that it has been proven in the past that the Attorney-General, with the assistance of a microphone, will outdo any shouting from them.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! That is not a challenge. I ask the member for Benalla in particular to stop banging on the desk in front of him. I ask members of the opposition, particularly the member for Murray Valley, to cease interjecting and to allow the Attorney-General to be heard. I ask the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to cease interjecting across the table.

Mr HULLS — Last week I announced the government's decision to establish a judicial commission —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Benalla and I warn the member for Kilsyth. If members of the opposition have no interest in the answer of the Attorney-General, they might like to leave the chamber now.

Mr HULLS — Last week I was pleased to announce the government's decision to establish a judicial commission of Victoria. I think most members of this house would agree that Victoria's judiciary is of the highest calibre. However, it is important that we have a robust, transparent, consistent and independent process for investigating complaints about any judicial misconduct, whether the allegations are of a minor or serious nature.

In Victoria we already have legislative processes in place for dealing with the most serious allegations against judicial officers, but there is no standing formal mechanism for dealing with complaints about judicial conduct which fall short of misconduct or incapacity that would warrant removal from office. The judicial commission will certainly fill that void. The commission will establish a process for complaints against judicial officers to be investigated and also appropriately dealt with. It will be able to recommend to Parliament that a judicial officer be removed from office and will also be able to refer matters to other appropriate bodies for further investigation.

The decision to create a judicial commission was the culmination of substantial work carried out by this government. It was foreshadowed in justice statement 2 in 2008, a comprehensive discussion paper was released for public consultation in November 2009 and a whole range of stakeholders were involved in that consultation process, including the legal profession, members of the public, obviously the courts, victims of crime groups and an expert working group. A whole range of submissions were received in relation to this matter.

The judicial commission is just one of a number of initiatives that the government is delivering to further strengthen our integrity and anticorruption system in this state. It will be the first step in implementing the Proust model, which includes a Victorian integrity and anticorruption commission, a new public sector integrity commissioner and a new parliamentary integrity commissioner. I am pleased to report that the Proust model and our decision to implement it has been supported by a wide-ranging coalition of people and organisations, including, I might say, the Law Institute of Victoria, which put out a media release welcoming it; the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry; the Australian Industry Group; and also, I am pleased to say, former police officer and whistleblower Simon Illingworth. We are committed to the Proust model, and we will do the work. There is a lot of hard work involved, but we will certainly do the work.

I have been asked to comment on alternative approaches, and that is appropriate given that the Proust review canvassed a range of alternative approaches before deciding on the model that was recommended to the government. Of concern was one possible approach that was proposed by one group in September 2007, nearly three years ago. I might say it was not put before the Proust review because no work was done on the proposal. It has been dubbed the ‘Talk but don’t act’ proposal; there was three years of talk but nothing has actually arrived, not even on a silver platter!

The plans for strengthening Victoria’s integrity and anticorruption system are contained in two documents, and I seek leave to table those documents. One document is the Proust review in relation to integrity in this state — a model, a road map which we will follow. The other document is a three-year-old press release, a one-page document. I seek to table those.

Leave refused.

Mr HULLS — The point is this: you have to do the hard work. You can talk about alternatives, but you really have to do the hard work if you are serious about policy development in this state. The choice is clear: you can support the Proust model or alternatively have the courage to actually put up a proposal. The failure to put up a proposal can only prove not only that those opposite are lazy but also that they were never really serious about any alternative proposal.

Water: food bowl modernisation project

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the conclusion of the Auditor-General that the government’s decision to commit \$1 billion to the food bowl modernisation project was:

... based on advice of water savings and cost assumptions that had not been verified, technology that had not yet proven itself and the feasibility of the project, which was unknown.

I ask: why did the government commit to this massive expenditure of public funds when these fundamental aspects of the project had not been established?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for Swan Hill for his question. The government’s commitment to the food bowl project was outlined in detail in the document *Our Water Our Future*, which was released in 2007. We made it very clear at that time that \$1 billion would be invested in the first stage of a project to capture 225 billion litres of water following intensive discussions and negotiations with the Food Bowl Alliance, the local farming and

business group that originally coined the idea. This is a great project. This is a project which will revive, renew and sustain the food bowl for generations to come. The fact is — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — I thank the honourable member. If you have a look across country Victoria at the big transformational projects that are about securing the future of our state, you see it is our government that put them in place. The Deputy Leader of The Nationals shakes his head. On the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline, everybody up there told me how year after year after year they went to the Kennett government and The Nationals ministers asking for money, asking for support. Nothing ever happened; nothing happened until we funded it. You have a great project up there now which will sustain north-western Victoria for decades and generations to come, but it would not have happened without our commitment

Then when you go to the food bowl you go to an area where the farmers themselves say — and by the way, as was acknowledged in an article in the *Sunday Age* on Sunday, every farmer to whom the *Sunday Age* spoke acknowledged the system was outmoded, outdated, historical, worn out and clapped out. Our government took a decision to put \$1 billion aside to revive, renew and resuscitate the project. The easiest thing in the world would have been to do nothing. The second easiest thing in the world would have been simply to buy the water and pipe it to Melbourne, but we did not do that. We made the investment, and it is a big investment. It is \$600 million, and it is generating thousands of jobs directly and indirectly in that region. It is truly transformational.

One of the reasons we strongly have supported this project is that so many people over so many years have said that if you want to both achieve water savings and sustain agriculture, investing in infrastructure is the right way to do it. I have a couple of quotes that confirm this. Here is one:

The key to boosting flows in the Murray-Darling Basin isn’t to buy water licences willy-nilly but to invest in making the irrigation infrastructure more efficient ... the priority should be making irrigation systems work properly and on better water monitoring to ensure deliveries to irrigators matched their allocations.

That statement was made in October 2008 by John Cobb, who is apparently the federal shadow minister for agriculture. Here is another one — —

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is clearly debating the question, and I would

have you return him to the question that he was asked, which was narrow in scope and dealt with the Auditor-General's report and the assertions contained within that report.

The SPEAKER — Order! I uphold the point of order and suggest to the Premier that he has been speaking for some time, so I ask him to conclude his answer without further debate.

Mr BRUMBY — The question was about water savings, and that is what I am talking about. Here is another quote:

On this basis I support the project ...

the food bowl modernisation project —

and am fully prepared to work towards its successful implementation.

That is a statement by Tony Plowman, a former opposition spokesman on water. Here is another quote — —

Mr Ryan — I renew the point of order, Speaker. The Premier is clearly debating the question. He has been asked a narrowly based question about aspects of the Auditor-General's report. We asked him to comment on that, and he is doing everything else but.

The SPEAKER — Order! I am quite happy to rule on the point of order. I do not uphold the point of order at this time. The Premier was quoting about the food bowl modernisation project, which clearly formed part of the question as asked by the member for Swan Hill.

Mr BRUMBY — I will conclude my answer, but there is just one other quote:

Now, there is no doubt that irrigation areas can save a lot of water by more efficient infrastructure both in the distribution system and on their farm.

That was said by Malcolm Turnbull at the Queensland Rural Press Club. The fact is there are — —

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — The member for South-West Coast in 2008 in this place by interjection said we should do the project faster. That is what the honourable member said.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier will ignore interjections from the member for South-West Coast. I ask the Minister for Water not to interject in that manner, and I ask the member for South-West Coast to

cease interjecting. Has the Premier concluded his answer? The Premier should now conclude his answer.

Mr BRUMBY — The fact is that we have had in this state the driest 10 years in our history. We had country towns that were running out of water, we had Melbourne slowly running out of water and our government acted decisively. We are investing in the biggest desalination plant, and we are investing in the food bowl, and the public record will show that both these major transformational projects for our state — great projects for country Victoria and great projects for Melbourne — have been consistently opposed by the opposition Liberal Party and The Nationals — and they stand condemned.

Employment: regional and rural Victoria

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — My question is to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development. Can the minister update the house on the Brumby government's plans to support regional communities and create jobs in regional and rural Victoria, and what details are available of an alternative plan?

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Regional and Rural Development) — I thank the member for Seymour for his question. Regional Victorians know well that when the Brumby government introduces a policy, what sits behind it is hard work, planning and development and working with local communities, and that the government backs it up with the investment that is needed to get results on the ground. All you have to do to see this is look back over the last four years. I will look at just three areas — education, health and investment through our Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF).

Over the last four years the Brumby government has invested \$1.6 billion across those three areas. If you add the RIDF funding over that four-year period to investment in the core services of education and health, you get \$1.6 billion. What do we see for that investment on the ground? We see health and hospital facilities being built and upgraded, schools and classrooms being rebuilt and modernised and job-creating infrastructure across the state.

As the member for Seymour asked about alternatives, I can say that recently there has been some crowing about alleged big policies and big ideas. I quote directly from the peddler of this particular policy, who said \$500 million will be spent over the next four years to:

... promote a grassroots approach to funding upgrades in infrastructure, community facilities and core education and health services — —

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, I ask you to ask the minister to indicate the source of the quote which she is providing to the house.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will not use question time as an opportunity to attack individual opposition members. The minister to continue her answer, without debate.

Ms ALLAN — I was quoting a press release that talks about this funding providing support for ‘community facilities and core education and health services’. However, as the member for Seymour did ask — —

The SPEAKER — Order! As the minister is quoting from a document, it is a reasonable request by the Leader of The Nationals for her to either make that document available to the chamber or inform the house as to the source of the quote.

Ms ALLAN — It is from a press release by the Leader of The Nationals.

Mr Ryan — On a further point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. This is the opportunity for the minister to deal with government business. Whilst I welcome the additional publicity in relation to our magnificent initiative, this is not the occasion for it.

The SPEAKER — Order! I uphold the point of order. The minister is debating the question and I ask her to come back to the question as asked.

Ms ALLAN — As the member for Seymour asked about policies — he asked about the policies of this government and about alternative policies — I am pleased to talk about a policy of this government that was announced just today by the Premier in partnership with the Minister for Agriculture. It is a new example of the way this government supports regional and rural communities. We are doing this through a new first farm grant to help young farmers to get on the land. It is about helping to kick-start new agribusinesses across regional and rural Victoria. Under this program grants of up to \$3000 will be available to first-time farmers to access business advice and planning, and \$7000 will also be available as a start-up contribution towards the delivery of their farm business plans.

That is just one example of the many different policies and programs we have in place to supplement the core services of education and health. It is about supplementing the investment we make in infrastructure. As I mentioned, over the past four years the Brumby Labor government has committed

\$1.6 billion to education, health and core infrastructure projects.

The member for Seymour, who asked the question, is a former schoolteacher. He would know that \$1.6 billion, less \$500 million, equals a \$1.1 billion cut should an alternative approach be taken to services in regional Victoria. However, the Brumby government’s forthcoming regional blueprint will continue to support people, it will continue to support jobs, it will absolutely not take the bush for granted and it will support regional communities with strong policies and programs to back it up.

We have already seen how the \$611 million Regional Infrastructure Development Fund is delivering 553 projects to communities across the state, leveraging \$1.4 billion in new infrastructure investment. What is important about RIDF is that it is enshrined in legislation. It is this government’s rock-solid commitment to the regions about how their fund will support them on what is important in regional communities. The member for Seymour may also be interested to know, since he asked a question about alternatives, that all we have seen to date is a three-page press release.

But for the house’s information, it appears there is more legislation on the way. It appears that someone has indicated that:

In government we will legislate to establish the regional growth fund.

In conclusion, I call on the Leader of The Nationals to put his legislation on the table and show us that his policy is not a Trojan Horse for cuts and closures to regional communities.

Water: northern Victoria projects

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to comments by the Auditor-General that the development of the business case for the food bowl modernisation project and the north–south pipeline commenced after the government had committed to the projects and approved the funding and that ‘this process is contrary to the explicit and mandatory business case guidance for projects such as these’, and I ask: why did the Premier allow \$1.75 billion of public money to be committed to these projects in complete contravention of the government’s own guidelines?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I know why the Leader of The Nationals is in two minds about this. It is because — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Yes he is; he is in two minds about it all right.

It is only a little while ago that the following statement was made:

The Victorian government should have built dams rather than adopt the food bowl modernisation project.

That is the officially endorsed Nationals view from their candidate for Murray Valley. The Nationals have always been — —

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. He should answer the question he has been asked.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier is debating the question, and I ask him to come back to answering the question as it was asked by the Leader of The Nationals.

Mr BRUMBY — Let me again remind the Leader of The Nationals to go back to the release of *Our Water Our Future*. That document went through all of the new water initiatives that we had committed to as the government, determined — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — We know the Leader of the Opposition's view. He is opposed to every single project about securing the long-term future of our state, whether it be deepening the channel, whether it be the food bowl or whether it be desalination — every single project — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier should ignore interjections from the Leader of the Opposition, who should cease making interjections across the table.

Mr BRUMBY — That document we released, which was very detailed, set out all the measures we were taking as a government to ensure that Victoria had adequate water supplies into the future but also to ensure that in the process of securing those supplies with the investment of public money we took the opportunity to renew, sustain and modernise our irrigation infrastructure. In contrast to the rhetoric, hot air and do-nothing attitude of those opposite, we actually deliver and take action in country Victoria.

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. He was asked a

question of very narrow scope dealing with the explicit and mandatory business case guidelines and why the government had ignored them. I ask you to have him the answer that question.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of The Nationals knows that it is not within the Speaker's authority to direct a minister, or the Premier, as to how they ought respond to a question. Indeed it is not stated in the standing orders that a minister, or the Premier, must answer a question. However, any answer given needs to be succinct, relevant and factual.

Mr BRUMBY — In contrast to the views that have been reported in the media in relation to the business case, the initial stage 1 business case, which was presented to water cabinet, said that the 225 gegalitres could be achieved. There has never been a debate about water savings, and indeed as recent studies confirm, we are actually more than achieving those savings. I do not have a copy with me, but if you look at the Victorian Farmers Federation press release at the time of its announcement — —

Mr Ryan interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — You don't believe them, either? They are no good either! Everyone is stupid except the Leader of The Nationals!

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier should ignore interjections from the Leader of The Nationals. I ask the Leader of The Nationals to cease interjecting across the table and to cooperate and facilitate the smooth running of question time.

Mr BRUMBY — If he were to check that press release, the Leader of The Nationals would see that the Victorian Farmers Federation not only endorsed the fact that 225 gegalitres of water savings were available but went on to say how savings beyond 225 gegalitres should be split up.

Mr Baillieu — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. He was asked a specific question about the findings in the Auditor-General's report. If the Premier is arguing that the Auditor-General is stupid, let him say so.

The SPEAKER — Order! The question, as asked, was about the north-south pipeline, the food bowl modernisation project and the Auditor-General's report. The Premier's answer is relevant to the question as asked, but he has been speaking for some time, and I ask him to conclude his answer.

Mr BRUMBY — The initial stage 1 business case that was presented to water cabinet in August 2008 said that the 225 gegalitres could be achieved for \$1.048 billion, using a 7 per cent escalation cost, and that exceeded the budget cost of \$1.004 billion. The board subsequently advised that with a 5.2 per cent per annum escalation cost the project would cost \$1.004 billion. The stage 1 business case was finalised by June 2009 — all of the key sections were completed during 2008 in accordance with cabinet's decision — and the 2009 business case, as the honourable member knows, is publicly available on the Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project website.

If the opposition had had its way, nothing would have happened on this project for years and Melbourne, Bendigo and Ballarat would all have either run out of water or have been on more severe restrictions. That would have been the effect of the policy remedy of the Leader of the Opposition and Leader of The Nationals.

Geelong: major events

Mr EREN (Lara) — My question is for 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 commitment to major sporting events in Geelong, and is the minister aware of any alternative plans?

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — I thank the member for Lara for his question. He is a great supporter of major events in Geelong and particularly of the world game. It gives me great pleasure to update the house and inform it that last month Australia presented its soccer World Cup bid book to FIFA headquarters in Zurich, Switzerland. The bid book specifies the use of two Victorian stadiums: the MCG and Skilled Stadium in Geelong. This is an enormous win for Geelong, and Skilled Stadium is included because the Brumby government stepped in and put the city forward.

The bid book contains plans for a significant \$320 million upgrade of Skilled Stadium, which would see it comply with FIFA requirements. This includes transforming the stadium to a 44 000 seat venue and then providing the legacy of 35 000 permanent seats post the World Cup event. This capital project alone is expected to generate \$928 million of economic activity along with over 500 jobs. The bid book also contains plans for two live sites in Geelong and upgrades to four local training venues, and it highlights the enormous branding and promotional opportunities for the city of

Geelong. These are the heights that the Brumby government wants Geelong to reach.

I was asked about alternatives. There is an alternative plan for Geelong — a plan which does not involve the World Cup or the world road cycling championships but which does provide a plan that proposes an air race along the Geelong foreshore. This plan was completely overshadowed last year as it was announced during the same week that Tiger Woods came to Melbourne.

Let me put these two plans into perspective. The 2006 World Cup in Germany provided television coverage in 214 countries, a cumulative audience of 26.29 billion viewers, and close to 3.5 million spectators at 64 games. FIFA World Cup games in Geelong would transform that city and provide a lasting legacy, not only for the world game but for the AFL and other major events in this great regional city. The Red Bull Air Race would give Geelong a couple of temporary 20-metre high air gates on Corio Bay. The FIFA World Cup would give Geelong a billion dollar-plus injection and create thousands of jobs.

After ringing every last dollar they could out of the air race estimates, the proponents put its figure at \$20 million — a dubious conclusion, to say the least. Even more so, given that the Red Bull Air Race would still cost considerably more yet make considerably less than, say, a Tiger Woods visit to Victoria, which event would get more international exposure, economic investment, tourist visitation and fan support? It is not rocket science.

It is little wonder that since this air race plan was announced not another word of it has been mentioned. For the benefit of the house, I seek leave to table a couple of documents: the details of Australia's World Cup bid, prepared by the Football Federation of Australia — an incredible opportunity for Geelong — and the alternative plan for major events in Geelong, a one-page press release by the Leader of the Opposition on the Red Bull Air Race.

Leave refused.

Mr MERLINO — The alternative plan, like those opposite, has gone absolutely nowhere. Only the Brumby government has a genuine major event strategy for Geelong. Only the Brumby government will fight for Geelong to make sure it is included in the biggest sporting event in the world. When it is announced in December that we have won it, it is going to be a great celebration for Geelong.

PERSONAL SAFETY INTERVENTION ORDERS BILL

Statement of compatibility

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) 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 Personal Safety Intervention Orders Bill 2010.

In my opinion, the Personal Safety Intervention Orders 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 main purposes of the bill are to:

protect the safety of victims of assault, sexual assault, harassment, property damage or interference, stalking and serious threats

to promote and assist in the resolution of disputes through mediation where appropriate.

The bill will repeal the Stalking Intervention Orders Act 2008.

Human rights issues

Human rights protected by the charter that are relevant to the bill

The bill has been developed taking into account the state's positive obligations to provide effective protection where an individual's physical security is at risk from another private individual. The bill establishes a system of intervention orders to provide additional protection than that available from the criminal law. In this way, the bill establishes a system that seeks to protect the individual's right to life (section 9 of the charter), right to protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (section 10), right to freedom of movement (section 12 of the charter) and right to liberty and security of the person (section 21 of the charter) where the person has been subjected to prohibited behaviour or stalking. Limitations on the rights of those who have engaged in prohibited behaviour or stalking must therefore be considered in this context.

Human rights engaged by the bill

Section 8 — Right to recognition and equality before the law

Section 8 of the charter establishes a series of equality rights. The right to recognition as a person before the law means that the law must recognise that all people have legal rights. The right of every person to equality before the law and to the equal protection of the law without discrimination means that the government ought not to discriminate against any person, and the content of all legislation ought not be discriminatory.

However, formal equality may cause unequal outcomes, so to achieve substantive equality, differences of treatment may be

necessary. To this end, section 8(4) of the charter provides that certain differential measures do not constitute discrimination, namely, measures 'taken for the purpose of assisting or advancing persons or groups of persons disadvantaged because of discrimination'.

Special provisions for children

Clause 18 engages section 8(3) of the charter, as it provides that the court cannot make a personal safety intervention order against a child under the age of 10 years, or if they do, it has no effect.

Importance of the purpose of the limitation

The limitation is designed to preserve the fundamental principle of criminal law that children under a certain age cannot be held criminally responsible. In all Australian states, including Victoria, the age of criminal responsibility is 10 years of age.

Nature and extent of the limitation

The nature and extent of the limitation is that children under 10 years of age cannot have an interim or final personal safety intervention order made against them. As a result, they cannot be found guilty of the offence of contravening a personal safety intervention order.

Relationship between the limitation and its purpose

The limitation is rational because it recognises the capabilities, maturity levels and specific rights relating to children, including the right under section 17(2) of children to such protection as is in their best interests and needed by reason of being a child. The limitation is proportionate because it applies only to children under 10.

Any less restrictive means reasonably available

None apparent.

On balance, the limitation is reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

Clause 49 engages section 8(3) of the charter, as it provides that a child who is not an applicant or a respondent to an order may only give evidence with the leave of the court. However this clause falls within section 8(4) as it constitutes a special measure taken to assist or advance children (as the court must take into account the impact of exposure to the court system and any possible harm resulting from this). In addition, the clause is consistent with section 17(2) of the charter.

Clause 71 engages section 8(3) of the charter, as this clause provides that the court must take into account different considerations when deciding whether to exclude a child respondent from the protected person's residence. However this clause falls within section 8(4) as it constitutes a special measure taken to assist or advance children. In addition, the clause is consistent with section 17(2) of the charter.

Clause 78 engages section 8(3) of the charter, as this clause provides that an order against a child respondent will usually not last longer than 12 months. However, this clause falls within section 8(4) as it constitutes a special measure taken to assist or advance children. In addition, the clause is consistent with section 17(2) of the charter.

Clause 107 engages section 8(3) of the charter, as this clause provides that a child who is the affected person or protected person or a family member of the respondent, affected person or victim may not be present in court unless the court orders otherwise. However, this clause falls within section 8(4) as it constitutes a special measure taken to assist or advance children by limiting their exposure to the court system. In addition, the clause is consistent with section 17(2) of the charter.

Clauses 15 and 85 engage and limit the right contained in section 8(3) of the charter as, under these clauses, only a child aged 14 and over may make an application for a personal safety intervention order or an application to vary, revoke or extend a personal safety intervention order with leave of the court.

Importance of the purpose of the limitation

The limitation is designed to enable children who are of an appropriate age and maturity to make their own application to the court where protection is required. The limitation recognises that children under 14 are generally less mature and therefore less capable of making such an application. In this respect, the provision is likely to be protective and consistent with the interests of children and hence consistent with section 17(2) of the charter.

Nature and extent of the limitation

The nature and extent of the limitation is such that children under 14 years of age cannot make an application on their own behalf. Nevertheless, a parent of a child, a police officer or any other person (with a parent's consent) may apply on behalf of a child, and a child may also be included in an application in respect of a parent (clause 17 of the bill). Accordingly, the nature and extent of the limitation is confined.

Relationship between the limitation and its purpose

The limitation is rational because it recognises the capabilities of children and maturity levels of children of different ages. The limitation is proportionate because it applies only to children under 14 and, in any event, others may apply on behalf of children if necessary.

Any less restrictive means reasonably available

None apparent.

On balance, the limitation is reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

Section 12 — Freedom of movement and Section 14 — Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief and Section 21 — Right to liberty and security of the person

This section of the statement discusses clauses which engage the right to freedom of movement in section 12. Certain clauses also engage the rights in section 14 and section 21 which are also discussed where relevant.

Section 12 of the charter protects various rights in relation to freedom of movement. These rights include the right to move freely within Victoria, the right to choose where to live in Victoria, and the right to be free to enter and leave Victoria. The rights conferred by section 12 apply only to persons who

are 'lawfully' within Victoria. As noted above, the state has a positive obligation to protect an individual's freedom of movement where the state is aware that this right is being threatened by the actions of a private individual.

Compulsion to attend court

Clause 20 and clause 59 engage and limit the right to freedom of movement as they require people to attend at court.

Clause 20 requires the respondent to attend court at a particular time and place for the hearing of an application. Clause 59 requires the author of an assessment report to attend court and give evidence, when required to do so by the person in respect of whom the report was prepared, or by a party to the proceeding (with leave of the court), or by the Children's Court.

Importance of the purpose of the limitation

The limitation in clause 20 is important to ensure the attendance and participation of a respondent in proceedings that may significantly affect them. It is also important that the court have access to the best evidence to inform its decisions.

The limitation in clause 59 is important to ensure that:

the court will have access to the best evidence when making decisions;

evidence about a person in a proceeding is able to be tested by that person and others.

Nature and extent of the limitation

Clause 20 requires a respondent to physically appear before a court to give evidence. The limitation is restricted in that it only applies to a respondent to an application for a personal safety intervention order. Non-attendance at court is not an offence; however, the court may make an order in the absence of a person and may also issue a warrant for the person's arrest (clause 21).

The limitation in clause 59 is confined to requiring the author of an assessment report to attend court and give evidence. This will only occur where a notice is issued under the clause, which will only be where they are requested to attend by the subject of the assessment report, the Children's Court, or a party (with leave of the court). The author of the assessment report will be guilty of contempt of court if they do not attend, but only if they are 'without sufficient excuse'.

Relationship between the limitation and its purpose

There is a direct relationship between the limitation and the purpose of ensuring the effective operation of the justice system. Further, in relation to clause 20 it is of benefit to the respondent to attend and participate in proceedings that may significantly affect them. In relation to clause 59, allowing the court the best available information, and allowing evidence to be tested is in the interests of justice.

Any less restrictive means reasonably available

None apparent.

On balance, the limitation is reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

Arrest and detention of a person

Clauses 21, 22, 23 and 101 limit a respondent's freedom of movement under section 12 of the charter as a respondent may be arrested and detained or held in custody, or bailed in accordance with the provisions of the Bail Act 1977.

The importance of the purpose of the limitations

The limitations that these clauses create are important because they are each designed to protect people from prohibited behaviour and stalking prior to a hearing for a personal safety intervention order or charges for contravention of an order being determined by the court.

The nature and extent of the limitation

The limitation created by clause 21 is confined to empowering a police officer to arrest and detain a respondent, hold them in custody, or bail them in accordance with the provisions of the Bail Act 1977. This may only occur subsequent to the issuing of a warrant by a registrar or magistrate in situations of urgency.

In the case of clause 101, when a police officer believes on reasonable grounds that a person has breached a personal safety intervention order, they can arrest and detain that person without warrant.

The relationship between the limitation and its purpose

The limitation imposed by both clauses is rational and proportionate, given that the legitimate objective of the provisions is to protect a person from further prohibited behaviour or stalking. Rights to bail remain available to a respondent. Thus, the limitation strikes a fair balance between the rights of a respondent and the rights of a person in need of protection.

Any less restrictive means reasonably available

None apparent.

On balance, the limitation is reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

Clauses 21, 50 and 101 also engage the right to liberty in section 21 of the charter which provides that a person must not be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention, and must not be deprived of his or her liberty except on grounds and in accordance with procedures established by law. However, none of these clauses limits the right to liberty because the arrest or detention is not arbitrary and the deprivation of liberty is on grounds and in accordance with procedures established by law. Given these carefully circumscribed limits, the arrest, detention, and any court authorised extension, is not arbitrary.

Clause 50 provides that a witness who fails to appear at a hearing may be arrested. This provision does limit a witness's right to freedom of movement. Clause 202 inserts the same provision into the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 and is modelled on section 194 of the Evidence Act 2008.

The importance of the purpose of the limitation

The limitation is important because it enables a court to examine relevant, competent and compellable witnesses who may hold relevant evidence or information which may bring

to light the truth of disputed facts and evidence. The ability to secure the presence of such witnesses is essential to the effective administration of the justice system and the right to a fair hearing.

The nature and extent of the limitation

Clauses 50 and 202 limit a person's freedom of movement to the extent that a person who has failed to attend proceedings may be apprehended and brought before a court.

The relationship between the limitation and its purpose

The limitation on the free movement of a person by requiring the presence of the person at court to give evidence is directly and rationally connected to the purpose of ensuring the effective administration of the justice system and the right to a fair hearing.

Less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose

None apparent.

Other relevant factors

The court's ability to issue warrants, fines or make other enforcement orders under clauses 50 and 202 is a discretionary one.

This is a reasonable limitation of the right to freedom of movement because the justice system would not be able to function if the courts did not have the power to compel persons to attend before them and give evidence.

Restricting where a person may be and who they may contact

Clause 67 engages and limits the right to freedom of movement by allowing a court to make an order that prohibits a respondent from going within a certain distance of a specified place or person or contacting a specified person.

The purpose of the limitation

The purpose of the limitation in clause 67 is to protect the protected person from prohibited behaviour or stalking.

The importance of the purpose of the limitation

The reason for the limitation is important, as it operates to protect a protected person from prohibited behaviour or stalking. The limit on the right is balanced against the protection of the right to life.

The nature and extent of the limitation

Although a respondent may be excluded from certain areas or places, or going within a distance of a certain person, a respondent can, under part 3 division 10 of the bill, apply for the variation or revocation of a personal safety intervention order.

The relationship between the limitation and its purpose

The relationship between the limitation and its purpose is both rational and proportionate, given that the legitimate objective of the provisions is to protect a protected person from a respondent by imposing conditions which restrict a

respondent from coming within a certain distance of a protected person and from accessing certain places.

Any less restrictive means available

None apparent.

On balance, the limitation in each clause is reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

In certain circumstances clause 67 could limit the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief (section 14). This is because the clause could result in a person being prohibited from being within a specified distance of a particular spiritual leader or religious centre.

The importance of the purpose of the limitation

The limitation is important as it operates to protect a person from prohibited behaviour and stalking. This is an important purpose that accords with the charter by promoting the right to life and liberty and security of the person, which imposes a positive obligation on public authorities to protect the lives and security of Victorians. The limit on sections 12 and 14 is balanced against the need to protect those whose physical security is at risk from another.

The nature and extent of the limitation

A magistrate may only make a final order where he or she believes on the balance of probabilities that a person has committed prohibited behaviour or stalking and is likely to do so again. A magistrate may only make an interim order where satisfied on the balance of probabilities that it is necessary to ensure the safety of an affected person or to preserve their property.

In addition, a respondent may apply for a variation or revocation of an order where circumstances have changed and may also appeal the making of an order. A final order will usually be of limited duration. Where the respondent is a student at a school, the court must consider the impact of any conditions on the respondent's schooling.

The relationship between the limitation and its purpose

The limitations imposed by these clauses are rational and proportionate, given that the legitimate objective of the provisions is to protect a person from further prohibited behaviour and stalking. The bill provides a number of procedural safeguards limiting the circumstances in which an order may be made.

Any less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve its purpose

None apparent.

On balance, the limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

Section 13 — Protection of privacy and reputation

Section 13 confers a number of rights regarding privacy. Specifically, a person has a right not to have their privacy, family or home unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with or their reputation unlawfully attacked.

Privacy encapsulates concepts of personal autonomy and human dignity. It encompasses the idea that individuals

should have an area of autonomous development, interaction and liberty — a 'private sphere' free from government intervention and from excessive unsolicited intervention by other individuals. Privacy comprises bodily, territorial, communications and information privacy.

Disclosure of personal information

There are various parts of the bill that require or permit the collection or disclosure of personal information from applicants and respondents and therefore engage the right to privacy:

Clause 15 provides that a police officer may apply for an intervention order on a person's behalf, including where the person has not consented to the making of the application.

Clause 70 requires the court to ask a respondent who is excluded from the protected person's residence to provide the court with an address for service. However, there is no penalty if the respondent fails to give such an address.

Clause 75 provides that the court may request a report from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, which may contain information on whether certain conditions of a personal safety intervention order would interfere with the respondent's schooling.

Clause 113 requires a registrar to serve a copy of a personal safety intervention order made against a carer or the carer's employer or organisation for whom the carer provides the care to the client.

Clause 130 requires that the Secretary to the Department of Human Services be given written notice where the court makes a personal safety intervention order that is inconsistent with a child protection order.

Clause 175 provides that the court may order that a copy of a personal safety intervention order be given to the principal of a school (if the respondent or protected person is a student) if it would assist to ensure the safety of the protected person, it is necessary for the effectiveness of the order, or is otherwise necessary in the interests of justice.

Clause 181 obliges certain public sector organisations to disclose information they hold about a respondent to a police officer if that police officer applies for such information in order to serve documents.

While these provisions interfere with a person's right to privacy, they do so in a manner that is neither unlawful nor arbitrary. This is because there are proper processes through which the information is divulged and the purpose of the interference is in accordance with the provisions, aims and objectives of the charter (particularly section 9 right to life and section 21 right to liberty and security of the person).

In addition, where a proceeding involves a child there is a restriction on publication of the proceedings to ensure that the child is not identified, contained in clause 123.

Privacy of the home

Clauses 114 and 116 of the bill engage the right to privacy of the home because they allow premises to be searched for a person without warrant where the police officer believes on reasonable grounds a person is present in contravention of a personal safety intervention order or to search for firearms or weapons. Clause 116 also allows for the search of a vehicle registered in the person's name.

Clause 117 engages the right to privacy of the home because it allows for a search of third parties' premises or vehicles for firearms or weapons under warrant.

The vehicle search powers potentially engage the right to privacy because a vehicle may be part of a person's private or domestic environment, particularly if it is privately owned.

Additionally, the exclusion of a respondent from a protected person's residence may have the effect of interfering with a respondent's right to privacy of the home.

However, in each instance, the right to privacy of the home is not limited as the interference is lawful and not arbitrary. The interference is not arbitrary because it is in accordance with the provisions, aims and objectives of the charter (particularly section 9, right to life, and section 21, right to liberty and security of the person) and is reasonable in the circumstances (where the intent is to protect a person from further prohibited behaviour or stalking). Further, in relation to the provisions which provide for exclusion of a respondent from a protected person's residence, any exclusion only occurs if a court considers it necessary in the circumstances.

Section 15 — Freedom of expression

Section 15 establishes a number of rights relating to freedom of expression. It protects the right to hold an opinion without interference and the right to seek, receive and impart both information and 'ideas of all kinds' anywhere and in any form. The general right is limited by section 15(3) which contains a specific limitation on the right to freedom of expression. This invites consideration of particular matters that are identified as ones which, when satisfied, specifically justify a restriction on the right.

The application of section 15(3) involves satisfying a number of conditions. First, the relevant restriction proposed on the right to freedom of expression must be lawful. Second, the relevant restriction must be imposed for a particular purpose, either to respect the rights and reputation of other persons, or in order to protect national security, public order, public health or public morality. Third, the relevant restriction must be 'reasonably necessary' for one of these purposes.

Clause 67(2)(d) (prohibiting contact with the protected person), clause 67(2)(a) (prohibiting the respondent from committing prohibited behaviour against the protected person) and clause 165 (court declaring a person to be a vexatious litigant) engage the right to freedom of expression under section 15(2) of the charter. However, clauses 67(2)(d) and 165 constitute lawful restrictions on the right to freedom of expression because each restriction is for the purpose of public order and the effective operation of the justice system.

Clause 67(2)(a) could prohibit a course of conduct that is demeaning, derogatory or intimidating, including derogatory taunts. This is a lawful restriction on the right to freedom of expression because it is reasonably necessary to respect the

rights and reputations of others. Moreover, the expression is only restricted between the respondent and protected person, and the respondent could apply to vary that condition of the order or for revocation of the order.

Evidence given by children

Clause 49 limits the right to freedom of expression, by providing that a child who is not an applicant or respondent in proceedings cannot give evidence without the leave of the court. The court must consider the desirability of protecting children from exposure to the court system and the harm that may occur if the child were to give evidence.

The importance and purpose of the limitation

The purpose of the limitation is to protect the best interests of the child, as provided for under section 17(2) of the charter.

The nature and extent of the limitation

The restriction on the giving of evidence only applies to persons aged under 18 years who are not the applicant or respondent to the order. The extent of the limitation is circumscribed because a court may grant leave for the child to give evidence, taking into account the possibility of harm to the child and the impact of exposure to the court system.

The relationship between the limitation and its purpose

There is a direct relationship between the limitation and the purpose of protecting the best interests of the child.

Any less restrictive means available

None apparent.

On balance, the limitation is reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

Restriction on reports of proceedings involving children

Clause 123 of the bill restricts the reporting of personal safety intervention order proceedings involving children where the reporting includes any identifying particulars, including photographs. This restriction is included to respect the rights and reputation of children and is therefore a lawful restriction under section 15(3) of the charter.

Section 20 — Property rights

Division 7 of part 3 governs the conditions that may be made in respect of personal safety intervention orders. Several clauses engage the right to property, including:

Clause 67 allows an order to include various conditions that may prevent the respondent from accessing their property, for example by prohibiting their presence within a specified distance of a place or person or by excluding the respondent from the protected person's residence.

Clause 69 allows an order to cancel a firearms authority or weapons approval.

Clauses 114, 115, 116, 117 and 120 provide for the search, seizure or surrender of firearms and other weapons where a relevant order has been made. Clauses 121 and 122 outline the consequences for the

property depending on the type of order that is made by the court.

However, in each instance, any deprivation of property is not arbitrary because it has a legitimate objective, the protection of an affected person — particularly their right to life — by limiting the risk posed in certain circumstances by possession of firearms and weapons. Therefore, to the extent that these sections allow for the deprivation of property, the deprivation is in accordance with law and there is no limitation on the right.

Section 24 — Fair hearing

Section 24 guarantees the right to a fair and public hearing. The right to a fair hearing applies in both civil and criminal proceedings and in courts and tribunals. The requirement for a fair hearing applies to all stages in proceedings and applies in relation to proceedings in any Victorian court or tribunal.

The purpose of the right to a fair hearing is to ensure the proper administration of justice. This right is concerned with procedural fairness (that is, the right of a party to be heard and to respond to any allegations made against them, and the requirement that the court or tribunal be unbiased, independent and impartial) rather than the substantive fairness of a decision or judgement of a court or tribunal (that is, the merits of the decision).

Applications for interim orders

Clause 37 limits section 24 of the charter because an application for an interim order may be determined by a court whether or not a respondent has been given notice of the application and whether or not the respondent is present at the time an order is granted.

Importance of the purpose of the limitation

The purpose of the limitation is to ensure the safety of an affected person from prohibited behaviour or stalking as swiftly as possible.

This is an important limitation, recognising that the state has a positive obligation to protect those whose physical security is at risk from another (in accordance with sections 9 and 21 of the charter).

Nature and extent of the limitation

The extent of the limitation is confined because the duration of an interim order is limited. The order ceases to have effect as soon as the application is finally determined, which is likely to occur within a short period of time.

Further, there are safeguards in place. These include that a court cannot make an interim order unless it is supported by oral or affidavit evidence (clause 38) (although it can if the application is made by telephone, fax or other electronic communication); and if a respondent is not present, a court must give them a written explanation of the relevant matters set out in the order (clause 40). In addition, the bill provides scope for an application to be made for the variation or revocation of an interim family violence intervention order (clause 85). In addition, a respondent will not be criminally liable for a breach of an interim order until it is served on the respondent.

Relationship between the limitation and its purpose

Given the importance of the context in which such orders are made, and the safeguards referred to above, the limitation is rational and proportionate to its purpose.

Any less restrictive means reasonably available

None apparent.

On balance, the limitation is reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

Direction to mediation

Clause 26 provides that a magistrate may adjourn proceedings and direct a matter to mediation. This clause does not restrict a person's right to a fair hearing, as the person will still have access to the court where the matter is assessed as not suitable for mediation or where the mediation fails (for example, because one party will not engage in the mediation process). A magistrate may also make an interim order at the same time as directing a matter to mediation.

Evidence

Section 24 is engaged, but not limited, by clause 47 which provides that the court may inform itself in any way it thinks fit, despite any rules of evidence to the contrary. Clause 47 does not apply to proceedings for contraventions of personal safety intervention orders, which are criminal in nature.

A court, even if not strictly bound by the rules of evidence, must act judicially and impartially. Clause 47 specifies that in determining what evidence to admit, a court must be satisfied that it is just and equitable to admit such evidence and that the probative value of the evidence is not substantially outweighed by the danger that the evidence might be unfairly prejudicial to a party, or misleading or confusing. Thus, while the right is engaged, it is not limited, because a person will still have the proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court after a fair and public hearing.

A further safeguard is provided for in clause 48, which states that where evidence is admitted in an affidavit or sworn statement, a party to proceedings may, with leave of the court, cross-examine a person who gives evidence by way of affidavit or written statement. This power is in addition to a party's general right to cross-examine witnesses.

A public hearing

Clause 123 of the bill restricts the reporting of personal safety intervention order proceedings involving children and clause 51 enables a court to close proceedings to the public. These clauses engage the right to a fair hearing which includes the right to a public hearing.

However, sections 24(2) and (3) of the charter enable a court or tribunal to exclude persons or the general public from a hearing and to prohibit the publication of judgements or decisions made by a court. Therefore, these provisions fall within a lawful restriction on the right to a public hearing and do not limit the right.

Accessibility of the court and court processes

Clause 52 (alternative arrangements for a proceeding) and clause 49 (evidence given by children) engage the right to fair

hearing to the extent that they amend the way in which evidence is presented to the court. The purpose of the sections is to allow those who may be intimidated by the court process to give the best possible evidence, and to protect children from unnecessary exposure to the court system, thus promoting values embodied in section 17 of the charter.

The clauses engage, but do not limit the right to a fair hearing because a person will still have the proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court after a fair and public hearing.

Vexatious litigants

Clause 165 provides that a court may, after hearing or giving a person an opportunity to be heard, make an order declaring a person a vexatious litigant which means that that person may not make an application for a personal safety intervention order without leave of the court. A person declared a vexatious litigant will also be restricted from applying for a family violence intervention order under the Family Violence Protection Act. The purpose of this further exclusion is to prevent a vexatious litigant seeking a similar order under the Family Violence Protection Act.

Clause 167 provides that a person who is declared to be a vexatious litigant may appeal against the order only with leave of the appeal court. Further, the person may apply to vary, set aside or revoke the order only with the leave of a magistrate of the court (clause 169).

The vexatious litigant provisions engage but do not limit the right to a fair hearing because the provisions do not restrict the person's right to a fair hearing before the court in relation to whether they are to be declared a vexatious litigant and there are a number of safeguards to ensure that the person is guaranteed a fair hearing in relation to challenging the order. The restriction on the person making applications for a personal safety intervention order does not engage the right because at the stage a person is not a party to civil proceedings in respect of the order. The provisions preserve the right of a person to seek leave to apply for a personal safety intervention order and the person will be able to do so where there is no abuse of process. This additional requirement for vexatious litigants exists to protect people from unsubstantiated claims and to ensure the effective operation of the justice system.

Right to be heard

It may be argued that clause 129 engages the right to a fair hearing because it enables the Children's Court to vary or revoke a personal safety intervention order of its own motion. However, there is no limitation on the right to a fair hearing because under clause 129(3) the court may only act on its own motion if notice is given of the court's intention and parties have the opportunity to be heard.

Conclusion

I consider that the bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities because, to the extent that some provisions may limit human rights, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

Rob Hulls, MP
Attorney-General

Second reading

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

It is vital to the functioning of any cohesive society that people are able to live together in harmony, with minimal disagreement and safety from violence. But as our state grows and we live closer together than ever before, our communities can be less connected.

Disputes that used to be resolved in conversation over the fence are appearing in our courts as applications for stalking intervention orders. These orders can prevent inappropriate behaviour, but they rarely resolve a disagreement and can ruin ongoing relationships. Disputing neighbours or school-mates may never patch things up.

Today the government introduces a new system of personal safety intervention orders. These will replace stalking intervention orders, and ensure that people in low-level neighbourhood disputes are encouraged to use mediation to find long-lasting solutions to conflict, while people at risk from future harm are kept safe by personal safety intervention orders, enforced by police and courts.

Make no mistake — this new system will not trespass on the government's recent amendments to family violence intervention orders. This new Personal Safety Intervention Orders Bill is only for disputes that happen outside the family. Nothing in this bill derogates from our commitment to treat family violence as a serious matter, requiring the attention of, and intervention by, the police and the courts.

The Personal Safety Intervention Orders Bill arises out of a comprehensive review of stalking intervention orders conducted by the Department of Justice. Stalking intervention orders were originally introduced to protect victims of pursuit-type stalking. We are all aware of victims of stalking who are followed, watched and contacted by a perpetrator who has formed a fascination with that particular victim. The impact that this behaviour can have on victims, and in some cases their friends, work colleagues, partners and families, is immense.

This is the behaviour that stalking intervention orders were introduced to address. Stalking intervention orders are allied with the criminal offence of stalking, and can be made in addition to police laying criminal charges. Stalking intervention orders were developed to protect victims of stalking from experiencing further victimisation.

However, the stalking intervention order system has 'stretched' from this original, narrow, purpose. Stalking intervention orders are now used in a range of situations that are not true 'stalking' at all — they are situations where difficult, challenging or inappropriate behaviour is being alleged. Often this occurs in neighbourhood disputes, where a dispute over a fence, a loud stereo, a barking dog or communal washing facilities can escalate into poor behaviour by one or both neighbours. Similarly, stalking intervention orders are used in school situations, to address bullying, jealousy or friendship breakdown. Sometimes neighbourhood disputes or schoolyard matters can escalate to true 'stalking' situations but often this is not the case.

So why are stalking intervention orders being used in these situations? For the large part, what may be described as 'neighbourhood disputes' or 'schoolyard disputes' often escalate because the people involved don't have the skills to resolve the matter themselves. In an increasingly dense urban environment, people are living closer together than ever before, without necessarily knowing how to get along with other members of the community. In the absence of knowing what else to do, people are increasingly turning to the court for a stalking intervention order. A broad reading of the definition of 'stalking' means that these disputes may be technically covered by the stalking intervention order system.

The Personal Safety Intervention Orders Bill 2010 has two aims:

- to better protect victims of serious inappropriate behaviour that threatens their safety where that behaviour occurs outside the family; and

- to refer appropriate disputes to mediation services.

Mediation is no longer an adjunct to the justice system. It is a core part of court business. Police, magistrates and registrars are increasingly advising parties to disputes about how the free, confidential mediation services provided by the Department of Justice may be able to help them. Mediation is becoming an option of first resort for interpersonal disputes where safety is not at risk. It is time to stop seeing mediation as an 'alternative' form of dispute resolution — it is now an integral part of the justice system and an 'appropriate' form of dispute resolution.

The Personal Safety Intervention Orders Bill will encourage the use of free mediation services in appropriate circumstances. The Department of Justice runs the Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria (DSCV), which provides free, confidential, and appropriate

dispute resolution to Victorians. This service is being expanded into justice centres across Victoria and many Magistrates Courts and Children's Courts have DSCV staff members available at court or via the telephone. The DSCV will conduct mediation assessments and mediations under the bill.

For the first time, magistrates will have a legislative power to direct parties to try to mediate appropriate disputes. The outcomes of the mediation process, and whether or not the parties attended mediation, can be taken into account by the magistrate when deciding whether to make a final personal safety intervention order.

However, it is important to ensure that only appropriate matters go to mediation. Obviously, it would be completely inappropriate for a case of genuine stalking to go to mediation. This would only re-traumatise the victim and reward the stalker. There is no 'dispute' to mediate between a stalker and his or her victim. The victim simply needs to be protected from the stalker. However, in some cases it will not be clear as to whether a matter should be mediated. If one party sprays another with a garden hose this is technically an assault — but does it mean that mediation is not appropriate?

For this reason, all matters that are referred for mediation will be assessed by trained professionals from the DSCV. These dispute assessment officers have specialist training and experience in determining whether a matter can or should be mediated. They do this by carefully interviewing each party involved. Dispute assessment officers also stay in touch with the parties in the lead-up to mediation. It is not uncommon for a dispute assessment officer to contact each party several times to ensure that they are thoroughly prepared for mediation.

To ensure that matters are assessed for mediation against consistent and transparent principles, I will be issuing ministerial guidelines under this bill. These guidelines will set out the most significant things that a dispute settlement officer must have regard to, and will include guidance about what matters should not be mediated.

One of the most important functions of the dispute assessment officer is to examine whether any power imbalances exist between the two parties and, if so, whether these can be rectified. For example, if one of the parties has an intellectual disability, they may be aided by having a support person present. The mediation process can also be adapted to ensure that a person with a disability can fully participate in the

proceedings. Similarly, if one or both of the parties is a child, it may be appropriate that they have a parent or guardian present. People with an intellectual disability and children do not need to miss out on the benefits of mediation, so long as it is assessed as appropriate and they are adequately supported. The DSCV adopts a flexible approach to mediations to ensure that they are tailored to the particular needs of the parties involved. If a power imbalance would prevent the mediation process being fair and it is not possible for the imbalance to be rectified, mediation will not proceed. These issues will be addressed in the guidelines.

A mediation assessment is the first step of any mediation process, but the process for assessing the suitability of mediation does not end there. Mediators constantly monitor whether the mediation process is fair and appropriate. If the dynamics of the situation alter and mediation is no longer appropriate, the mediator will end the mediation, and, in the case of court-directed mediation, send the matter back to court.

This bill gives magistrates the power to send parties to mediation, but this is not the only point in the system at which people may be referred to mediation.

When someone goes to a court to seek an intervention order, the first person they talk to is often a court registrar. Registrars will be encouraged, through the bill and new practice directions, to provide parties with information about mediation when the party first contacts the court. It will then be up to the party whether they wish to pursue mediation, a personal safety intervention order or both. These changes aim to ensure that each person gets the right response to their matter — with appropriate disputes going to mediation and dangerous matters going to court.

The government wants to encourage appropriate cases to go to mediation as early in a conflict as possible. We will continue to work with police, schools and local councils, to tell them about mediation and encourage them to refer people to mediation. This will help prevent disputes from escalating and save the parties time, money and emotional distress.

We are promoting the use of mediation to solve disputes. But mediation will not be appropriate in all cases. There is a genuine need for the bill to protect the victims of stalking and other forms of threatening and frightening behaviour.

The term 'stalking' has become stretched to the point where it is an umbrella term for many matters. A person will still be able to apply for a personal safety intervention order if he or she is being stalked, but the

grounds for an intervention order have been expanded to explicitly recognise some of the other forms of behaviour that had come to be covered by stalking intervention orders — such as harassment and property damage or interference. The aim of this is to allow stalking to revert to its natural meaning.

The bill will explicitly recognise one-off behaviours that pose a serious threat to safety — such as assault, sexual assault, and making a serious threat. This will ensure that victims of serious threatening behaviour have access to the personal safety intervention order system. The bill expressly protects persons with disabilities who may be threatened by their carer by making it clear that property damage or interference will encompass withholding access to a person's food or medication or withholding access to a person's wheelchair.

The bill will also address harassment that is undertaken through a third party. This may occur through both willing and unwilling third parties. For example, if a school bully teases or assaults a child once and then incites another child to tease or assault the same victim, the bully may be found to have harassed the victim and so become the respondent to a personal safety intervention order.

Although there are more types of behaviour covered by the bill, the aim is not to make the personal safety intervention orders system apply to more minor behaviour. As I have said, the aim of this bill is to divert non-dangerous behaviour to mediation in appropriate circumstances. Court hearings will be reserved, wherever possible, for serious matters that require court intervention. For this reason, final orders on the grounds of 'prohibited behaviour' — that is, assault, sexual assault, harassment, property damage or interference or making a serious threat — will only be made where the respondent's prohibited behaviour would cause a reasonable person to fear for his or her safety. This will insert an element of objective risk — a person who is afraid, for example, of all people of a certain ethnic background will not be able to obtain an order simply because a person of that ethnic background keeps moving their wheelie bin. The court must agree that the behaviour is objectively frightening.

The court may also refuse to make an interim or a final personal safety intervention order if the court believes that it is not appropriate to make an order in all the circumstances of the case. For example, it may be inappropriate to make an order against a young child if the child is too young or immature to understand and comply with the order. In such cases, the magistrate

may decline to make the order even if the grounds are technically made out.

This bill has a particular focus upon resolving schoolyard matters. I was concerned to hear how common intervention orders are becoming in schools. I have been told that some children and their parents are applying for intervention orders because of schoolyard disputes or friendship breakdown. In some of these cases, it is an appropriate response to bullying, but many school kids just do not know how to resolve their disputes. There must be a role for mediation in many of these cases.

Before this bill, there was no formal process to enable courts, schools and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to work together to manage an intervention order. Courts are making orders without always knowing what the impact of that order will be on the parties' school education. The court is also unable to notify the school when an order is made.

The Personal Safety Intervention Orders Bill enables the courts, schools and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to work together. The aim is to ensure that school students can continue their education with the minimum level of disruption — while still protecting children. The bill will require the court to consider the impact of the proposed conditions of a personal safety intervention order made against a child on that child's education or training.

In some cases, the court may form the view that the school should know that a personal safety intervention order has been made. The bill allows the court to order that a copy of the personal safety intervention order be given to a principal of the school. The courts can make these decisions on a case-by-case basis.

The Personal Safety Intervention Orders Bill completes the split between family violence and non-family violence intervention orders, as recommended by the Victorian Law Reform Commission in its *Review of Family Violence Laws — Final Report*. The bill provides that matters between family members must be heard under the Family Violence Protection Act and matters between non-family members must be heard under the Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act. If a party applies for an order under the wrong system, the magistrate will, in some circumstances, be able to continue to hear the matter under the correct system. This is to make the process less bureaucratic for the parties.

Whilst the bill is a separate system to the Family Violence Protection Act, it adopts many of the

procedural reforms of that act. The aim is to have consistent processes under both acts where appropriate.

The Personal Safety Intervention Orders Bill contains a new system of vexatious litigant orders, to mirror the system in the Family Violence Protection Act. The effect of being deemed a vexatious litigant will be that the vexatious litigant must seek leave from the court before they can make an application in relation to the person named in the order or their children in family violence intervention order or personal safety intervention order proceedings. The vexatious litigant order applies to both systems to prevent a person who is banned under one system from continuing their vexatious behaviour under the other. Meritorious applications will still be able to proceed with the leave of the court.

I wish to make a statement under section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975 on the reasons for altering or varying that section by this bill.

Clause 182 of the bill provides that it is the intention of clauses 95 and 97 of the bill to alter or vary section 85 of the Constitution Act.

Clause 95 provides that if the applicant for a personal safety intervention order was not the protected person and that applicant is appealing a decision, then the appeal cannot proceed unless the protected person or those with responsibility for the protected person (such as a parent or guardian) consents to the appeal. The reason for varying the Supreme Court's jurisdiction in this manner is to ensure that a protected person or a person with the responsibility for a protected person can decide what matters are appealed on their behalf or on behalf of those for whom they have responsibility. However, nothing in clause 95 prevents appeals on the grounds of jurisdictional error.

Clause 97 provides that there is no further appeal from an appeal decision of the Supreme Court. This is appropriate, as the rights of the parties in such cases have been tested in a hearing by the president of the Children's Court and the Supreme Court and further appeals could result in a proliferation of proceedings. This may result in the attendance of those subject to prohibited behaviour or stalking at numerous traumatic court hearings. If new facts and circumstances emerge, then the respondent for an order may seek a variation or revocation of the personal safety intervention order from the Magistrates Court. However, nothing in clause 97 prevents appeals on the grounds of jurisdictional error.

The Personal Safety Intervention Orders Bill represents a major reform of intervention orders. This bill will do two things. It will provide protection for those who need an intervention order to protect them from a non-family member. It will also — in appropriate cases — promote the use of mediation to address whatever conflict underlies the behaviour that has led people to seek an intervention order.

Because of the substantial nature of these reforms, I have instructed my department to conduct a review of this bill two years after it commences.

This bill has a default commencement date of 1 January 2012. This is to allow time to establish the systems and processes to support this new system of law — such as regulations, court rules and training and instructions to magistrates and registrars. This date is the last possible date that the bill can commence, and it may commence earlier.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all of the stakeholders and members of the public who contributed to the review of non-family violence intervention orders. I believe that the Personal Safety Intervention Orders Bill is a much stronger, more effective and more practical piece of law reform for your contribution.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr CLARK (Box Hill).

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 23 June.

APPROPRIATION (2010/2011) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 8 June; motion of Mr BRUMBY (Premier).

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in support of the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill and offer praise for this government's 2010–11 budget.

Here is a fact: this state remains resilient in the face of the global financial crisis. An explanation of that fact is quite simple: strong economic leadership has steered the Victorian economy in the right direction. Taxes are coming down, borrowings are coming down and thousands of jobs are being created.

This AAA-rated 2010 state budget is about ensuring that individuals and families, whether they live in

Forest Hill, Geelong or Bendigo, have access to vital services such as health, education and transport.

The 2010 state budget also acknowledges the need to build the right infrastructure for growth, to protect the Victorian lifestyle we have all come to love and expect.

The budget's centrepiece is a record \$4 billion investment in our health system, in partnership with the commonwealth government. It is a health budget that sets up our hospitals and health services for the next decade. Of particular note is the forthcoming funding for the Box Hill Hospital redevelopment, which was announced last year. The \$407.5 million redevelopment when completed will deliver 506 beds, which is an increase of 113; six new operating theatres and four refurbished theatres; a new and significantly larger emergency department, with 19 additional cubicles; 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 endoscopy laboratories; and a dedicated precinct for women's and children's services. Most importantly, it will provide additional capacity to care for around 7000 extra people each year.

Mr Wynne — Seven thousand?

Ms MARSHALL — Seven thousand people each year. Yesterday at question time I was listening carefully to the Minister for Health respond to a question that was asked. I refer to part of his answer, which was:

This government prides itself on providing every single hospital in every single year of its time in office with a funding increase. Every single hospital across the length and breadth of this state has received more support each and every year we have been in office. That is the approach we have taken, and this year's budget was no different, not just to recurrent funding but also to important capital works.

... our challenge is always to make sure that the quality of our buildings matches the quality of the care provided by our dedicated staff. That is why, particularly in rural and regional communities, this year's budget built on a strong record of investment, a strong record of giving to country health the support that is necessary to keep buildings efficient and to give dedicated clinicians the tools, if you like, the practical support to treat more patients and to provide better care.

This partnership and investment will provide new hospitals, more doctors, more nurses, more ambulance services and extra hospital beds. It will provide more outpatient and elective surgery services.

From speaking with the residents of Forest Hill at one of my mobile offices recently and from the responses to my community surveys I know that health is an

important issue. This government is providing funding to ensure people can get the treatment they need when they need it.

I am excited that this budget sees the continuation of the \$1.9 billion Victorian schools plan. This year's budget saw Parkmore Primary School allocated an additional \$3 million on top of the funding allocated in the 2009–10 budget to complete the school's modernisation project in one build. After almost 12 months of lobbying I was overjoyed when the Premier joined me at Parkmore Primary School to make this announcement. The funding for this project has been the topic of numerous discussions between me, the fabulous principal, Glenda Prior, and the school community. Together we have worked hard to ensure the school has the 21st century facilities it needs to give students a 21st century education.

It was amazing to see the positive reaction of parents, teachers and students, with one parent coming up to say to me, 'It was so great to see that you care as much about this school as we do'. The principal of Parkmore Primary School, Glenda Prior, wrote in a letter to me:

Parkmore Primary School community would like to thank and acknowledge the support Kirstie Marshall has given to our school in the seeking of additional funding.

The extra funding allocated in the 2010 state budget will enable our school modernisation program to be completed in a single staged project.

We are very excited about this project; an enormous amount of time and effort has gone into developing plans for the new school building and grounds. The fruition of these plans will further enable exemplary teaching and learning to continue catering for our learners in the 21st century.

This was a great win for the school and also for the wider community, which uses the school's facilities out of school hours on a regular basis.

The 2010 state budget delivers a record \$6.4 billion for better roads and public transport across the state, including new trams, more stations and road projects to reduce congestion. Locked in is an \$807.6 million investment in 50 new low-floor trams and a new tram maintenance and storage depot at Preston. The rollout of 38 new trains as part of the Victorian transport plan will also continue, with new stabling yards under construction across the metropolitan network to improve the efficiency of the network.

New infrastructure and increased tram and train stock will help deliver timetable changes, which will see more services to some of the busiest lines to meet demand in peak periods. These increased services and timetable changes will have a flow-on effect to the people of Forest Hill electorate who are reliant on public transport, particularly assisting those who use the

Belgrave and Lilydale lines or the no. 75 tram route which goes from Vermont South to and from the city.

The \$4.3 billion for the regional rail link, which is the biggest addition to the rail network since the city loop, will deliver a brand-new rail line through Melbourne's growing west to improve capacity and reliability. The impact of this project will be far reaching as it will free up the city loop and inner city lines and will have a flow-on effect for people travelling to and from the central business district and all parts of Melbourne. Unprecedented numbers of commuters are now using public transport. Members on this side of the house know that investment needs to be made now, and that is what this budget and the Victorian transport plan illustrate.

Safety on our public transport network is as important as the enhanced infrastructure. I recall late last year being approached at a mobile office by a constituent who was distressed that her teenage son had been harassed and verbally assaulted at a train station on his way home from school. I am pleased to assure her that this budget has brought forward funding for 50 new transit police for the network and has given the Chief Commissioner of Police capacity to further boost transit police numbers with the government's \$673.6 million commitment to increase front-line police by 1966 officers. This is the biggest one-off boost to police officer numbers in Victoria's history.

Victoria is the safest state in Australia with the lowest crime rate. I understand that this government knows that we all need to feel safe. That is why increasing police numbers is so important and is yet another of the many great aspects of this state budget.

I commend the government on yet another budget that delivers so much for the people of Forest Hill. Make no mistake: people in the eastern suburbs will remember that it was a Labor government's budget that delivered better school facilities; safer roads; a greener, more efficient transport network; and unparalleled police presence in our streets, ensuring safety for all of our communities. The state budget of 2010–11 is a great result for the Forest Hill community as this government continues to invest heavily in health care, education and community safety, which underpin family life in Victoria.

I just want to read a couple of quotes on the budget. A statement from the Brotherhood of St Laurence left a huge impression on me. Executive director Tony Nicholson said on 4 May this year:

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is encouraged by the emphasis of today's Victorian state budget on ensuring that all Victorians can share in the more prosperous times it forecasts.

Kindergarten Parents Victoria said:

Kindergarten Parents Victoria applauds the state government's decision to invest \$82.6 million to support early years services in Victoria as announced today.

'This comprehensive package will help ensure that all Victorian children have access to a quality kindergarten program ...'

That is a statement from Emma King, CEO of Kindergarten Parents Victoria, on 4 May.

The Australian Industry Group said that business welcomes the tax reductions. On 4 May Victorian director Timothy Piper said:

... they will go some way to alleviating the financial burden on local businesses.

I think this is an absolutely fantastic budget for Victorians. I was particularly proud of the investment and the success that we have had in the electorate of Forest Hill. We have seen some great changes recently in what is a fantastic part of the eastern suburbs. I commend the bill to the house.

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — I rise to make a contribution to debate on the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill. This will be the first time in more than a decade that I have not responded to the state budget as a shadow minister. As those in the house recall, I have been the shadow minister for multicultural affairs, for housing, for community services, for aged care and for health. I have now retired from the front bench in preparation for my retirement from this Parliament later this year. This gives me the ultimate freedom therefore in my response of traversing portfolios and focusing on my electorate of Caulfield. It is an electorate I have very proudly represented for over 14 years. It is an electorate I hope to leave in the very capable hands of David Southwick, who has now been preselected for the seat of Caulfield. I think he will be a very fine member.

The relationship I enjoy with my constituency is, I believe, based on trust and mutual respect: respect that is not partisan in nature but for the individual, and trust that shows that I have endeavoured to act in my constituents' best interests. Trust forms the basis of nearly all relationships, whether they be personal relationships, employee-employer relationships, pupil-teacher relationships, child-parent relationships or indeed — and importantly in the context in which I speak today — people-government relationships.

The trust between a people and its government forms the basis of our democratic way of life. Political parties voted by the people to govern take on the role of acting

for the people and in the people's best interests. It is a position of trust and respect which by its very nature is based on truth and honesty so that people have faith in their government and trust their government. Once that trust is broken, the relationship, like any other, starts to crumble and respect is lost. In the case of a people-government relationship, the people then start seeking an alternative party to trust with the business of government and the spending of their taxpayer dollars to provide them with the basic services they need to maintain their health and wellbeing, their standard of living, their standard of education and their safety.

Sadly, we have come, here in Victoria, to an era of arrogance, spin doctoring, data manipulation, pork-barrel vote buying, policy plagiarism, cover-up and a lack of honesty. Hardly a recipe for instilling trust! The loss of faith, respect and trust which has ensued will have an outcome at some time. I think the Premier and his ministers are all too aware of this. However, they have chosen their course. They have chosen the means by which they have tried to hoodwink, to mislead and to cover up to hide the truth from Victorians. On this they will be judged.

As Paul Austin has written of John Brumby:

He has been in the policy engine room of this government throughout its 11 years in office. His problem is that when he talks about the problems confronting Victoria, he is talking about problems that have emerged or persisted or worsened on his watch.

Paul Austin went on to say:

There is a chant getting louder ... and it goes like this: where have you been? What have you been doing all this time? Why did it take you so long to get on to the water crisis? Why did you not order more trains well before now, when you knew the system was failing? Why have you only now promised a serious boost to police numbers, when drunken violence and vicious assaults have been an obvious problem on the streets for years?

Anyone in Victoria would be justified in asking, in addition to these questions, the following: why have you now promised to set up an anticorruption commission, after years of issues of corruption being raised here in Victoria and especially after the Leader of the Opposition, Ted Baillieu, has promised such an independent body, and why has the Brumby government steadfastly denied there is a need until now, when we are just six months out from the election?

There have been years of appalling reports in relation to child protection and appalling cases being raised about the abuse of children over the entire time of this government. I recall talking about some of those cases

while I was shadow Minister for Community Services, and in some instances they pretty much reduced me to tears, they were so appalling. Then why did it take an Ombudsman's report exposing the depth of violence and abuse being faced by children in care and exposing the deep flaws in the child protection system to convince the Brumby government to finally agree to implementing the Ombudsman's recommendations — recommendations that had mostly been made before?

When the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee was looking at the budget for this year, why did the Minister for Community Services, when asked about the 1100 abused children who have not had their cases processed, conceal the information in a blatantly disrespectful manner, according to reports, and cause a letter to be written to the chair of the PAEC demanding that she be recalled to give fresh evidence to the committee?

Why, after the years of questions being asked by the opposition about hidden waiting lists in our hospital — and I recall initiating some of those questions back in October 2007 — and given the obvious hiding of poor performance and the thousands of patients being denied proper and timely treatment, did it take the outing of such rotting at the Royal Women's Hospital and at other hospitals for this government to belligerently call for an inquiry and then only appoint a public servant to audit the remainder of the hospital system, neatly hiding the ongoing practice of hidden waiting lists? Can performance figures in the budget really be believed? What about the failure to report the thousands of people actually waiting to get on the elective surgery waiting lists in our public hospitals?

Why, after 11 years of our ambulance service being unable to meet code 1 response times to treat the most seriously ill, were the target times recorded in budget papers pushed out further, only to put patients at even greater risk? Despite this, response times are still not being met. And why, despite the claims of increased funding through the budget for more ambulance staff, have our ambulance paramedics' pleas for more mobile intensive care ambulance specialists in places such as South Gippsland been ignored? Why are these pleas being ignored? Is this the result of restructuring of our MICA service carried out by this government, which paramedics claimed would put lives further at risk?

Why, after years of claiming Victoria as the safest state in the nation, did we wake up to a *Herald Sun* front page on Monday this week that talks about the awful truth and the violent incidents Victorians have not been told about? This is demonstrated by claims that, for example, in the local government area in the electorate

of Caulfield according to the 000 service, the rate of assaults per 100 000 was, 103 per cent more than recorded by police. With the lowest spending per capita in the country, it is no wonder Victoria Police now claims a failure of resources from the Brumby government. This has occurred in my electorate.

I have received calls from people who have called police on numerous occasions, only to have police tell them, 'We do not have the resources to respond to your need'. This was the case even with a young woman who had been raped. The police suggested the constituent call the 000 service, but there was no response from that service either. I think we have a very serious problem.

Why did it take a coalition policy announcement to increase police numbers for the Brumby government to engage in yet another policy plagiarism and make a similar announcement? A paucity of police has raised the hackles of Caulfield constituents. They claim local police say they simply do not have the resources to attend incidents of local crime and to call the 000 service, which also cannot respond.

Why do my constituents have to put up with late and cancelled trains on the Frankston and Sandringham lines in their efforts — which are often in vain — to get to work on time? Why has there now been an apparent explosion in the number of violent assaults on our trains? The Premier admitted in this house yesterday that it will be years before his government, if re-elected, would be able to provide the funding for the sort of protection on trains offered in the coalition policy. In this place, he and his ministers have tried to defend the indefensible. I suppose we will be treated to yet another stint of policy plagiarism as the public goes into meltdown on this issue.

Finally, why did the Brumby government sign a Council of Australian Governments agreement to increase kindergarten hours for four-year-olds but fail to make a significant increase in capital funding to provide additional infrastructure needed to deliver on such a policy and instead try to pass the buck for its policy decision to local councils like Glen Eira City Council, which is in my electorate?

The Premier has not just been here for three years as the Labor Party likes to try to claim; he has been here for 11 long years and has failed to act, hoping the spin, obfuscation and cover up would get him over the line. The Brumby government, according to the media and reflected in community comments, is vulnerable and failing in accountability and honesty on basic issues such as water, hospitals, trains, roads, child protection

and law and order. All the while, this Premier takes extended summer holidays and with gay abandon just six months from an election goes winging his way around the world on what may turn out to be his swan song.

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — Today it is an honour to talk on the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill. It is another good budget that focuses on continuing our investment in infrastructure and continues the strong AAA credit rating which was predicted by the shadow Treasurer to never arrive. He said we would never have a AAA credit rating, but no-one else agrees with the shadow Treasurer. Standard and Poor's and so forth all told us that the AAA credit rating has been given to us and would be continued to be given to us throughout the years. We have maintained that AAA credit rating with a surplus of \$872 million in 2010–11, averaging \$1.2 billion in the following years. As we know, those surpluses will be used to further invest in infrastructure.

If you look at the program for 2010–11, you see there is about \$9.5 billion worth of infrastructure proposed, which will secure around another 30 000 jobs. We are looking at major water projects which we have discussed at length in the house today; we are looking at major new hospitals, including the Bendigo hospital, Box Hill Hospital and Parkville Comprehensive Cancer Centre and other agreed reforms under the Council of Australian Governments agreement.

We are also looking at the completion of further upgrades to 533 schools across the state. We are looking at the new regional rail link, which will deliver substantial benefits to suburban train catchers like those in my area.

Specifically, the budget addresses certain things in my electorate, such as two substantial lots of money for road funding, including the Clyde Road duplication, which is something for which the Minister for Roads and Ports fought hard. I know the people of Berwick are very grateful for it. Some in the Liberal Party think it is not good enough, but at this stage it has not committed anything to any project there. It is fine to sit there and criticise, but you have to put forward a policy.

We have also had funding for the Hallam South Road upgrade. That is another important road which services both the large suburban area and large industrial area of Hallam. It is important for jobs and so forth.

There was also \$7 million in the budget for the completion of the Timbarra Secondary College in my electorate, which has a long and tortured history. It is

finally there; it was committed to before the election of 2006. The school is going ahead in leaps and bounds.

The funds provide for three basketball courts. I know the Oatlands Basketball Club and others will be very grateful for them, because they have been waiting 15 years for the Casey City Council to deliver a basketball facility in the city of Casey. This is the largest junior basketball club in Victoria. It had to wait 15 years, but now 90 per cent of the funding is being provided by the state and federal governments, not the local council, which has carried on like a pork chop and has delivered nothing in this space, which is very disappointing.

I went to an opening last week at Oatlands Reserve, where another two soccer grounds are being built. Again, the land, which is worth a substantial sum of money, has been rented to the City of Casey at a peppercorn rent. This land, which is 9 hectares in area, has made up for the lack of foresight and strategic planning by the City of Casey. The state government has had to fill the vacuum and provide sporting facilities. That is pretty disappointing because the City of Casey is always very good at telling the world how marvellous it is, but unfortunately it has not delivered the goods.

Mr Mulder interjected.

Mr DONNELLAN — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I refute those allegations by the member. I think it is quite disgraceful to suggest I would tamper with any tender. It is totally inappropriate, and I ask the member to withdraw those remarks.

Mr Mulder — I withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! I remind the member for Polwarth not to interject in that manner.

Mr DONNELLAN — It is disgraceful. I would not suggest those things of others.

I will go back to the budget and the stakeholder comments, which are incredibly positive. This is obviously one for the member for Scoresby, who went around when the budget was put out with some absolutely hysterical comments. What did he say? There were some very interesting comments. He said that the AAA rating was at risk, that the budget was a house of cards and that Labor governments cannot be trusted when it comes to promises on jobs. He 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.

The Leader of the Opposition in a press conference said 'the financial situation that Victoria finds itself in now is such that we may be threatening the state's AAA rating'. That was the comment. It is not the actual settings we have set in the budget. It is a load of absolute rubbish. One day later the member for Scoresby said in a press release:

On these forecasts Victoria's AAA credit rating is now under serious threat.

The real arbiters of such stuff — Standard and Poor's — totally refuted such statements and 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.

I think that very much cuts right across the drivel, the absolute rubbish that was perpetrated by the opposition when the budget came out, specifically the member for Scoresby and the member for Hawthorn.

Let us look at what the Brotherhood of St Laurence said:

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is encouraged by the emphasis of today's Victorian state budget on ensuring that all Victorians can share in the more prosperous times it forecasts.

That is very, very positive. The Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry said:

... the 2010-2011 state budget has delivered business a short-odds trifecta via modest cuts in business taxation and WorkCover premiums, selected infrastructure boosts and a strong surplus ...

...

The 3.5 per cent WorkCover premium cut will benefit nearly all Victorian businesses ...

That is also very positive.

I turn to what the Master Builders Association of Victoria said. The association is not renowned for generous comments about the state government in relation to regulation and so forth and usually gets a little bit grumpy along the way. A press release quotes Brian Welch, the executive director, and states:

... the Master Builders Association welcomes the state government's budget announcements to expand the Victorian first home bonus scheme and cut payroll tax and WorkCover premiums.

...

The \$2000 boost to the first home bonus and the regional first home bonus will improve housing affordability across Victoria.

That is another very positive statement.

The Property Council of Australia 'applauds the level of new investment in transport infrastructure' and says Victoria has 'debt levels at the very low levels'. That is the independent commentators saying it is an incredibly positive budget.

Those comments are certainly a contrast to the ongoing drivel that the opposition put forward after the budget was released in the form of statements such as, 'We are looking at losing our AAA credit rating', 'We are looking at a recession', 'We could not work out what the budget surplus was so we had three or four goes at that' and 'We could not read the right page'. It was said there was not going to be any jobs growth, even though we have had jobs growth of about 100 000. Supposedly you cannot trust Labor on jobs growth reaching 30 000. I thought that was a modest projection for jobs growth, and although we had opposition members saying it was not possible, we have beaten it by three times the projection. You would have to query whether the member for Scoresby and his ilk are capable of making economic assessments in the first place.

Then we had what I thought was the most hysterical claim. On 2 September 2009 the Australian Bureau of Statistics data showed that Victoria was leading the nation in recovering from the global financial crisis, but on the same day the shadow Treasurer issued a media release in response to the national accounts data suggesting that it was full of factual inaccuracies and was out of date information. In other words, he was suggesting that the Australian Bureau of Statistics lies and collects false information to make this government look good. That is the implication, which is quite ridiculous and quite juvenile. If the statistics are positive, obviously you would have to suggest that every time they are positive the opposition will come out and say the statistics are no good. However, if they are negative, I have no doubt the opposition will jump up and say, 'We believe in those'. The opposition cannot have an each-way bet. Opposition members have got to put their money on the nose; they cannot just keep having each-way bets, because they will never win enough by doing that.

Let us look at how the economy is travelling now. It is a very good news story and would be quite positive if both the opposition and some of the scribes would actually have a look at what is happening. We have superb economic data at the moment. If we look at the March quarter 2010 national accounts — the statistics

which it is suggested are obviously false but which we know are not; it just suits the opposition to suggest that — we see that Victoria's economy has again defied the ongoing impact of the global financial crisis with a state final demand of 6.4 per cent over the past year — 2 per cent better than the Australian average across the board. That is very good news, and that would suggest that the money we put into infrastructure has underpinned employment in this economy, has underpinned the engineering and construction sector and has underpinned the property services and business services sector. The budget has been a very good buffer against some drop-offs in exports and things like that. It was a very well-crafted budget.

If you look at private business investment in Victoria, you see that it has also recorded a rise of 14.7 per cent over the past 12 months — from March 2009 to March 2010. Again, that is the largest of all the states. You cannot get better than best. They are strong economic figures, and it is a pity others do not see those things.

In the past 12 months we have seen 109 700 new jobs created in Victoria. This is the 100 000 that the member for Scoresby suggested we would not even get near. He suggested we would not even get near 30 000, so we have tripled it. At the end of the day these geese continue to pontificate upon economic analysis and forecasting and get it wrong every time. In addition, more than 70 per cent of all full-time jobs in this country were created in Victoria. That is a startling statistic, and it highlights how well this government has managed the economy, managed its budgets and focused the budgets on job creation. These are unarguably brilliant figures.

I want to look briefly at regional jobs growth. Over the year — this is statistics again from the March quarter — employment in country Victoria rose by a strong 16 755 persons, or 2.5 per cent, and again exceeded the national average of 0.8 per cent. In the quarter ending April 2010, the unemployment rate in country Victoria was 5.9 per cent, which was again below the national average of 6.2 per cent. Consumption in Victoria rose very strongly in the March quarter. If you look at housing affordability, Melbourne has maintained its advantage over Sydney and Perth; and if you look at housing starts, you see that Victoria accounted for 32 per cent of dwelling starts across the country. These figures are unarguably positive.

At the end of the day it is not a matter of these statistics all being made up by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, as the member for Scoresby would have you believe. These statistics are collected properly and

collated in a methodical way. Probably the most offensive thing that has happened in recent years, which the opposition has put forward, was when the member for Scoresby claimed in Parliament in September 2008 that Members Equity bank was obtaining a government backed bail-out.

How offensive and dangerous that is! Here we have someone whose every economic forecast has been incorrect who is now having a go at a bank to try to create absolute havoc. It is disgraceful. As a person who has deposits at Members Equity I find it offensive that someone like the shadow Treasurer would come into this place and try to create a run on a bank. He might think it is 'Ha-ha, very funny', but it is not the type of thing you do. It is totally irresponsible. It suggests that he is not fit to hold the role of shadow Treasurer. When you go around trying to create runs on banks it is an absolute disgrace. The truth is there was no bailout. All the member did was create panic among deposit-holders, mums and dads who had their money in there, and he thought that was very funny, ha-ha.

This is an opposition which will say anything and do anything and unfortunately get it wrong every time. If you look at the history of what I mentioned today, you see that every economic forecast opposition members have made has been wrong.

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) — I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Appropriations (2010/2011) Bill 2010. For 11 long years Labor has had the opportunity to invest in and for Victoria. During these 11 long, dark years, Labor has collected over \$340 billion in taxes, charges and fines, and what has been done with this money and all this opportunity? Unfortunately, as Victorians discover on a daily basis, very little.

Since its election in 1999 Labor has watched its budgetary spending capacity increase from \$19 billion to almost \$45 billion per annum. This is an increase of about 230 per cent. The first of many questions that this raises is: can Victorians rightfully feel that they have received a 230 per cent increase in service delivery? Other questions immediately follow: can Victorians feel they have received a 230 per cent increase in good governance; a 230 per cent increase in public safety; a 230 per cent increase in the quality and efficiency of our public transport system, education system or health system; or a 230 per cent increase in the quality of Victoria's road and rail infrastructure?

Hardworking Victorians from Wonthaggi to Wodonga and from Mallacoota to Mildura know that they have not received such increases and they are all hurting. We

have heard contributions that make plain the selective hearing of this government. Every day I speak to and hear from Victorians, and they are hurting badly. We have an arrogant government that simply does not want to listen to Victoria or Victorians.

The Premier and his Treasurer in recent weeks have had the audacity, the cheek and the gall to parrot, ad nauseam, the line that they are responsible economic managers and that they have over the course of their government been prudent economic managers. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, it was interesting to note that the Premier, not surprisingly, during this year's budgetary announcements did not take a curtain call in respect of Labor's debt achievements. The budget papers indicate that John Brumby and his Labor government will reach the \$32 billion debt mark, which matches the finest work of guilty Labor governments of old. This year's budget papers show that state debt has increased more than eightfold in six years and will reach just under \$32 billion in 2014.

With my tongue firmly planted in my cheek may I offer my congratulations to the Premier and his ministers. They have achieved a level of success that only their predecessors John Cain, Joan Kirner, Tony Sheehan, David White, Rob Jolly, Jim Kennan and so on were able to achieve. This is an absolute disgrace. The Brumby government has presided over a massive increase in state debt, while watching as billions upon billions of extra dollars have flowed into the state's Treasury and Victorians have nothing to show for it.

The member for Scoresby, in his detailed budget reply on behalf of the coalition, noted that there are no debt repayment plans in place. Labor continues to incur massive debt, with little or no care, while demonstrating no concern as to how this debt will ever be repaid. Our children and grandchildren will be left with the responsibility of paying back this enormous debt legacy. It is unforgivable.

I now turn my focus to local outcomes in this budget. There is a prevailing attitude in this government that Victoria does not extend too far north of the Great Dividing Range. For those members present who do not realise it, the Great Dividing Range is just north of Craigieburn as you travel along the Hume Highway out of Melbourne. North-eastern Victoria has again been ignored by Labor at budget time. Members of my local community have come to live with disappointment when it comes to Labor.

It is unbelievable that Labor still cannot guarantee when the Wodonga rail bypass will be finished and when

there will be a return of the passenger rail service, apart from speculation in media reports that we may well see the last freight train and the last New South Wales passenger service, the XPT, going through the city of Wodonga on 23 July. Then we might see some 12 weeks of training for the drivers of the V/Line engines. It all seems very convenient, this 12 weeks, and we are quickly approaching an election in Victoria, on 27 November. Is this a matter of expediency or a matter of convenience? No doubt we will see the minister, and quite likely the Premier, come out with a marching band and fly out the Royal Australian Air Force Roulettes and say, 'What a wonderful, terrific job'.

Yes, absolutely, it is a great project. We are looking forward to seeing this project completed, but ensuring that it is completed on a reasonable time line and on budget and ensuring the return of these passenger services to the community of north-eastern Victoria. There is a lot of conjecture, but there is not one single person in the Brumby government who will commit to a date and a timetable with any certainty for the community of north-eastern Victoria.

I find this absolutely incredible when I consider that the previous Liberal government delivered for Benambra by committing to this project well over 14 years ago. Worse still is that the Labor government even signed a memorandum of understanding with local business, which incidentally it has now reneged on, which dates back to 2001, that means the government has been involved in this project for well over nine years but is still to deliver.

One of the biggest scandals that will be recorded in history is Labor's utter neglect when it comes to community safety and law and order. This year's budget continues that neglect. We need more police on the beat in north-eastern Victoria; violent crime is not only a problem in metropolitan Melbourne. The coalition has listened and has put forward a comprehensive, statewide plan to cut violent crime.

The Premier, with his trademark smirk, was cock-a-hoop when he announced he was copying the coalition's law and order policy by promising to put more police on the job. Unfortunately for Victorians, the Premier did only half the job. Labor's half-baked, rip-off police plan means that under Labor there will be less police on the country beat going forward, as they will be needed to counter violence on Melbourne's train network. It is once again typical of Labor to set its standards low and then fail to achieve them.

The Leader of the Opposition and the coalition have recognised this problem, which is why the coalition will provide protective services officers tasked with keeping Melbourne train users safe and freeing up more front-line police to be on the beat right throughout Victoria. This point has been missed by the Premier, who has again shown that he believes policy that is near enough is good enough for him.

Staying on the theme of emergency services, Wodonga's residents are yet to see or hear anything on the much-vaunted, much-promised redevelopment of Wodonga's ambulance station. Understanding that ambulance services come under the health portfolio, our ambulance officer men and women are working hard to provide those services; they are all nonetheless part of the emergency services family. Despite many promises and announcements made in the local press over the years by local Labor MPs in the other place and local Labor identities, there is no mention in the budget papers of when Wodonga residents can expect delivery of a new, first-class ambulance station.

Benambra residents are not alone in having witnessed firsthand the failings of Labor on infrastructure, as have so many other country communities. Despite years of promises the budget confirms that Labor will not honour its word when it comes to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. Labor has short-changed country communities and cannot be trusted to deliver for regional Victoria.

To fix Labor's neglect, a Victorian coalition government will establish a \$1 billion regional growth fund to spearhead a regional resurgence in Victoria that will create new prosperity, more opportunities and a better quality of life. The \$1 billion regional growth fund is the key plank in the coalition's plan to establish regional Victoria as a future driver of our state's growth and prosperity. The regional growth fund will promote a grassroots approach to identifying community projects and will provide flexible funding through five regional development committees that will help communities fix gaps in services and infrastructure, provide for better infrastructure, facilities and services, strengthen the economic base of communities, create jobs and improve career opportunities for regional Victoria.

When the rail relocation project is complete and Wodonga has the opportunity to rebuild its central business district there will be a blank canvas, a great opportunity for Wodonga to rebuild its CBD to ensure not only the future growth of the largest population concentration in north-eastern Victoria but the overwhelming and potentially positive flow-on to

outlying country and rural areas throughout north-eastern Victoria and the electorate of Benambra.

Towong shire has a population of around 6500 over its 6000 square kilometres, which equals something like one person per square kilometre. It is a struggling, hardworking shire that is trying to do the best for the future, and I certainly think the growth of Wodonga will see benefits. With the growth of Wodonga's CBD going forward we need guarantees for local builders and about local design and local jobs, where there is capacity and capability in abundance. We hardly need to be told what is good and right from level 45 at 80 Collins Street, which is where a lot of plans seem to be derived about excess rail land.

It is all good and well to have some expertise shared throughout Victoria, but we need to rely on local knowledge, experience and jobs. Without doubt the area will certainly receive support and strength from a coalition government. It is clear that Labor's plan for Victoria's agriculture and rural agribusiness is failing significantly. Notwithstanding the difficulties with the drought, there has been a lack of ongoing support from government.

The coalition has also announced positive plans to combat the scourge of wild dogs and foxes, which are especially prevalent throughout north-eastern Victoria. I will continue to talk in this place time and again about the impact of our neighbours from hell, the current government, because of the effect on our state parks and forests, and on primary producers. We will reintroduce year-round bounties. The coalition will also announce policies to combat the locust plague, about which we have not heard much from the government. While these policies might not appeal to the trendy, inner-suburban set the government likes to play to, they will make a difference to great country communities in Victoria.

Labor's latest budget, despite widespread community concern and north-eastern Victoria having faced three major, complex fires in the last decade during the watch of this government, has failed to increase fuel reduction burn targets, and Labor has not honoured its promise on neighbourhood safer places. How many times will Labor need to be told that fuel reduction is critical for improving bushfire survivability and maintaining healthier parks? I am in furious agreement with my coalition colleagues that Victorians are sick and tired of a state government which fails to deliver.

The basics of this state government need to be fixed. There has been a breakdown in law and order, and violent crime plagues our streets and our cultural and

social hubs. Our public transport is unreliable and overcrowded, and in north-eastern Victoria to all intents and purposes does not exist, while we wait for long-promised upgrades to be completed. We have congested roads in our cities and crumbling roads in the country. Our hospital waiting lists and emergency department waiting times continue to grow, underlining Labor's failure in health. While Labor claims that education is its first priority our education standards continue to decline. As Victorians in country areas know all too well, we have an unreliable water supply and unfair distribution of critical water services and infrastructure.

I do, however, in conclusion want to end on a bright note. There is hope at the end of the day — and that hope is that the coalition stands ready to restore Victoria with a positive policy agenda. May we all hope this budget will be the last to be delivered by this incompetent, spendthrift, lazy Brumby Labor government.

Mr LUPTON (Prahran) — The 2010 Brumby government budget is another great budget for the people of Victoria and the people of Prahran. It builds on the work of previous years and in particular on last year's job-creating budget that made Victoria the engine room of Australia's economy in the face of the global financial crisis.

We should put this in context. Last year we said our budget was designed to stimulate the economy and create at least 35 000 jobs. We ended up creating over 100 000 jobs, we led Australia in economic performance and we prevented a recession here in Victoria. We did this through record infrastructure spending of some \$11 billion, and that investment was put into practical projects that provide a long-term benefit to the people of Victoria. We did this while maintaining an operating budget surplus, as we promised to do, and we maintained our AAA credit rating, unlike some other states.

In Prahran we have seen the evidence of this in the construction industry — in the opening of new, world-class hotels like the Cullen and the Olsen, which provided work during construction and provided work in the hospitality and service industries now that they are completed. These projects are also great for tourism and provide thousands of new customers for local small business. In that context I was very pleased today to hear the announcement by Tourism Research Australia that its international visitor survey for the year ended March 2010 showed that Victoria's international overnight visitor numbers increased by 4.2 per cent, to 1.54 million visitors in the last year.

These tourism statistics are great news for Victoria. They are great news for Victoria's economy and they show the strength of our tourism industry. When international tourists come to Victoria in record numbers like this, they come because they love our world-class cultural and sporting events, our great calendar of major events spread throughout the course of the year, our regional attractions, our theatres and our world-class shopping precincts.

Representing one of those world-class shopping precincts, as member for Prahran, I am aware that it is important that these achievements be recognised. Attracting visitors from all around Australia and overseas is very important to sustain local businesses. It is very important to me and to the government.

We have the best figures of any state in the last year as far as growth is concerned. We have grown more than any other state, and I think that is a tribute to both our terrific economic management and our strategy for bringing major events to this state and attracting more flights, particularly international flights, from important destinations to Melbourne.

All those things put Victoria in a very strong position, and that is evident in my electorate of Prahran. It is apparent in the work done in recent times at all of our schools in the Prahran district and in particular in the modernising work that has been carried out. Every primary school in the Prahran district has now had modernising and refurbishment works carried out by our government and has also benefited from federal Labor government investment. Stonnington Primary School, South Yarra Primary School, Toorak Primary School and St Kilda Primary School are all benefiting from this investment by the government. The important thing about that is that our young people are getting a better start in life as a result.

We have also seen major works carried out in the Alfred hospital precinct. Work on stage 2 of the Alfred Centre for elective surgery is nearly complete. The Alfred Centre is a signature achievement of this government. It is a dedicated elective surgery centre, the first of its kind in Australia, and is now a model for other elective surgery centres in Victoria and around the country.

As a result of the particular model of care developed for elective surgery at the Alfred Centre, cancellation rates for surgery have been reduced to less than 1 per cent, giving patients faster surgery and more certainty about when their surgery will be performed. Stage 2 involves more outpatient clinics and services and will continue to provide enhanced services for patients. This

investment is on top of the hundreds of extra nurses that this government has employed at the Alfred hospital. Without these additional nurses doing such a wonderful job these new facilities would not be able to provide for the extra patients that we are now able to treat.

Through funding in last year's budget we have completed the refurbishment upgrades of Windsor and Prahran railway stations that we promised at the last election. These upgrade works were funded in last year's budget and were completed during the course of last year. At the last election we promised \$3 million in refurbishment funding for these upgrades, and this has been delivered. In the course of those works we also renewed the pedestrian overpass bridge at Windsor station.

It was unfortunate to see that the Liberal Party claimed recently that this promised work had not been done. It is unfortunate that the Liberal Party cannot be trusted to tell the truth, but everyone who uses Prahran and Windsor stations knows that the work we promised has been done and those stations are much more comfortable and safer and have more information for passengers as a result of the work being completed. This attitude from members of the Liberal Party is in keeping with its approach to the budget more generally. They opposed our job-creating infrastructure spending in the last budget. There is no doubt that if they had been in government and adopted the approach they advocated, our state would have gone into recession.

It is important for us to remember that the global financial crisis is not yet a thing of the past. There are still worrying signs in Europe that could again cause difficulties here in Australia. It is very important to emphasise that we cannot afford to have throwbacks to pre-Keynesian economic ideas from the Liberal Party putting our state at risk.

In the 2010 state budget we build further on this great work. For Prahran there were highlights, particularly in health, public transport and community safety. This 2010 budget has rightly been described as two health budgets in one. It injects \$4 billion into our health system in cooperation with the federal Labor government. There is a \$45 million boost to elective surgery capacity and, at the Alfred hospital in particular, there is an expansion of the intensive care unit. This \$45 million boost to elective surgery capacity translates to 9000 elective surgery procedures being carried out sooner than they otherwise would be. That is a terrific boost, and a very important thing, for patients needing care in Victoria.

In relation to public transport, not only did we complete important infrastructure upgrades at Prahran and Windsor railway stations but in this year's budget funding has been provided to make those stations fully staffed premium stations. So on top of the physical upgrade works we have completed we will now have these two stations fully staffed from first train to last train, seven days a week. This is not an election commitment; it is a fully funded budget item.

This follows the completion on local train lines of major maintenance work like the complete replacement of all wooden sleepers on the Sandringham line with new concrete sleepers, and the rather prosaic but vital rail grinding work being completed on that line. All of this important maintenance work will help to improve reliability on the Sandringham line.

Then there is the continued investment in our \$38 billion Victorian transport plan, which will see new infrastructure and more new trains and trams coming onto the system as well as continuing work to boost the capacity of the transport system. Again, this is funded work that is improving the system.

In community safety we see the biggest single boost to front-line police numbers in the history of Victoria. In government we have increased the size of our police force by around 2000 over and above retirements, so there are 2000 more police serving now than there were under the previous Liberal government. We have delivered on our promises for extra police in each term of government, and in this term we have exceeded our promise, unlike our opponents who promised more police but then cut police numbers. So in this budget we have funded an extra 1966 front-line police over five years, and the people of Victoria know they can rely on us to deliver. Importantly over 600 of those new police officers have been funded for deployment in the next 12 months. This again is not an election promise; it is a funded budget item.

We continue to make Victoria a competitive place to do business by further reducing business costs such as WorkCover premiums and payroll tax. To keep our economy strong and create more jobs, we continue this year with a \$9.5 billion infrastructure program, including key projects like the regional rail link. It is important to emphasise that this project is a terrific example of our government's planning for the future. The regional rail link will enable regional trains from Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo to run express to Southern Cross station, removing them from the suburban system, freeing up capacity for Metro trains and allowing us to increase the capacity of the

metropolitan rail system. It is a good plan for Melbourne and a good plan for regional Victoria.

These investments are also good for the livability of Melbourne by continuing to make regional Victoria an attractive place to live. This takes population pressure off Melbourne and is an important part of growing the whole state. We have seen population growth in all regions of Victoria as a result of this government's approach, and that is a great win all round. I think it is important to also emphasise some of the endorsements that this year's state budget has received from some important commentators. I will quote from a few of those just to show the wide-ranging support that this state budget has drawn.

From Standard and Poor's:

... 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.

The other ratings agency, Moody's Investor Services, said:

The outlook on the state of Victoria's AAA rating is stable ...

...

'The state's better financial projections reflect the improved economic environment in Victoria ...

The chief executive officer of the Victorian Council of Social Service, Cath Smith, has said in reference to A Fairer Victoria, which is an important part of our budget strategy:

With AFV —

A Fairer Victoria —

we've also seen state leadership in policy ...

...

... this government does work incredibly hard and most of the time does get it right ...

Likewise from a similar sector, the executive director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Tony Nicholson, said that it was:

... encouraged by the emphasis of today's Victorian state budget on ensuring that all Victorians can share in the more prosperous times it forecasts.

The Community Child Care Association said:

Today's state budget commitment of \$14.4 million for the children's capital program is a welcome investment in building the future for Victoria's children

...

The Victorian government has done well to manage the state's finances in such a way that despite a global financial downturn all of its 2006 financial election promises have been fulfilled.

The chief executive officer of Kindergarten Parents Victoria, Emma King, said:

Kindergarten Parents Victoria applauds the state government's decision to invest \$82.6 million to support early years services in Victoria ...

'This comprehensive package will help ensure that all Victorian children have access to a quality kindergarten program ...

The chief executive officer of the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Wayne Kayler-Thomson, said:

... the 2010-11 state budget has delivered business a short-odds trifecta via modest cuts in business taxation and WorkCover premiums, selected infrastructure boosts and a strong surplus ...

...

The 3.5 per cent WorkCover premium cut will benefit nearly all Victorian businesses ...

The executive director of the Master Builders Association of Victoria, Brian Welch, also added his endorsement:

... the Master Builders Association welcomes the state government's budget announcements to expand the Victorian first home bonus scheme and cut payroll tax and WorkCover premiums.

...

The \$2000 boost to the first home bonus and the regional first home bonus will improve housing affordability across Victoria.

The Victorian executive director of the Property Council of Australia, Jennifer Cunich, said that the property council 'applauds the level of new investment in transport infrastructure' and that Victoria has 'debt levels at the very low levels'. The Australian Industry Group also welcomed the tax reductions in this year's budget.

In conclusion, what we see is a state budget this year that invests in the entire state, invests for all Victorians, invests in our future and provides a solid economic foundation for our continuing work for the people.

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Community Services).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

SUPPORTED RESIDENTIAL SERVICES (PRIVATE PROPRIETORS) BILL

Statement of compatibility

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Community Services) 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 Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Bill 2010.

In my opinion, the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) 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

This bill regulates supported residential services in Victoria and provides for minimum standards of accommodation and personal support for residents living in these facilities.

Supported residential services are a form of residential accommodation where personal support is provided to the residents for fee or reward.

The Health Services Act 1988 currently regulates supported residential services.

The bill repeals the current regulatory arrangements and creates a new system for the regulation of supported residential services.

The bill also aims to simplify the requirements for registration and to clarify proprietor's obligations to residents of supported residential services, as well as establishing new rights for residents with respect to services and the tenure of their accommodation.

Human rights issues

There are a number of rights engaged by the bill. Prior to analysing the rights in detail, I wish to make the following general comments.

One of the key purposes of this bill is to protect the rights of residents living in supported residential services by establishing a registration system and imposing minimum standards on service providers. In my view the bill aims to ensure that people living in supported residential services are protected from neglect or abuse and cared for properly. It also aims to protect the capacity of people living within residential care to make autonomous decisions about their lives and to live as independently as possible.

Human rights protected by the charter that are relevant to the bill

The specific rights engaged by this bill are:

Section 8 — Recognition and equality before the law

Section 10(b) — The right to be protected from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment

Section 10(c) — The right not to be subjected to medical or scientific experimentation or treatment without his or her full, free and informed consent

Section 13 — Privacy and reputation

Section 15 — Freedom of expression

Section 20 — Property rights

Section 25 — Rights in criminal proceedings.

The clauses of the bill relevant to these rights are discussed below.

Recognition and equality before the law (s8)

Section 8 of the charter provides that a person has the right to recognition and equality before the law.

It is important to note that the guiding principles of the bill set out in clause 7 are intended to enhance the right to recognition and equality before the law. Clause 7 sets out the rights of resident's including the right to 'fair and equal treatment'.

This right is engaged by a number of clauses of the bill:

Clause 65 — Offence to employ unsuitable persons

Clause 73 — Effect of approval or disapproval of manager.

These provisions deal with situations in which people should not be employed because they are not 'suitable persons'. These provisions potentially engage section 8 because they provide for situations where people may be treated differently.

The notion of 'suitable person', while not defined in the bill, draws on common-law principles of suitability in the sense of good character, honesty and integrity. Guidance as to the specific requirements and qualifications required will be provided in the regulations.

The right to be protected from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (s10(b))

Clauses 60 and 61 create indictable offences for failure to monitor health care issues or personal support issues.

These clauses promote section 10(b) of the charter, which protects people from treatment that is cruel, inhuman and degrading. The provisions set out clear accommodation and support standards for supported residential services and impose significant penalties on proprietors where they fail in their obligations to properly care for residents.

Right to privacy (s13)

A number of clauses in this bill engage the right to privacy.

Section 13(1) of the charter provides that a person has the right not to have his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with.

An interference with privacy will not limit the right if the interference is neither arbitrary nor unlawful. The interference will not be arbitrary if the restriction on privacy accords with the objectives of the charter and is reasonable in the circumstances. The interference will not be unlawful if the

law authorising it is circumscribed, precise and determined on a case-by-case basis.

The right to privacy is engaged in a number of different contexts.

Provision of information to the secretary

The following clauses require information to be provided to the secretary in certain circumstances:

Clause 14 — Application for registration

Clause 36 — Secretary may request registration statements

Clause 20 — Application for variation of registration

Clause 30 — Ceasing to be director or officer of proprietor which is a body corporate

Clause 62 — Inquiries, assessment and further care

Clause 68 — Requirement to apply to secretary for approval of manager

Clause 69 — Further information.

The purpose of these provisions is to ensure that the secretary has the necessary information to make decisions about the registration of supported residential services. The clauses specify the circumstances in which the information is to be provided and it is clear from the provisions that the information is for a specific and circumscribed purpose. Requiring the information is therefore not a limitation on the right to privacy as it is lawful and not arbitrary.

Public register

Clause 39 of the bill provides that the secretary must establish and maintain a public register of supported residential services. The bill enables the secretary to include information about the name, address and proprietors of supported residential services.

The purpose of the register is to enable members of the public to see what services are available, where they are, who the proprietors are, and to verify that the premises are registered in order to make informed decisions when accessing these services. The information in the register is collected according to law and published for a limited purpose which is for the ultimate benefit of proprietors. It is neither arbitrary nor unlawful. As such, the clauses do not limit the right to privacy.

Part 6 notices to vacate

The powers in part 6 of the bill which allow for a proprietor to give a notice to vacate to a resident, potentially engages the right to privacy, specifically the right not to have the residents' privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with.

Safeguards have been included in the bill to protect the resident, specifically by giving the resident the right under clause 121 to apply to VCAT to challenge the validity of the notice.

The purpose of these provisions is to enable proprietors, in appropriate circumstances, to terminate agreements with residents. Notices to vacate can only be issued in accordance

with these provisions and are circumscribed in order to protect residents and as such do not limit the right to privacy.

Part 7 monitoring and enforcement

Clause 131 and clause 133 require authorised officers to have and produce cards which contain their photograph and name. These clauses engage the right to privacy of the authorised officers. The purpose of these provisions is to ensure that proprietors of residential services can verify that those conducting inspections of their premises are in fact authorised officers. They are necessary for the effective performance of the authorised officer's duties. The provisions are required under law and are for a clear and circumscribed purpose. As such, they do not limit the right to privacy.

The following clauses engage the right to privacy because they allow authorised officers to enter and search supported residential services for the purposes of monitoring the services and enforcing the proprietor's legislative obligations:

Clause 134 — Power to enter — monitoring compliance

Clause 135 — Power to enter unregistered premises with consent

Clause 136 — Entry to unregistered premises — search warrant

Clause 143 — General powers of authorised officers

Clause 144 — Power to direct persons to produce documents, operate equipment or answer questions.

The purpose of the provisions is to effectively monitor supported residential services and ensure they are complying with their obligations to care properly for residents as set out in the legislation. The powers to enter and search premises are clearly defined.

While clause 134 permits an authorised officer to enter a supported residential services premises without a warrant or consent it limits the power to registered premises. Clause 139 requires that before entering any premises an authorised officer must announce themselves and give any person in the premises a reasonable opportunity to allow entry to the premises. Limitations are also placed on the powers which prevent an authorised officer from entering any part of the premises which is set aside for private use unless they have consent under clause 134. In addition, clause 140 also requires that if the authorised officer exercises a power of entry without the proprietor or occupier being present they must leave a notice setting out the time of entry; the purpose of entry; what was done on the premises; the time of departure; and the procedure for contacting the secretary for further details of the entry. Further, as a participant in a regulated industry, the proprietor is taken to consent to monitoring activities and therefore has a lower expectation of privacy. Accordingly, this provision does not limit such a person's right to privacy and reputation under section 13 of the charter.

With regard to properties that are not registered under the scheme, but that an authorised officer suspects may be operating as a supported residential service, clauses 135 and 136 only allow for entry with consent or a warrant. Further, clause 141 requires that before executing the warrant the authorised officer must announce themselves and give any

person in the premises an opportunity to allow entry to the premises.

Whilst on the property, clauses 143 and 144 give the authorised officers a range of general powers. Clause 143 sets out a number of powers including the power to inspect, seize, take samples and take photographs. Clause 144 gives the authorised officer the power to direct a person at the premises to produce documents, operate equipment and answer questions. These powers engage the right to privacy. However, these powers are necessary to ensure the effective monitoring of compliance with the scheme established under the act. Further, as the premises are part of a registered scheme the proprietor voluntarily agreed to abide by these conditions as part of their registration. The requirements are set out in law and are for a particular and defined purpose and therefore not arbitrary. Therefore the right to privacy is not limited.

Provision of information ‘to’ and ‘from’ the proprietor

The following clauses deal with the provision of information ‘to’ and ‘from’ the proprietor:

Clause 45 — Person nominated

Clause 46 — Details of resident’s guardian or resident’s administrator to be recorded

Clause 47 — Preparation and copies of residential and services agreements

Clause 56 — Interim support plan

Clause 57 — Resident’s ongoing support plan.

The purpose of these provisions is to enable the proprietors of supported residential services to properly care for residents in accordance with their particular healthcare needs. The provision of this information to the resident’s nominated person, other staff and health-care providers is also to ensure that the resident can be properly cared for. The purposes of the provision of the information are clearly set out and the provisions themselves limit the information to that which is necessary for the development of care plans and the like. The provision is therefore neither arbitrary nor unlawful and does not limit the right to privacy. The safeguards provided for within the provisions themselves would be further supported by the provisions of the Health Records Act 2001.

The clauses also promote section 10(c) of the charter which protects people from medical treatment without consent.

Requirement to keep records

The following clauses deal with the obligation on proprietors to keep records in relation to incidents and complaints from residents:

Clause 75 — Procedures for resident complaints

Clause 76 — Requirement to keep prescribed records

Clause 77 — Records and reporting of prescribed reportable incidents

Clause 78 — Proprietor to keep records for seven years.

The purpose of these clauses is to ensure that the proprietor keeps appropriate records in relation to complaints, injuries,

accidents and to oblige the proprietor to report such things to the secretary. They form a key part of the provisions aimed at protecting residents within supported residential services by maintaining a robust scheme for the regulation and monitoring of services. They are for a clear and circumscribed purpose and are therefore neither unlawful nor arbitrary. They do not limit the right to privacy.

Powers of community visitors

The following clauses set out the powers of community visitors to look at certain records kept by the proprietor in relation to residents:

Clause 184 — Functions of a community visitor

Clause 187 — Powers of community visitors.

Community visitors may enter and look at any part of a supported residential service, they may speak with any resident of the supported residential service, ask questions of staff and look at any records required to be kept on the premises under the act. Community visitors are an important safeguard in promoting and protecting the rights of residents. They talk to residents/patients to ensure they are being cared for with dignity and respect and to identify issues of concern. Community visitors can then liaise with staff and management to resolve these issues. Broader or more serious issues are referred to OPA. The purpose of these clauses is to provide residents with further protection. The community visitors are restricted in relation to the information they can view. Clause 196 specifically sets out the obligations on community visitors in relation to keeping secret any information that they are given or told while performing their role. The powers are provided for by law and are not arbitrary since they are circumscribed and intended for a very particular purpose.

Freedom of expression (s15(2))

Section 15(2) of the charter recognises a person’s right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information. This right encompasses the right not to express, that is to say nothing. The following provisions engage section 15(2) because they compel proprietors to provide particular information:

Clause 37 — Proprietor must provide registration statement within 28 days

Clause 88 — Proprietor to notify secretary of offences.

These clauses engage the right to freedom of expression because they require information to be provided to the secretary in particular circumstances. The purpose of both clauses is to assist the secretary to monitor registrations and have the necessary information to enable this to occur at different points in time. Section 15(3) of the charter provides that the right to freedom of expression may be restricted where it is necessary for the purpose of protecting the rights of persons. The information required by the secretary in both of these clauses is aimed at the protection of residents living in supported residential services through the effective operation of the registration system. The clauses therefore fall within section 15(3) and do not limit the right to freedom of expression.

Property rights (s20)

Section 20 protects the right of people not to be deprived of property otherwise than in accordance with the law.

Divisions 1 and 2 of part 5 of the bill protect the residents' property rights in relation to money and real property by creating safeguards to prevent any abuse of residents' property rights in supported residential services.

The clauses recognise the potentially vulnerable situation residents may be in and protect their right not to be deprived of property otherwise than in accordance with the law.

Clause 79 protects residents' finances when they are in the control of proprietors by requiring written consent and establishing a prescribed amount to be controlled that cannot be exceeded.

Clause 80 requires records of expenditure to be kept and clause 81 requires a proprietor who manages or controls the money of a resident to provide the resident with an itemised statement.

Clause 84 ensures the rights of residents not to have their property sold or transferred for less than its market value or in the absence of a written agreement and without the provision of independent financial or legal advice.

The right to a fair hearing and to a decision by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal (s24(1)), in combination with the right not to be compelled to confess guilt or to incriminate oneself (s25(2)(k))

In order to regulate supported residential services effectively, the bill requires proprietors to keep a range of information and records and gives authorised officers broad powers to inspect premises and documents and direct a person to answer questions, as discussed above. Some of this information may reveal evidence that a proprietor has breached the provisions of the act or be used as evidence of other criminal acts. As such these provisions of the bill engage sections 24(1) and 25(2)(k) of the charter. Section 25(2)(k) of the charter protects the right of persons charged with a criminal offence not to be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt. This also includes the right not to be compelled to incriminate oneself.

Clause 150(1) of the bill protects the rights by providing that persons may refuse or fail to give information or do any other thing that they are required to do under the act or regulations if giving the information would tend to incriminate them. However, clause 150(2) constrains the privilege to a limited extent by providing that this protection does not apply to 'the production of a document or part of a document that the person is required by this act or regulations to produce'.

Clause 144(1)(c) also protects individuals from self-incrimination as it requires an authorised officer to inform a person of the right before requiring them to answer questions. Clause 144(1)(a), like clause 150, does not afford this protection of refusal to documentation. It does, however, state that a person must produce documents if directed to do so by an authorised officer unless there is a 'reasonable excuse' not to do so.

Clauses 143 and 144 of the bill permit the inspection, review and seizure of documents and materials for the purpose of

compliance with the act and regulation of registered proprietors of supported residential services.

The lack of explicit protection in relation to the use of documents obtained under the bill may mean that in some circumstances the right against self-incrimination is limited. However, that limit is reasonable and demonstrably justifiable in accordance with section 7(2) of the charter.

Reasonableness of the limitations*(a) the nature of the right being limited*

The right in section 25(2)(k) of the charter is a right 'not to be compelled to testify against oneself'. A search and seizure of a person's records and documents is not generally considered to breach the privilege against self-incrimination. The privilege against self-incrimination may be less far reaching in relation to documentary material than for things that a person says such as admissions.

Compelling the production of already existing documents is also much likely to raise concerns relating to self-incrimination than documents that were compelled to be produced in direct response to a request for information.

(b) the importance and purpose of the limitation

The purpose of the limitation is to enable the registration system to function by enabling the secretary to inspect relevant documents in order to ensure compliance and to perform ongoing monitoring.

(c) the nature and extent of the limitation

The limitation is confined to documentation that is already in existence and does not require the production of any incriminating documents.

(d) the relationship between the limitation and its purpose

There is a clear and rational relationship between maintaining a proper functioning registration regime and keeping particular documents. Indeed the inability to access such documentation would undermine the scheme.

(e) any less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve its purpose

There are no less restrictive means reasonably available that would achieve the purpose of clauses 150 and 144.

In conclusion, to the extent that clauses 150 and 144 of the bill limit sections 24(1) and 25(2)(k) of the charter, the limit is compatible with the charter.

Conclusions

I consider that the bill is compatible with the charter of human rights because to the extent that some provisions may limit rights, those limitations are reasonably and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society. Most of the rights engaged by the bill do not limit rights and in a number of cases the bill includes positive measures aimed at protecting and promoting human rights.

Hon. Lisa Neville, MP
Minister for Community Services

Second reading

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Community Services) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

In Victoria we have a diverse population, living in a wide range of settings across the state.

Around 6000 Victorians call supported residential services home. These services provide a combination of accommodation and assistance with daily living to people with a mix of needs, including some older Victorians and people with disabilities.

Unlike most other supported accommodation options, the SRS sector is very diverse. SRS range in size, location, resident profile, fees charged and the range and focus of services they provide.

Feedback received by the government indicates that some people choose to live in SRS in preference to other accommodation options, and are happy with their choice. It is considered important that Victorians continue to have this supported accommodation option, particularly those Victorians on low incomes.

As many SRS residents are vulnerable, and rely on SRS proprietors to provide them with both accommodation and support, it is important that their safety and wellbeing is protected. These are private services, which have been subject to regulation by the Victorian government for over 30 years to ensure these residents are appropriately protected.

The current regulatory scheme is set out in the Health Services Act 1988 and supporting regulations, and sets minimum requirements that all SRS must meet. Over time, however, there have been significant changes in this sector, and the mix of people residing in SRS has also changed.

In 2008 a review of the regulatory scheme commenced to identify where changes might be necessary, given the evolving nature of this sector.

Five main principles guided this review process and the development of proposed reforms:

1. Effectiveness — the regulatory scheme should protect the safety and wellbeing of residents, ensure minimum standards and create certainty for all involved, whilst not unnecessarily restricting innovation or responsiveness to individual situations.

2. Fairness — the regulatory scheme should maintain a balance between protecting the interests of residents and imposing obligations on people responsible for the provision of services to those residents.
3. Accessibility — the regulatory scheme and associated documentation and decision-making processes should be open, clear and understandable to all involved.
4. Flexibility — the regulatory scheme should be able to accommodate emerging issues and sector trends in a timely manner.
5. Efficiency — the resources expended and the costs imposed by the scheme should be justified in terms of the benefits to the Victorian community.

The purpose of SRS regulation is to protect the wellbeing of SRS residents, and thus consultation has been a critical element of the review process.

Extensive consultation with residents and their families, proprietors, and a wide range of other stakeholders commenced in 2008 with the release of a discussion paper. A total of 78 written submissions were received through this review, with over 300 attendees participating in consultation forums, meetings and focus groups across the state. These consultations, along with other research and analysis conducted by my department, have identified a range of areas where change is necessary.

The Victorian government is also committed to identifying areas where the costs of regulation can be reduced for Victorian businesses. Extensive work was undertaken to identify areas where the regulation of SRS can be streamlined to reduce unnecessary burden on SRS proprietors without compromising resident safety.

A wide range of changes are thus being proposed to both the form and the content of legislation governing SRS.

For a start, it is proposed that the legislative provisions governing these supported residential services be contained in a stand-alone bill. Feedback from consultations indicated that stakeholders find the current legislative scheme within the Health Services Act difficult to use and confusing, particularly given SRS provide accommodation and support rather than hospital-like services. Establishing a stand-alone act for SRS will help achieve a more accessible, easy to use

legislative scheme that is tailored to the specific needs of this unique industry.

The bill also reformulates the scope of the supported residential services legislation by clarifying that those facilities providing accommodation and support which are covered by other legislative regimes or funding and service agreements with government or public bodies are not supported residential services and thus not included within the scope of the bill.

While changes to the legislation are proposed, it is important to emphasise that its purpose remains to protect the safety and wellbeing of residents of supported residential services. It does this by establishing requirements for supported residential services to be registered, and setting minimum requirements that proprietors must meet in providing accommodation and support to residents.

To this end, a range of significant reforms to enhance protections for residents while reducing unnecessary administration for proprietors are contained in this bill. In summary these reforms include:

- strengthening occupancy rights;
- strengthening financial protections;
- building staff capability;
- introducing new enforcement mechanisms;
- strengthening reporting of serious incidents;
- introducing outcome-based standards;
- streamlining administration processes.

Strengthening occupancy rights

Key reforms will provide residents with greater certainty about the security of their accommodation, greater protection of their money and new appeal rights. The bill establishes new, statutory protection of resident occupancy rights by specifying statutory notice periods for a range of circumstances and establishing a formal right of review of such decisions by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

The amount of notice to leave a proprietor must give a resident will depend on the individual circumstances. It will range from immediate notice to vacate (where there are serious risks to other residents), through to 60 days notice (when the supported residential service needs to be vacated for building works).

In considering appropriate periods of notice that proprietors must give residents, careful consideration has been given to balancing the right of an individual resident to secure accommodation, the rights of other residents to a safe and home-like environment and privacy, and proprietors' obligations to find residents more appropriate accommodation if their needs can no longer be met in that supported residential service.

At the same time, there will also be statutory requirements regarding the notice to leave a resident must give, which will be a minimum of 2 days and a maximum of 28 days.

For many residents, supported residential services are their long-term home. These reforms will provide them with greater certainty that they will not be unfairly evicted.

Strengthening financial protections

Increased protections for residents' money will ensure it is safe and secure. The bill establishes statutory limits on the amounts that can be charged for security deposits, fees paid in advance, and reservation and set-up fees, and sets requirements for the repayment of these amounts. Furthermore, deposits and some other fees will have to be placed in a trust account.

These changes will help residents understand what money can be paid on entry to a supported residential service, and how their money is protected. Residents will now also have the right to go to VCAT if there are disputes about these payments.

Building staff capability

Throughout the review process, the importance of appropriate staffing was identified as a key area of interest. The bill establishes requirements for:

- mandatory police checks to be undertaken for all new supported residential services staff;
- new day-to-day managers, who are not the proprietor, to be assessed as part of the registration process or on appointment.

The bill also establishes the power to set a range of additional supported residential services staffing requirements in the regulations. These will be the subject of a subsequent regulatory impact assessment process, but it is proposed that these include:

- a requirement for supported residential services to employ staff with first aid training;

a staff member with a minimum qualification of certificate III in a recognised area to be employed for a minimum of 7.5 hours on each day of the weekend;

all personal care coordinators to complete approved training in specified areas every three years.

These reforms will improve residents' ongoing access to staff with up-to-date knowledge and skills and a safer living environment.

Introducing new enforcement mechanisms

Additional enforcement options designed to achieve better compliance are also contained in this bill, including:

powers for proprietors and the Department of Health to enter undertakings where less serious areas of non-compliance are identified. Undertakings must be agreed between the proprietor and the department. They might, for example, include agreement to arrange additional staff training, update documentation and policies, and/or to obtain additional expert advice in relation to identified problem areas.

powers for compliance notices to be issued where there are more serious breaches of the law. A failure to comply with the terms of notice is an offence under the bill, for which a significant penalty can be imposed.

In addition, amendments are proposed that will enable a pattern of poor regulatory compliance to form grounds for an administrator to be appointed, if such an action is considered necessary to protect the interests of residents. Similar considerations can also be taken into account in considering whether to censure a non-compliant proprietor or suspend admissions.

These and other associated reforms will provide a greater range of options to encourage compliance and impose timely sanctions where necessary.

Strengthening reporting of serious incidents

The bill establishes new obligations on supported residential services proprietors to report serious incidents to my department and to keep records of all incidents in a central location. These changes will ensure the Department of Health can respond quickly to protect residents when serious matters (such as allegations of sexual assault) arise. It will also allow for statewide improvements to be made where issues are identified, benefiting all residents and proprietors.

In addition, the bill offers extra protection for residents by amending the Crimes Act 1958 to make it an offence for people working at supported residential services to engage in sexual activities with residents who have cognitive impairments, unless the resident is the worker's spouse or domestic partner.

Introducing outcome-based standards

Consultations identified that many residents were not sure about the nature of services they should expect to receive from supported residential services proprietors, and proprietors felt the current requirements were extremely complex and difficult to navigate. The review also found that the current focus on highly detailed, prescriptive standards for accommodation and care tended to limit flexibility and innovation, and did not provide any incentive for proprietors to tailor services to individual resident needs.

In light of this, the bill creates the framework for a consolidated set of resident-focused outcome-based standards that will make it easier for residents to understand what they should expect from these services. These standards will be set out in the regulations and focus on four principal areas: resident lifestyle, food and nutrition, personal and health care, and the physical environment. The move to outcome-based standards will help ensure residents receive services provided in accordance with their own, individual care needs.

Streamlining administration processes

The Victorian government is committed to removing unnecessary regulatory red tape. To this end the bill includes a range of reforms to simplify and streamline registration processes where this can be done without compromising resident safeguards. These include removal of the requirements to periodically renew registration and pay an annual fee, as well as removal of part of the approval-in-principle process. It is estimated that these will result in significant cost savings for proprietors.

This bill also continues the role of community visitors in visiting these services, with minor amendments made to clarify their function and powers.

Regulation of the sector is one of the critical ways the Victorian government protects the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people in SRS across our state. Whilst the Victorian government does not fund the operational activities of SRS it has made a significant investment to improve the viability of eligible services and the quality of life of over 1900 residents living in them.

Since its introduction in 2007, the Supporting Accommodation for Vulnerable Victorians Initiative (SAVVI) has contributed to improvements in the safety and amenity of premises, additional staff hours and an expanded range of activities for residents. Other work has focused on improving residents' access to the health and support services they may require. As the bill recognises, residents of supported residential services have the same rights and responsibilities as other members of the community. SAVVI has helped both keep some SRS open (thereby providing people with more choice in accommodation) and increased the capacity of residents to access services and activities within their communities.

It is clear that supported residential services provide an important part of the broader system of supported accommodation options available to Victorians who are either unable to live independently or choose not to do so.

They are these peoples' homes and, like everyone else in the Victorian community, residents living in supported residential services have the right to be safe and to exercise their independence as far as possible.

The reforms outlined in this bill will help achieve this, by establishing an up-to-date legislative scheme. They are an essential part of this government's commitment to supporting supported residential services residents and protecting the vulnerable populations within our community.

I commend the bill to the house.

**Debate adjourned on motion of
Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster).**

Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 23 June.

APPROPRIATION (2010/2011) BILL

Second reading

**Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of
Mr BRUMBY (Premier).**

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Mental Health) — It is a pleasure to join the debate on the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill. This is another great budget for regional Victoria, for my community of Geelong and for Victoria as a whole.

This budget positions Victoria well for the future. It secures further jobs, building on the remarkable achievement of nearly 100 000 over the last 12 months;

it provides further tax relief for businesses to enable them to thrive and grow and provide further job opportunities to Victorians; it provides greater assistance to families to realise their aspiration of buying their own home; and, importantly, it sees significant investment in building a fairer Victoria.

You can see the strong commitment this government has again made to our unique A Fairer Victoria agenda. This year over \$1 billion is invested in initiatives that are focused on supporting and assisting vulnerable Victorians and their families.

Across my portfolio areas we have continued our strategic investments in expanding services and reforming the way in which we deliver those services to improve access and outcomes for vulnerable Victorians.

In mental health this budget builds on record investment, with a \$174 million boost for mental health, which builds on the more than \$300 million already invested in the Brumby government's nation-leading mental health reform agenda Because Mental Health Matters. This takes our mental health budget to over \$1 billion.

A key focus in this year's budget is the allocation of further investment in child and youth mental health services. The \$3.6 million of new recurrent funding will see a new youth suicide prevention and community support program rolled out, with a particular focus on same-sex attracted and indigenous young people. Two new rurally based youth early intervention teams will be established, thanks to \$4.9 million in additional funding, building on the four teams already rolled out in the last two years.

The budget also contains additional resources for a new youth-focused community crisis response capacity, which will see capacity scaled up and ensure that young people who are experiencing an acute episode continue to get timely access to the right services.

The budget also builds better mental health treatment for older Victorians with severe mental illness, with an investment of \$4.9 million.

We know that in addition to boosting early intervention and prevention services it is vitally important that we continue to support the acute end of the system. That is why this year's budget provides significant additional capital funding for new mental health beds in Bendigo and at the Austin Hospital. An amount of \$56 million will deliver 42 new mental health beds as part of the new Bendigo hospital, and \$14.2 million has been

allocated to deliver a new 22-bed community care unit at the Austin.

Additional funding has also been delivered to roll out stage 3 of the government's enhanced triage initiative, which will now see 90 per cent of the state getting better access to the right mental health care and treatment.

The government's ongoing commitment to improve the quality of life for Victorians with a disability, their families and other carers is also reflected in this year's budget. An additional \$70.2 million is provided for disability services, on top of more than \$300 million in the last two budgets alone. This takes our current investment in disability services to almost \$1.4 billion.

I want to be clear for the purpose of informing the house and the misinformed member for Doncaster that this is additional state government funding — not commonwealth funding. In fact the state government contributes over 80 per cent of funding to disability services, with the commonwealth contributing just under 20 per cent.

This new investment includes \$7.9 million over four years for more individual support packages. When added to the commonwealth contribution, that will enable an additional 460 people to have the opportunity to make choices about how and where they live. This is in addition to well over 14 000 Victorians already receiving individually tailored support.

The budget also provides funding to build more supported accommodation, with an additional 20 new supported accommodation places. This is on top of the 261 places we are currently in the process of building across the state.

The government's recognition of the importance of a strong and sustainable disability community services sector is also reflected in this budget, with an investment of \$22 million over the next four years to community service organisations delivering supported accommodation. This investment will assist agencies, with an increase in price over indexation each year over those four years. This is within the range identified by PricewaterhouseCoopers in its review of the prices and costs of out-of-home services, commissioned by the Department of Human Services.

Further investments in disability services include \$8.3 million for aids and equipment, \$10 million for an additional 15 facility-based respite places for people with a disability with high and complex needs, and an additional 330 episodes of respite care funded through the national disability agreement. This is on top of the

nearly 22 000 episodes of respite that will be provided this year.

To further implement Victoria's Autism State Plan, a first for Australia, the budget includes an investment of \$108.6 million, including funding for early childhood intervention services, inclusion support programs and school satellite services; \$18 million for autism schools in Melbourne's north and eastern regions; and \$7.5 million provided over four years to improve case management and referral services for families, to build our capacity and expertise to respond to the needs of people with autism spectrum disorder.

Senior Victorians have played a great role in building this state into the great place it is today. Many of them have lived through some tough times, and it is therefore incumbent upon us to provide them with the resources and supports they need to live active and independent lives. That is why this budget provides a \$155.5 million boost to services, which will provide them with the supports they need to maintain their independence as long as possible.

Since coming to government we have increased funding by almost 100 per cent for seniors, and this year's budget will see over \$1.2 billion being spent to support our ageing population.

This year's budget also recognises that some seniors need more support than can be provided in the home. That is why this year we have extended the land tax holiday for companies establishing aged-care facilities. We have also committed additional funding of \$2.5 million for stage 5 of the aged-care land bank to help establish more residential aged-care services in the middle and inner ring suburbs of Melbourne by helping not-for-profit aged-care providers access surplus government land. We have also provided \$25.8 million to redevelop acute primary health and residential aged-care services at the Coleraine hospital, delivering 10 adult acute care beds, 27 residential beds and primary care and emergency service areas in a new purpose-built facility to be co-located and closely linked to a refurbished Mackie Court, with 24 low-care beds.

For those living in their own home we have provided additional supports, including \$66.7 million over five years for home and community care services and \$1.2 million over two years to bring forward the delivery of an additional 1000 personal alarms for vulnerable Victorians.

The Brumby government also knows it is important to support seniors in our community, as it knows that

active and fit seniors are less likely to suffer from medical and mental health conditions. Therefore in this year's budget we have provided additional support of \$500 000 to build more men's sheds around Victoria, which has been a very popular program.

There is also \$2.8 million over four years to create a more accessible Victorian Seniors Card website and to provide better information about the discounts and special offers that are available to seniors right across our community.

We know that the needs of vulnerable Victorian families are becoming more complex and that children who can no longer live with their own families in their own homes are the most marginalised and vulnerable kids in the state, experiencing all kinds of abuse or neglect before being placed in care. This government acknowledges these challenges and is taking action to address them.

In fact over the past 12 months alone the government has allocated over \$330 million to protect children, support families and engage vulnerable youth. This includes last year's \$160 million investment, the \$77 million investment in strengthening child protection services and this year's budget allocation. This extra funding builds on our reform agenda that commenced in 2005 with legislative change to address and ensure that we are meeting the challenges of the 21st century for vulnerable children and families.

This year's budget continues that tradition, with over \$24 million over four years for the state's family support services and early intervention services. Other measures to protect children include over \$6 million for more coordinated responses from police, child protection workers and sexual assault counsellors to victims of sexual assault or abuse. There are more resources for the child safety commissioner, with over \$2 million for his office to oversight the child protection system. Building on our workforce initiatives from last year, a further \$1 million has been invested to strengthen our recruitment and retention strategies.

The house will recall that last year I also announced a series of major reforms for our out-of-home care system, which was backed up by a record investment of \$135 million. This year's budget continues that investment in the second tranche of that reform, including funding for more and better quality out-of-home care placements, funding for our therapeutic residential care units, funding to roll out an Aboriginal kinship care program and funding to secure better services for those children who require the support of our secure welfare service.

To better engage young people there is \$22 million to support young people at risk of slipping behind so that they will have better futures. This will employ additional youth workers across the state. These are the actions of a government which takes its responsibilities seriously and is prepared to do the hard work needed to help disadvantaged families and at-risk children.

Of course there will continue to be major challenges in meeting the complex needs of children in care. That is the reality of a system that steps in and protects children who are abused or neglected by their own families.

I do, however, note the comments made yesterday in this house by the shadow spokesperson. I noted her comments with interest. It was a lengthy, well-scripted document that had all the right lines, but not one of those words spoken yesterday made any comment about the additional funding for child protection, family and youth services. There was not one comment about how we are investing in improving the range of placements, services and supports available to vulnerable children and families. In fact the only comment related to last month's Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing. This really shows that she is not interested in the real issues facing vulnerable children and families in Victoria, that she does not understand the Children, Youth and Families Act and that she wants to blame someone because her colleagues on PAEC asked the wrong questions. This is disappointing. They are such important areas of government. A former minister, the member for South-West Coast, stated back when he was minister that this area was so important it required a bipartisan approach.

We take these issues seriously, and we remain focused and committed to improving the responses to vulnerable children and families through reform and additional funding. I am proud to say that this budget provides significant investment across my portfolio areas and across government that will improve services, increase opportunities and improve the quality of life for vulnerable Victorians, their families and those who work with them.

This year's budget also shows our commitment to regional Victoria and particularly to Geelong. They are investments that build on the significant investment in and the rebuilding of Geelong. In fact under this government Geelong has been transformed, with new jobs, new industries, population growth, more young people staying in the region and new services and infrastructure, ranging from the ring-road and Skilled Stadium to the rebuilding of schools, the Geelong Hospital, the McKellar Centre and local community

and sporting infrastructure. This year's budget is no different. Additional funding has been allocated to increase the capacity of the Geelong Hospital and to begin planning for a second hospital in the region.

There is also funding of \$76.9 million to undertake the final stage of the Geelong Ring Road. This road has already been a boon for Geelong and the Surf Coast residents, and it has become an important connection for tourists and residents alike.

The budget also continues our investment in important infrastructure linking Geelong to Melbourne, with \$4.3 billion for the regional rail link project, delivering stand-alone tracks for trains to and from Geelong. It is a great boost to local services and provides greater reliability and capacity.

This budget also provides funding to support our important emergency services in the region — lifesaving clubs, the Country Fire Authority and the State Emergency Service — acknowledging the contribution of our volunteers, who help keep our community safe.

Again, this budget positions Victoria and Geelong for the future. It delivers jobs, it delivers investment, it delivers new infrastructure and it delivers important services. It is a win for families and for communities in every corner of our state. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr ROBINSON (Minister for Gaming) — I am very pleased to contribute to this year's budget debate, in particular on behalf of the good people of the electorate of Mitcham.

Mr Walsh — It's your last one, so make the most of it.

Mr ROBINSON — We might have to have a wager on that, Walshie. We'll see how we go. This year you might pay up — that'd be a change!

This is yet another solid, strong, responsible Labor budget in Victoria. It is interesting that at a time when economic stability is very much the exception right around the globe, Victoria continues to be a shining example not just to the rest of the country but to the wider world. I will start my contribution by referring to a comment piece entitled 'Victoria's glowing example' in the *Australian Financial Review* of 5 May by Alan Mitchell, a well-respected commentator. It states:

Certainly the government can take its share of the credit. The strong population growth — at 2.2 per cent in the past year, a third higher than that of New South Wales — has been

assisted by the government's efforts to maintain the supply of land for new housing.

That, the former Treasury economists at Access Economics point out, has given Victoria the best record of any state in keeping up with the underlying demand for housing.

The state has also done better than any other at supplying jobs for its new residents. Trend employment growth over the past year was almost 4 per cent, double the national growth rate and two and a half times that of its struggling rival, New South Wales.

That is a common endorsement. We have seen numerous other endorsements from respected commentators.

I guess all of us in here understand the value of creating sustainable jobs; that is what family life depends upon. In the last year Victoria has provided overwhelmingly the majority of full-time jobs created in Australia. That is not bad for a state that accounts for only about one-quarter of the nation's population. I made that comparison with other jurisdictions around the world, where on a daily basis now we see turmoil. Their poor decision making in the past decade has led to dislocation and turmoil that is probably going to get worse before it gets better. At a time of massive economic dislocation through Europe and the US, Victoria and Victorians have responded overwhelmingly with confidence.

I will look at some of the commentaries responding to our budget. The Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry said:

... the 2010–11 state budget has delivered business a short-odds trifecta via modest cuts in business taxation and WorkCover premiums, selected infrastructure boosts and a strong surplus.

...

The 3.5 per cent WorkCover premium cut will benefit nearly all Victorian businesses ...

At the other end of the commentary spectrum the Victorian Council of Social Service said:

With AFV —

A Fairer Victoria —

we've also seen state leadership in policy ...

...

... this government does work incredibly hard, and most of the time does get it right ...

The Brotherhood of St Laurence backed up those comments by saying:

The Brotherhood ... is encouraged by the emphasis of today's Victorian state budget on ensuring that all Victorians can share in the more prosperous times it forecasts.

Those are very positive endorsements.

After more than 10 years in government you do not get to a position of being able to deliver budgets which are progressive and responsible and provide well for the needs of the state without making hard decisions. As I said before, the contrast with other jurisdictions is clear. In so many other jurisdictions, particularly in Europe, hard decisions were not made, and the consequences are now becoming apparent.

As a Victorian government member in the last decade — and it is a great privilege to be a member of a government — I have sat through many meetings and requested many things I would have liked to have seen rolled out instantly in my electorate, but the discipline of the government has always been such that we had to look broadly at what was right for the state. We had to get the expenditure and revenue sides matched up, and there were occasions when we were not able to deliver things as quickly as I would have liked to have seen them delivered to the Mitcham electorate. That discipline, multiplied over numerous electorates and over a number of years, ensures that we as a state can thrive in difficult economic times, when other jurisdictions around us are doing very poorly. It again emphasises the inherent discipline of this government.

In the Mitcham electorate we have seen a number of tremendous initiatives. The most important of those is the nearby Box Hill Hospital, where a \$408 million rebuilding is now under way. My family is no different from many other families in the eastern suburbs that have relied upon services at the Box Hill Hospital. It is a great hospital that has served the region tremendously well over many years. However, as happens with all pieces of physical infrastructure, Box Hill Hospital has worn down and needs rebuilding. The government has announced a spectacular rebuilding project that will keep the hospital in its current location — a very convenient and central location for those in the eastern suburbs — and will allow the footprint of that valued institution to double. It is not an easy project to undertake, because the building work has to take place while the hospital continues to function. But I have been pleased to be associated with the Minister for Health and the other members who have championed this rebuilding project, which will deliver huge benefits to the Mitcham electorate and to electorates nearby for many years to come.

We have also seen continued investment in our schools in this budget. This carries on a proud Labor tradition that has continued since we came to office, whereby a number of schools have completed entire rebuilds and others have been through building phases.

The condition of schools in the electorate bears virtually no comparison to what it was 10 years ago. This year we will see work commencing at Blackburn High School. It is a greatly admired school; it does great work, particularly in terms of its music program. That will start later this year and is greatly welcomed. Ten years ago that school — some longer serving members might remember this — had a self-government model. It was a flawed model that did tremendous damage within that school from 1998–99. The school was glad to see that model discarded. We look forward to that work being undertaken at Blackburn High School.

Blackburn Primary School, which is nearby, continues with its planning work. I am hopeful it will be funded next year. It is very close to having that planning work completed. That is another excellent state school. It has a combination of quite historic buildings and other less contemporary buildings. The school is looking forward to them being updated. Down the road in Blackburn North we will see the construction of a new primary school, the Whitehorse primary school, on the site of the former Springview Primary School. That is something local residents are very much anticipating.

We have seen two kindergarten upgrades. Just prior to the delivery of the budget, funds were announced for a series of kindergarten upgrades, including a \$100 000 grant to the well-known and greatly respected Taralye centre, which specialises in oral-only learning techniques for children with hearing impairments. It is a service that has served its catchment constituency well for the last 40 years. It is a service that was initially started by the efforts of parents who were concerned in the late 1960s and early 1970s that the state was not providing sufficient services for children born with hearing impairments. Those parents did not wish their children to be trained in the more traditional responses to those conditions. Taralye does a great job, and the \$100 000 grant to assist with a new roof will be greatly appreciated and put to great use later this year.

We have seen the success in the last year — and work is now just being finalised — of the Springvale Road level crossing. It is a tremendous project. People who have been living in the area for 50 years or more have been waiting literally most of their lives to see this project come to fruition. That work was completed in record time due to the superb planning and construction

work undertaken by the Springvale Road rail alliance partners. They have done that in a way which minimised disruption and delivered a first-class asset to the people of the Mitcham electorate and particularly the residents of Nunawading. As someone who grew up in the shadows of Springvale Road and who was familiar from a very young age with the congestion that that crossing caused, I welcome the work that has been done on that crossing. It greatly complements the earlier level crossing elimination at nearby Middleborough Road.

The Mitcham electorate suffered for a long time from traffic congestion that was generated by the proximity of the major east–west arterial across a major rail line. As a consequence, a series of north–south arterials would very quickly get blocked by a combination of level crossing traffic and intersection traffic. To now have two of those major arterial grades separated is a revolution in terms of transport accessibility in the Mitcham electorate. I am delighted to have been associated with that project.

In conclusion, I want to spend a moment addressing one part of my ministerial responsibilities. It is something that does not get much coverage — the role I play in assisting the Premier on veterans' affairs. One of the great programs the Labor government initiated some time ago was the community war memorial restoration program. This program allows for numerous war memorials around Victoria to be upgraded. Many of them have been in place for many years and are feeling the effects of time and weather. To be able to go and present local groups, councils and residents with news that funds will be provided for restoration work is one of the great privileges of my ministerial life. Wherever I go across the state — I have been to some distant and little-known localities for the purpose of announcing these awards — the response is always one of gratitude and pride. These small memorials which means so much to those people and towns are going to be given an upgrade. It is a case where a small grant can make a huge difference.

Recently I was in the Macedon electorate with the member for Macedon — —

Ms Duncan — Romsey!

Mr ROBINSON — We were at Romsey on an early winter's day. I think we would say it was a soft day. Conditions were not ideal, but it was great to have a cross-section of local residents in the town who were all thrilled that their memorial was going to be given an upgrade. Later that day I went to Eganstown, which is not far from Daylesford. I will read a letter from

Winsome Menadue, who wrote on behalf of the citizens and friends of Eganstown:

On behalf of the residents and friends of Eganstown we wish to express our thanks for your attendance at the little war memorial on ... 11 May 2010 for the presentation of the government grant \$4000 to have the names of the once citizens who enlisted in the conflicts.

One citizen, the eldest of a family, enlisted and went to the Boer War. One returned home and had a blacksmith shop in Daylesford.

Checking the names today I discovered the details are not up to date as 13 did not return.

She then says my presence and words were:

... a reminder that we of the present citizens remember the past contribution for the future to learn and appreciate their freedom —

that they have won. That is a very eloquent statement of the value of these grants. I know they are very much appreciated across the state of Victoria. We do more work in the veterans field at a state level in Victoria than anyone else in the country. That is another part of the proud Labor tradition in this state.

This is a great budget. It is one that delivers great benefits to the people in the electorate of Mitcham. It is one that also delivers great benefits right across the state. It is one of our best budgets.

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — It gives me great pleasure to speak in support of the Victorian state budget. This budget builds, as other speakers have said, on this government's track record of investing across this state regardless of where you live — in the city or in the regions — and particularly in the things that this government sees as its major priorities, that being education, health and community safety as well as infrastructure.

We know that many challenges lie ahead of us, both natural challenges and challenges that have come about as a result of increasing population across Victoria, which has been as a result of a range of things, one being a boom in births in Victoria — and of course that is very welcome. It is healthy for our economy to have an increasing number of births. It is also lovely for families, but it brings with it some challenges that governments have to address and plan for. That planning requires forward thinking, but it also requires investment. That is what is delivered in the Victorian budget for 2010–11.

I believe it is appropriately entitled *Standing Up for Families — Securing Jobs*, and that is exactly what this budget has done and allows us to continue to do. We

know we have been through some very difficult times in this state, not only in 2009 with the bushfires, but also with the worldwide financial crisis that we have seen in world economies and the way in which Australia, and obviously Victoria, has dealt with that. It has been dealt with extremely well in this state despite the predictions from the opposition following last year's budget that we would go into, I think it suggested, recession.

With the careful management we have under the Brumby Labor government and the Treasurer, we have seen such a crisis averted in this state — and not just 'averted', because this state has continued to grow and prosper. That really has been about prudent leadership and careful management of the economy.

We have seen in this budget a strong emphasis on securing jobs and maintaining high levels of investment in infrastructure as we have dealt with the global financial crisis — and we have been very successful in that endeavour, in partnership with the commonwealth government, in many projects as well. We have seen close to 100 000 new jobs being created in Victoria since March 2009, making Victoria the state in Australia with the fastest job growth, far beyond any other state — no other state even comes close. In the last 12 months Victoria has recorded the fastest employment growth of any Australian state, accounting for almost half of all the jobs that have been created across the country. In Victoria we have also had the highest full-time job growth of any Australian state. Of those job growths in the last 12 months, 25 000 jobs have been created in regional Victoria, which again demonstrates that this government creates opportunities right across the state regardless of whether you live in metropolitan Melbourne or in a small country town.

Alongside that investment in infrastructure we have continued to invest in education and training. This budget will continue to secure jobs through investments in a range of projects across the state. To highlight that, the investment we have made in the government's infrastructure program under a range of areas is estimated to secure around 30 000 jobs over the 2010–11 period. A graph provided by the Department of Treasury and Finance shows the general government infrastructure investment in Victoria; it tells the story very dramatically. We have seen increases in infrastructure spending from 1999 right through to this year's current budget and estimates going forward to 2013–14 — in fact the biggest infrastructure spend will occur in this 2010–11 period.

We know that investment in infrastructure not only creates jobs, which is critical at this time, and has been

critical as we have moved on — and hopefully moved forward from the economic crisis we faced — but is what enables us to grow as a state and to plan for future generations in a whole range of areas of government endeavour, such as in health, education, roads and community safety endeavour; I am very pleased that this government has continued its focus on increasing infrastructure.

I remember what happened in the 1999–2000 period or the 2000–01 period, but certainly early in this government's term under then Premier Steve Bracks. In relation to comparing the infrastructure investment that we were making in those early years with the infrastructure investment that had been made in the previous seven years, I remember being pretty impressed with what our efforts were at that time.

But if you look at the graph in the budget papers provided by the Department of Treasury and Finance, what we see is that from 1999–2000 right across the last 10 years, infrastructure investment has continued to grow as our population and needs have grown and we need to continue to invest.

One of the areas of huge investment has been in the area of health. I know that we have gone beyond doubling our investment in health over those 10 or so years, and that is no mean feat. Investment in health under any government is huge, so to double that investment is a massive task and I think speaks volumes about where this government puts its money, or puts our money — taxpayers money — in preparing for the future and making sure that we have the medical infrastructure that we know we need today and will need increasingly into the future.

It is not like the health budget has ever started from a low base, so to increase that investment is massive. This budget continues that investment, particularly in public hospitals. We continue to build and upgrade hospitals across Victoria, including under this budget major redevelopments at Box Hill and at Bendigo — a wonderful announcement in the budget about the Bendigo hospital — in addition to the \$1.1 billion allocated since the 2009–10 budget for the Parkville Comprehensive Cancer Centre and the Wonthaggi hospital.

This government is providing the biggest investment ever in regional hospitals. We saw that some years ago when we completely rebuilt the Kyneton hospital, and I am very pleased to see the allocation for the Sunbury day hospital continue. It is very exciting to see that building nearing completion. That has been another

example of this government's investment in health infrastructure.

This government continues to provide the biggest investment in regional hospitals, including \$473 million for the new Bendigo hospital, which is the largest regional hospital project ever undertaken in Victoria and will include 308 acute inpatient beds, an emergency department with 34 places, 8 operating theatres, 75 mental health beds and an integrated women's and children's facility. It will be state-of-the-art and it will meet the growing needs of Bendigo and the regions surrounding Bendigo.

This budget also provides \$408 million for the Box Hill Hospital redevelopment and \$91 million for the final funding allocation for the expansion of the Sunshine Hospital, thereby meeting one of the government's key election commitments of 2006, which was to expand the health services in Melbourne's west. I am very pleased to see those staged developments occurring at Sunshine Hospital. The hospital is one of the closest major public hospitals to the Macedon electorate and many constituents in Sunbury and beyond attend there.

We have also seen funding for something that is used by many people in my electorate. A sum of \$10 million has been allocated to continue the redevelopment of the Allied Health facilities at Royal Melbourne Hospital's city campus. This year's budget makes the final allocation under the medical equipment replacement and statewide infrastructure renewal program. It is quite a long-winded title for a very important program that provides \$20 million to renew critical health infrastructure and \$35 million to replace medical equipment across the hospital system for the next 12 months.

There are also the ongoing issues of managing demand and dealing with waiting lists. This budget provides money to boost capacity to meet growing demand and includes \$276 million over four years to expand patient services, including critical and maternity services, to treat an additional 22 000 patients in this next budget period. Also, \$46 million has been allocated over four years for new mental health inpatient services, and \$140 million has been allocated to expand a range of services, including renal dialysis, chemotherapy and radiotherapy, and blood services, as well as subacute services, palliative-care and transition-care places. We hope to provide some of these services, such as renal dialysis, at the new Sunbury day hospital.

We know the way health care is provided is changing quite dramatically, and part of the budget continues to invest in research into health care. We know that in a

very short period of time the change has meant, for example, that since between five and eight years ago the number of operations done as day surgery has dramatically increased. I think we are now seeing something like 60 per cent of operations being done as day surgery. That is a huge change in a relatively short period of time. The Sunbury day hospital will be a very welcome addition to health infrastructure in the Macedon electorate.

All areas of government are covered in this budget, including the promotion of community safety. One of the key features of this budget is the provision of the biggest increase in police numbers in Victoria's history — an additional 1966 front-line police over five years — as a continuation of this government's investment in police. By the end of June 2010 we will have increased the total number of police in Victoria to 11 370 sworn police officers. By November 2010 we will have achieved the government's commitment of providing a police force of 11 420 officers across the state, which will be an increase in the total number of police in Victoria of 20 per cent. There are a range of other measures in this budget to help deliver a safer state.

I am pleased to point out that today the government tabled the Auditor-General's report entitled *Personal Safety and Security on the Metropolitan Train System*. In its conclusion the report states:

VicPol and the department have been successful in reducing crime on Melbourne's train system since 2007–08.

In contrast, the approach to improve passengers' perceptions of safety has not been effective and requires focused attention.

We continue to do that. I guess what I would say is that it is not a question of whether or not problems occur in any government. We know problems will always occur, whether they be in relation to bushfires or whether they be social problems. I am very proud, though, to be part of a government that deals with those problems. I guess it is not so much that the problems occur but that how the government addresses those difficulties when and where they occur is testimony to its performance. There is much more in this budget that I could continue to highlight. I am very proud of this budget. It continues the legacy of the great work of this government. I commend it to the house.

Mr SCOTT (Preston) — I rise to support the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill 2010. This is an excellent budget, particularly for the Preston electorate. I will touch on a number of local initiatives before I discuss the broader implications and nature of the budget in my contribution.

Funding has been provided for the Preston tram depot, which will enable the purchase of 50 new high-capacity low-floor trams and the supporting infrastructure, which includes the redevelopment of the Preston tram workshop as a tram depot. Funding will also allow for the purchase of a power supply upgrade.

I am particularly pleased that funding has been provided for the Northern School for Autism, which is a specialist school for autistic children located in Tyler Street, Preston. The school has been significantly boosted by this budget. In fact the school will be rebuilt on a new site after receiving \$10 million in the budget. The new site will be a purpose-built campus with capacity for 150 students; it will be on the site of the former Burbank Primary School in Reservoir. The Burbank site was freed up by the merger of two primary schools, creating the Reservoir Views Primary School.

This is an excellent initiative, and anyone who knows the Northern School for Autism would know that the current site is essentially constructed out of portables. I pay tribute to the staff and parents for the work they have done at that site. The school really requires a purpose-built campus specifically designed for the needs of autistic children.

The new campus will increase the capacity for the school. The current school can accommodate 100 students. It was at capacity and had a waiting list of parents wanting to enrol their children. The new site will increase capacity but will also include facilities, such as classroom, arts, library, multipurpose and administrative buildings. This is really fantastic for the northern suburbs of Melbourne, and I would like to put on the record my great personal regard particularly for the parents of autistic children, because anyone who knows anything about autism and the effect an autistic child has on a family knows that many parents dedicate their lives to the welfare of their child. The Northern School for Autism redevelopment will provide an excellent new facility which will assist parents in that fantastic work.

There has also been a significant boost to funding for the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT), involving a campus redevelopment with a teaching and learning centre. Over the last 10 years there has been an investment of \$439 million in building and upgrading technical and further education infrastructure across Victoria. This budget provides \$55 million for TAFE infrastructure, but particularly for the residents of Preston this includes a new teaching and learning centre at NMIT's Preston campus. This funding will allow for the construction of a three-level teaching and learning

centre of around 8200 square metres located on the existing student car park, with connections to existing campus buildings.

The centre will accommodate further education, building design and drafting, children's services, business and commerce, health and community service and corporate units. NMIT is a real hub for post-secondary education in the northern suburbs, providing opportunities for many young people to build future careers and have educational opportunities in our society. It is often used as a pathway to university by individuals who did not get entry in the first place, and it is also used for apprenticeships and other technical education. It is a fantastic centre which, as I said previously, gives many opportunities to young people in the northern suburbs.

Another initiative I would like to touch upon that is located just out of my electorate but will provide significant benefits to people living in my electorate is the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre, stage 2 of which is funded in this budget. The centre will be a purpose-built dedicated cancer and treatment centre located at the Austin Hospital, which, although it is in the member for Ivanhoe's electorate, services the needs of people in my electorate.

This will consolidate and expand the centre's clinical care and research activities. It is my understanding that the value of the centre is \$68.9 million. This is a fantastic initiative which will improve cancer services. Many residents in my electorate are touched by cancer, and the improvement in the facilities that the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre will provide means that world-class services will be available to residents of the northern suburbs.

In addition Northern Health will have new cardiac catheterisation services at the Northern Hospital at Epping to meet the demand pressures, with two additional cardiac catheterisation laboratories at a cost of \$7.37 million. Cardiac emergency services are obviously critical to people in the northern suburbs, and we are ensuring that those services can meet their needs. The Northern Hospital particularly services the northern Reservoir area of my electorate. People often go to the Northern Hospital to receive services, and improvements in the services will lead to better health outcomes. I have to say there has been a great tradition in this government of delivering health services.

On a broader note, moving beyond my electorate, this is a fantastic budget for all of Victoria particularly because of the willingness to invest in infrastructure, and I note that the previous speaker touched upon this

fact. If you examine infrastructure spending over a period of time, at the time the government was elected it was sitting at a little over \$2 billion in 1999–2000 for the non-financial public sector. If you include commonwealth stimulus spending, which was passed on, and public-private partnerships, it increased to just under \$12 billion during the last financial year, although it has declined somewhat, as there has been a winding back of the stimulus package.

Capital spending, including what the commonwealth passed on, is running at over \$9 billion. This is a very significant investment in public infrastructure, and I will soon touch upon some of the elements of that investment in my contribution. This means future generations will have the services they need to build a better life than we enjoy today. I am a great believer in leaving a legacy of improved services and infrastructure and a better standard of living, and that is something this government has been committed to.

As has been stated earlier, the budget is in place in the context of a global financial crisis, but Victoria has a good story to tell in comparison to most jurisdictions, with almost 100 000 jobs created in the 12 months leading up to the Victorian budget. That is approximately half the jobs created in Australia and is a significant achievement whereby in Victoria at least many more young people have been given the opportunity to enter employment in comparison to what happens in other jurisdictions.

The improved circumstances of Victoria's economic performance compared to our earlier expectations at the onset of the global financial crisis have meant that the relative level of debt that will be incurred as a result of spending will be lower. Members of the opposition have in the past attempted to pretend that there is somehow a crisis. Victoria has kept its AAA credit rating because its budgets have been sensible and conservative in their borrowings and have met all the requirements of the international rating agencies for it to be awarded a AAA credit rating.

Victoria is not at risk of sovereign default, and there is no crisis in its public finances. The estimation is that by 2014 general government net debt as a proportion of state domestic product will be just over 4 per cent. That is hardly a radically high figure and leaves our finances in a very sound state moving into the future.

This budget is designed not just to boost jobs; the initiatives in the budget are designed to create approximately 30 000 jobs in 2010–11, further increasing the opportunities for young people and combating the global financial crisis.

There is a boost to business competitiveness with cuts to taxation. The government has a proud record of cutting taxation and providing a very independent business environment in Victoria whereby the level of taxation has been significantly lowered over time, particularly in reference to both WorkCover premiums, which are not formally a part of taxation but a cost on business, and payroll tax, which has been cut dramatically.

This is also a budget that is concerned with delivering security and safety to Victorians, with a commitment to 1966 more police on the front line. This is a significant boost and builds on earlier commitments by the government to increase the number of police in our community.

I turn now to the investment program of \$9.5 billion, which will secure, as I said earlier, an additional 30 000 Victorian jobs in the financial year. That particularly includes transport infrastructure, with \$4.3 billion for the regional rail link. There are two ways to deal with population growth and a growing society. One is to put your head in the sand. There are a number of other jurisdictions around Australia that during the last 10 years essentially put their heads in the sand and hoped not to have to deal with any infrastructure problems. But the Victorian government has taken and continues to take an active role to ensure that the infrastructure is available for the community to build a better future, particularly in transport.

I would also like to touch on housing, where there have been changes to the first home owner bonus, with it being refocused on the construction of new homes. This is an important change. At the moment approximately 69 per cent of Victorians own their homes, and there has been a very proud tradition of home ownership, but there is a further issue of housing affordability. One of the issues is how you meet not just the demand side, by increasing the ability of young families to buy homes but how you increase supply. By targeting the assistance to new home buyers to newly constructed homes we meet the public policy objective of increasing supply by changing the relative pricing and encouraging the construction industry to supply more homes and provide downward pressure on new home prices for those first entering the home market. This is a very wise policy, because it serves both the demand and supply sides of the housing equation.

I think the needs and desires of young people who are building families together and who are building their future in Victoria are to be able to buy a home and to be able to buy one affordably. In the northern suburbs there are a number of developments north of Epping

where homes can be bought — I checked this recently — for under \$350 000. These new-home packages are for nice, well-designed three-bedroom homes with good access to transport. The Victorian government has made a targeted and thoughtful policy to ensure that housing affordability remains within the grasp of ordinary working Victorians, which is important.

The increase in supply of housing has the knock-on effect of improving the rental market. Not all Victorians will be buying a home. A range of Victorians rent their homes. I note that the member for Albert Park is in the chamber; large numbers of people in Albert Park rent. By increasing housing supply, pressure is taken off the rental market. This contrasts with the attitude of a certain former New South Wales Premier, which was that Sydney is full. Consequently he did not build infrastructure or address housing affordability. This led to decreasing affordability. Comparisons have been done, and the sort of housing affordability that I have described in Epping is simply not available in Sydney close to the city and with access to high-quality transport services.

These policies, particularly the retargeting of the first home bonus and policies that encourage people to live in regional Victoria — further boosting economic activity in that important area of the state, which is a real focus for the government — have allowed this government to focus on the housing needs of Victorians. There has also been a great commitment — and I will touch upon it presently — to social and public housing, of which I am very proud to say there have been a number of examples in my electorate in recent years, including housing being constructed as we speak.

There is a combination of assisting the private market, increasing the housing supply and improving the supply of social and public housing to ensure that housing is available at a more reasonable price than in many other jurisdictions.

This is an excellent budget that will do much to improve the lives of families in Victoria. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park) — It is always a pleasure to follow the considered contributions of my friend, the member for Preston. It is an even greater joy for me to make a few brief comments on the appropriation bill before us.

This bill is the basis of the state's economic activity, and under the stewardship of the Treasurer, the Premier

and the cabinet of this Labor government we have seen the state's economy not only get through the global financial crisis and the worst economic conditions in a generation but also emerge resilient and stronger — indeed it is the engine room of the Australian economy — in delivering jobs and opportunities for all Victorians, whether they live in the inner or outer suburbs or in country or regional centres. This is a budget that delivers a resilient economy, jobs and infrastructure as the basis for future prosperity. It provides for the future to make sure that our state's vital community services can be enjoyed by our thriving community, and it ensures that funding will be spent on the many key services that Victorians rely on.

In many ways it is a budget that is focused on the future. It is focused on the people, communities and environment of Victoria, and it places us as a leader of both a dynamic Australia and this region of the global economy. It is a budget that also deals with the challenges and the opportunities provided through the ideas and strong leadership brought to government by this side of the Parliament. It makes the most of those opportunities and deals with those challenges. This is a state budget that only this side of the house could deliver. Those on the other side, with their policy-free, lazy and unelectable leadership are not in a position to contribute the sort of budget that this side of the house has.

I would like to concentrate my comments on the budget's contribution to this government's commitment to the management and sustainability — through a new approach — of our natural environment. Our prosperity, our economy, our services, our lifestyle and the futures of our people are all very much based on the resources that we bring from our natural environment into our built environment. This government is committed to sustaining and growing both those resources and the community in an active partnership that is focused on both innovation and appropriate management of those natural resources.

As we all know, ours is a state faced with many challenges arising from the relationship between the natural and built environments. That climate change and the impact of human-driven activity contribute to this is well known and accepted on this side of the house as a major challenge, unlike those opposite — who — I will not describe with an unparliamentary, one-word definition — whose federal leaders can be described as denialists or cavemen on this issue. Those opposite would send us even further backwards on this important issue.

As part of the impact of climate change there are more intense drought periods, lower average rainfall and increased average temperatures, and as a result we see the mounting risks of fire damage from the catastrophic fire events that flow from those factors. Sadly, we only have to look to the Black Saturday bushfires of last year for evidence of that.

Perhaps equally important is the issue of water security for communities, the environment and industry. These challenges are all set against the challenge of managing the state's biodiversity and our accumulated natural capital, which is both valuable and important in its own right but which equally underpins much of the lifestyle and economic activity of the people of this state.

This natural environment has been and continues to be in many ways greatly stressed as we have managed the coexistence of both our natural and built environments and their relationship to our thriving lifestyles. What this state budget seeks to do is bring into sharp contrast the strategies that this side of the house has to deal with as part of some of these challenges as opposed to the part-time contributions of those opposite. For it is this Labor government — and this budget — with its visions for sustainability, that will ensure our communities are well placed to contribute to the national leadership in this area around making sure that economic activity, jobs and opportunities for the future are built into our response for dealing with these environmental challenges the government is making sure that the issues of innovation are linked inextricably with our desire to reduce our footprint on our natural capital by recognising, measuring, pricing and valuing those natural inputs and resources.

Those opposite are incapable of achieving this, because no-one would know what their policy positions are on any of these critical issues. That would depend on the day of the week or the position of the political cycle or the media cycle that drives so much of their contributions in this and other areas. What you need is a vision, a plan, and this government has put a great deal of solid public policy work into making sure that we approach this important series of issues on a solid public policy basis, as it has in many areas.

I will draw the attention of the house to some of those that might bring into stark contrast the choices that will be facing Victorians later this year on this and, indeed, many other issues. This is an area in which the state budget will be securing much of the policy position of the government. Perhaps most importantly in this area is the white paper *Securing Our Natural Future — A White Paper for Land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change*, which was brought out late last year,

and which, together with the earlier 2009 Victorian climate change green paper, provided the policy rigour of much of the government's approach to land management and biodiversity issues. Indeed they provided the basis on which our approach to climate change response and mitigation is driven.

In particular, in the run-up to the election and incorporated in this budget is the fully funded Jobs for the Future Economy plan, which details across the whole of the state the whole-of-government approach to many of the opportunities and issues that would see some of these challenges turned into positives for our future economy and our future workforce, and particularly using our intellectual capital response to the natural capital's problems to create opportunities for this stuff.

Of course this is hard, grinding public policy work; it is not the stuff of flashy headlines and 30-second media grabs by those who know they will never have to implement their policies. It is the basis of rigorous and determined public policy where you have a plan and a vision for where you want to take the state and, in particular, the Jobs for the Future Economy plan sets that up for the whole of the state.

This is a government that is committed to reducing the impact of our growth and development on the finite resources of our natural environment. Through the innovation and leadership of economic activities we seek to transition to the new economies of the 21st century and make sure that the activities of human economic activity are appropriately balanced with the resources of the natural world in sustaining them.

This is really a budget, in these three policy documents I have referred to, that makes sure the natural world and our lifestyles and economic activity are essentially accounted for and factored into our management of both the economy and the natural world, so we can see that the failure to take into account the impact of our economic activity on the broader ecosystems of the world is not so much market failure, but really a very classic case of cost shifting as we seek to shift the cost and the burdens to the natural world.

What these public policy documents that are given life to through this budget really seek to do is ensure a proper system of regulating and measuring the assets that contribute from our natural world and underpin the economic and lifestyle activities which see the appropriate emphasis placed on what in lots of cases has been called unaccounted-for external factors in this economic measuring.

We can measure and account for these assets, and when we do that is when we begin to value them. This is a lesson that the economic and environmental illiterates opposite would be well advised to learn when they go about, one would assume, turning their minds to what it is they are going to seek to convince the people of Victoria about as to why they should be elected. But they will have a long way to go in terms of trying to match the emphasis that this government has brought to these issues. The position is that this government, through the budget, makes sure that we recognise the challenges and the opportunities, and seek to ensure that we use the market system that drives so much of our economic activity and has seen us through the global financial crisis problems, to make sure that that underpins a new approach to our sustainable approach to economic activity.

Whether this approach is reflected in energy, in water, in carbon reduction, in mitigating the impacts of climate change, we know that this budget brings a unified approach to managing all of these challenges. This is set against a range of challenges elsewhere in the budget that are dealt with.

In regard to how these issues then translate into the district of Albert Park and how the people of that community seek to deal with a thriving, indeed booming, economic activity, a booming population and a booming community able to meet these challenges, there are many good examples reflected in this budget. I might draw the attention of the house to just a few of the infrastructure investments that this budget delivers for the Albert Park community.

Major Projects Victoria is leading quite a range of investments in those. I will particularly draw the attention of the house to the Princes Pier redevelopment in Port Melbourne, which has well and truly turned the corner in terms of finalising this iconic and important industrial, military and indeed multicultural site that has underpinned much of the Victorian community's contribution in those three areas over almost 100 years. The restoration and turning of that into a new community facility is well on track for completion in 2011 at a cost of over \$30 million in a very complicated engineering feat.

There is the Lakeside Oval redevelopment to be the home of the Victorian Institute of Sport, the South Melbourne Football Club and a range of other community and elite activities. That project was recently commenced by the Minister for Major Projects and that, too, is on schedule for completion in 2011.

The next major redevelopment of the arts precinct has begun with the redevelopment of the Hamer Hall precinct. The internal and external changes there will make sure it continues to be our premier elite arts precinct by turning that facility away from the St Kilda Road entrance to focus increasingly towards a pedestrian community-friendly Yarra River.

There are other major projects going on, particularly in the areas of education investment and housing investment. In particular I draw the attention of the house to the exceptional new college in Albert Park which following a \$30 million investment from the state is on schedule to open in 2011 under the stewardship of a fantastic leadership team headed by the new principal, Steve Cook. We are well and truly advanced in making sure there is a community-focused high school delivering quality, rigorous and academically-focused education that would make it a very viable option for families wanting to send their children to state education. I commend the budget to the house.

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — It is a great pleasure to join the budget debate, particularly having just heard the member for Albert Park who is doing such a great job and providing such great representation for his constituents. It is a great pleasure to join with members to congratulate the Treasurer and the Premier for their work in presenting what is a great budget — a budget which builds on the past decade and which takes us into the future.

We have to remember when we look around the Western world just how well Australia has come through the global financial crisis. If we then compare Victoria to other jurisdictions across Australia, we can see how well Victoria is doing — Victoria has really got the best of the best. But of course that is not easy to do; it takes an enormous amount of work. Victoria is very fortunate to have a Premier and Treasurer who are completely devoted to making sure this state is a great place to live, work, engage, do things and raise a family.

I would like to make some remarks about police, emergency services and corrections. I will also take this opportunity to make some comments about central Victoria, a place dear to my heart. The budget shows what the government has been able to achieve. By the end of this year we will have nearly 2000 more police than we did a decade ago, which will be the biggest increase ever in a decade in Victoria. That was necessary for us to do because prior to coming into government we had that most terrible of

combinations — that is, The Nationals having the police portfolio and working hand in hand with the then president of the Liberal Party, Ted Baillieu, and promising 1000 police but cutting numbers by 800.

That terrible combination is back in business at present, but we have provided for an additional 2000 police. In the next five years the government's program is for an additional 1700 police, together with the freeing up of 266 more so that in the next five years Victoria will have 1966 additional front-line police.

It will cost the state \$561 million over five years to recruit, train and employ 1700 police, with \$73.9 million over four years for 200 police to be freed up; then \$38.4 million will be spent on releasing 66 police from telephone answering duties. We will end up with 1966 police.

In addition the budget also announced \$98.1 million to redevelop and centralise the police crime department. The leases on some buildings will expire in 2012; the budget commits to locate and fit out new and better premises. Police and staff now stationed at 412 St Kilda Road and 452 Flinders Street, along with some at police headquarters, will all be brought together in what will effectively be a central crime centre. That is badly needed by the police, so we must get that arrangement in place.

In the decade since 2000–01 there has been a reduction in crime of over 25 per cent. I join with all government members to congratulate local police on the work they do on the ground around the state to help keep Victoria safe. Today the Auditor-General made comments about crime on the public transport system. While we like to see crime levels going down, as the Auditor-General says, that is no consolation for anybody who is involved in a crime. That is why Labor is committed to work with police by making provisions for 1966 additional police in the coming five years.

In my portfolio of corrections — and I note that the member for Ripon is in the house — a tremendous project is being developed for a new prison at Ararat. That is obviously important for the corrections system, just as it is important for jobs in Ararat. The member for Ripon will acknowledge just how much has occurred in his area and in country Victoria, including work on the Ararat police station, which is coming along fantastically at present. This budget has funds for more police stations over and above the government's election commitments. There are also more funds for beds in both the men's and women's prison systems.

On Black Saturday 2009 we saw a fire event like we have never seen before. We saw the tragic consequences of that in terms of loss of life and property. Some people will say that this new, changed environment is because of climate change; others will say this is a natural change in the climate. Whatever it is, we have to confront a situation where we can have a fire event at a new level. That is why we continue to see substantial change. In this budget we have made funding commitments so all of those changes occur into the future.

We are very fortunate in this state to have tremendous volunteers and staff in the CFA (Country Fire Authority) and in other emergency services. Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria does such a tremendous job representing fire brigades around the state. Their president, Gary Lyttle, and CEO, Andrew Ford, have made important representations on behalf of their members. The work that these organisations do is critical to the community, where so many people are reliant upon volunteers of the CFA.

I will make some observations. Some honourable members opposite want to make comments about police. On 6 April this year the opposition promised 1600 additional police. Those opposite said \$140 million of their commitment — that is 651 police, or 41 per cent — would come from government advertising. That is a double count, because the opposition has previously earmarked that money for additional protective services officers, so 651 suddenly disappear. We also know the opposition is opposed to the way the operational response unit was funded. You will remember that that was established last year. One hundred and twenty police go as a result of the opposition's objection to that funding. Together that makes a 771 reduction in police. But that is what you would expect when you have The Nationals and the Leader of the Opposition working together, just as happened when the Leader of the Opposition was the president of the Liberal Party. What they are about is reducing the number of police.

There is only one party in this house that you can trust when it comes to increasing police — that is, Labor. The opposition members are the ones who recognise that. The Leader of The Nationals says that Labor has delivered on what it has said it would. In fact they have done a bit more, and he has no challenge to that. As he says, there is one party that delivers — and that party is Labor.

I will talk about central Victoria. It is a great place. The member for Ripon, a former federal candidate for Bendigo and a former mechanic at Newstead, knows

what a great place it is. Let us look at the key projects that have transformed central Victoria, such as the regional fast rail; the Calder duplication; at the last election, the education plan for new junior secondary schools; and the new police station. These are all the things which we have pushed and promoted and which those opposite have blocked or opposed. That is disgraceful, whether it be, for example, closure of the ambulance station in Kangaroo Flat — and here is Labor with a plan for ambulance stations in Bendigo — or whether it be about Labor's super-pipe. Since the last election we would have had a couple of summers without any water for Bendigo, Castlemaine or Harcourt. Properties in the apple industry in Harcourt would now be in a dust bowl if we did what the Liberal Party and The Nationals wanted to do — that is, not allow water to be bought from Goulburn irrigators so that central Victoria could survive. I have to ask: what sort of party cannot stand up for its own constituents? What sort of party would allow well over 140 000 or 150 000 people to be simply left without any water?

As you may be aware, Acting Speaker, at the last election only one party promised to plan ahead for the future hospital needs of Bendigo. There was another party that would not do that — the Liberal Party. There was an additional party that would not do that — The Nationals. It was Labor that said, 'This is what we'll do', and has done it. The best way forward for the future is what the government has announced in the budget: a \$473 million commitment for a new hospital in Bendigo based on the Anne Caudle site.

When you look at the changes — whether it be the fast rail, the Calder upgrade, the education plan, the super-pipe, the new police station or what is occurring with ambulances — you realise that these are the big things that have to happen. And it is Labor, the party that has a vision for central Victoria, that is doing them.

What a turnaround it is. In the 1990s those opposite wanted to close hospitals — and we know that is their plan. They tried to close Dunolly hospital and failed. Maldon Hospital was next, and they failed. We have improved both hospitals, and in Castlemaine we now see the new aged-care facility. We promised, and we delivered. If you have a look at Castlemaine — which is a great place, whether it be the library project, the new CFA station or the new police station that is on the way — you will see a transformation in confidence that is reflected across central and country Victoria.

We know that we have come through the global financial crisis and that Victoria has been the best of the best, but we have to confront the future and keep the momentum up. That is why we believe the plan we

have and the things we are working on in central Victoria, particularly the \$473 million commitment for the hospital, are so important. The view of The Nationals and those others opposite is not to commit to it. We know that from the last election. Last year Damian Drum, a member for Northern Victoria Region in the other place, said that coalition members will not put up their hands, and the shadow minister has made it clear that they will not be putting up their hands. There is only one party that has put up its hand — and that is Labor, the party that believes in and will stand up for central Victoria. When those opposite come around wanting to knock the fast rail and the fact that we pushed on and pushed on and made the federal Liberal-Nationals government cough up its half share commitment for the Calder upgrade, even though it was late, and when they will not match on our education plan, I have to say to them: we do not care, because we know that by working with central Victorians we will get on with the future.

I will make just one last comment — that is, that the Bendigo Senior Secondary College is a great school; it is the biggest Victorian certificate of education school in the state. We know there are those in the Liberal Party who want to close it down and send it out to somewhere in Golden Square. We say no to that — it should be in the centre of town. In this budget we have allocated funds for the next stage of the development. I have to say it is a great school. I do not say that because I went there; I say it because it is well located and well supported by the Bendigo community. To Liberal Party members I simply say that you can move the school as much as you want to, but you should go out there and tell people. Those opposite are very quiet on the issue at the moment. I want them to go out and tell as many people as possible about their intentions, because we stand up for Bendigo Senior Secondary College, we stand up for Bendigo and we stand up for central Victoria — and we totally reject those opposite who want to condemn us.

Mr HELPER (Minister for Agriculture) — The first thing I want to do in endorsing this budget is echo the words of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services by saying that this budget is deliberately steering us through difficult times and at the same time building on the strength of Victoria. As the previous speaker indicated, when you look at how other jurisdictions in Australia fared during the global financial crisis (GFC) and when you look at how Australia fared during the global financial crisis and compare that with how other countries fared, it all points to one thing — that the budget strategy of investing in the productive capacity of the state, in social services and in the livability of the state that this

government has put in place over all of its budgets has stood us in good stead in getting through the extraordinarily difficult circumstances we have seen around the world.

It was no accident and no 'She'll be right' kind of attitude that got us through this difficult period. I am Minister for Small Business and Minister for Agriculture, and both those sectors faced considerable challenges as a consequence of the GFC. The reason those sectors are travelling well compared to other jurisdictions and other countries is the careful crafting of the financial strategy in this state, which has been executed by the Treasurer and by the Premier and led by the Premier. That has got this state through the GFC and the circumstances we found ourselves in.

For not one second do I suggest that we do not need to continue the careful strategy forward, simply because the circumstances that we see the world economy in and the challenges it faces will also provide us with significant challenges. It is the stewardship of a Labor government that has got us through the GFC, and it is the careful stewardship of the Labor government that will get us through the future challenges. Getting through challenges also has to be tied to the opportunities that are provided once we have overcome those challenges. Those opportunities are manifested in both of my portfolio areas and in my electorate, and I want to discuss them all.

It is important that we understand that in agriculture, like in any portfolio, it cannot simply be an amalgam of a number of disparate policies and a few good ideas thrown in. It has to be a strategic, forward-looking approach to the long-term enhancement of opportunities and resilience to challenges for that sector. That is exactly what this government has done and what the Labor government has done. As the Minister for Police and Emergency Services indicated, Labor is a government for central Victoria but Labor is also a government for Victorian farmers. Let me explain.

A little while ago we released the Future Farming strategy, a strategy that committed \$205 million to emboldening our agricultural sectors to better meet the challenges that are always present in that sector and to better exploit the opportunities that that sector also provides. It is based on science, it is based on making sure our services to farmers are as constructive as they can possibly be, it is based on biosecurity and it is based on ensuring that our rural communities have the best opportunity to be supported by the agricultural sector and also to support the agricultural sector. It has

achieved those objectives through a number of different programs for quite a considerable period of time.

The 2010 state budget builds on that. In agriculture we have had a \$26.8 million investment package to further support Victorian farmers in their resilience to biosecurity threats, to threats of natural disasters and to the stiff competition that our agricultural sectors meet in the world. We want to build up the strength of our farmers and build up the strength of our agricultural sectors. For instance, the budget invests \$11.6 million over four years to establish rapid gene-sequencing technology at Bundoora and Bendigo. What is that about? It may at first glance seem like something relatively esoteric, but I put it to this house that it is very much the future of agriculture. We want to be able to discover the genetic traits that lead to higher levels of production, to discover, isolate and identify the genetic traits that lead to higher water-use efficiency and greater drought tolerance and to have the infrastructure to develop that type of leading science. We have done that so well in Victoria over many years and will do so into the future as a consequence of the Labor government's investment in biosciences across its many fields, but in particular I want to talk about agriculture. The linking up of that research capacity across the state is a great step forward in our endeavours to bring the science to the paddock as quickly as we possibly can.

The 2010 state budget has also allocated \$8.8 million over four years to enhance my department's ability to plan, mobilise and coordinate resources when farmers in this state, rural communities and others are confronted by natural disaster. My department is an important response department in many circumstances of natural disaster — for example, in circumstances such as bushfires, biosecurity threats and outbreaks, and in circumstances such as flood and drought. In all of those circumstances and with other significant natural disaster and biosecurity threats that confront not only agriculture in this state but the whole Victorian community, my department plays a significant role. Its ability to respond quickly, effectively and efficiently is something the Brumby Labor government sees as a higher priority. That is why we have invested \$8.8 million to build that capacity through this year's state budget.

I also want to talk about weeds and pests. They are a significant threat not only to agricultural land and not only to agricultural production but also to our natural environment, to the amenity of this state and to the enjoyment that all Victorians and many visitors can take from our state. If we do not manage the incursion of weeds and pests effectively, we leave the state vulnerable in that regard. We have already seen many

investments and many policies by the Brumby Labor government in this area — for example, the discussion and release of the biosecurity strategy, the investment in the science, the investment in better services to farmers, the investment in the ability of my department to develop biosecurity, weed and pest services to the broader state economy and communities.

In the relatively short time I have left I want to discuss the other portfolio areas that I am responsible for — that is, small business. As I have indicated before, the challenges that the agricultural sector faced as a consequence of the GFC were certainly also faced by the small business sector. Again, Victoria's 500 000 small businesses were extraordinarily resilient and were extraordinarily capable of getting through the GFC with minimal impact on the sector.

I do not for one moment pretend that there are not businesses that have been affected by the GFC circumstances, particularly trade-exposed small businesses. I do not diminish that fact at all, but our role in this state has been to lead a government which has cut business taxes significantly over all of its budgets, and which through my department delivers worthwhile, necessary and well-designed services and information to the small business sector — and all of this comes together to support the resilience of the small business sector.

I do not think it is appropriate for us as a government to claim the credit in its entirety for our business sector getting through the GFC in such good shape. That would be inappropriate, because we need to acknowledge the incredible resilience of our small business sector and our business sector in general. It is terrific that we have such a great partnership between the business community and the state Labor government, enabling the delivery of services, the delivery of advice and the delivery of fundamentally decent, good, solid, prudent financial management of the state to the business community. This all contributed to the strength we find ourselves having.

Take, for example, the \$52 million investment that was made some time ago into the Skills for Growth program. It is fundamentally about ensuring that the small business sector has access to opportunities for the upskilling of its workforce. That involves the planning of that upskilling via business-by-business holistic planning, taken to every participating business and the actual implementation of training plans. It is a terrific initiative and one for which the government can claim some responsibility for underpinning the economic resilience of this state.

In the couple of minutes I have remaining to me I want to touch on some of this year's state budget initiatives in my electorate of Ripon. For example, there is the \$2 million investment in the Halls Gap Primary School, and there is the \$2 million investment in the redevelopment of the Smythesdale campus of the Woody Yaloak Primary School. This government unashamedly sees education as its top priority so as to ensure that the opportunities for our young people and for future generations in this state are maximised.

I reference also the \$1 million upgrade of the Sunraysia Highway. That is not going to be a headline-grabbing initiative, but those people who use the Sunraysia Highway, be it for freight transport in support of the agricultural sector, for tourism or for community commuting, will appreciate the increased safety and travelling convenience resulting from this investment.

There is the \$3 million funding confirmed for Beaufort education centre. That, along with the Halls Gap and Smythesdale schools, is another sign that the government regards education as a top priority and that it is putting its money where its mouth is — that is, investing in teachers and in the infrastructure where they work.

The budget has funding for new fire stations for Burnbank and Moyston Country Fire Authority brigades. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services praised the volunteers who make up the CFA and our emergency services, and I join him in congratulating every CFA member for the commitment they make. Surely it is a worthwhile investment to make their fire stations more efficient and better environments to work out of. Congratulations to the CFA. I am glad I am part of a government that has supported the CFA and its volunteers and that is supporting the further development of the Burnbank and Moyston CFA brigades through this budget.

There is in the budget a \$1 million investment in maintenance works in the fantastic Grampians National Park, an icon of this state. The Premier discussed the fantastic visitation numbers in Victoria which became apparent today. Victoria has attractions such as Melbourne, but in terms of natural attractions the Grampians have no peer in this state. I welcome very much the investment we are making in Grampians National Park maintenance.

This is a terrific budget. It serves my two portfolio areas and my electorate extraordinarily well. It is something that I, as a Labor member of this house, am very proud of.

Sitting suspended 6.28 p.m. until 8.03 p.m.

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Health) — I am very pleased to make a brief contribution in relation to the 2010–11 state budget. It is a very sound budget for all Victorians, no matter where they live or what they do for a living. It is a budget that in every sense reinvests the proceeds of sound economic management in the basic core services that are so important to families right across our great state. It is not just a budget about investment; it is also about providing incentives, particularly providing incentives to rural and regional communities, so that our economy can continue to grow. They are incentives that share those proceeds of economic growth right across the state.

I want to make a few comments about what is a very strong budget outcome in terms of health. There is \$4 billion over the next four years to support a very big capital works program so we can improve the quality of the buildings across our health and human services sector and a strong budget outcome in terms of output or ongoing funding — that is, funding to treat more patients, funding to reform and innovate, funding to continue our fight against cancer and funding that is all about giving to our dedicated clinicians the support they need to in turn support patients.

I also want to speak about the budget and what it delivers. There are a couple of good examples of our government's strong commitment to the community I have the honour and privilege to represent in this Parliament. It is the community I live in. In terms of health, \$4 billion is a very substantial boost that brings to book a number of projects that have been announced previously and also brings to book and fully budgets the very substantial windfall to Victorian patients that is derived directly from the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreement signed in April. It is a very substantial reform of our health system. It is new money. It is a new partnership, and I think it is a stronger partnership with greater commonwealth effort.

There is always room for further improvement on top of any agreement, but in terms of this agreement, in the next four years and under fundamentally new arrangements for the six years after the forward estimates, there are substantial increases in commonwealth effort. That is something this Parliament and the community knows only too well has been missing and lacking. It is very important in terms of directly benefiting patients right across Victoria.

In relation to what that additional money buys and what that additional support means for patients, there is funding to treat 50 000 additional emergency

department patients and provision for 32 000 additional outpatient appointments and support for an additional 10 000 outpatient appointments and 10 000 radiotherapy treatments. Elective surgery, as members have heard me speak about a number of times, is very important to Victorians right across the state. There is also additional funding for some 9000 extra episodes of elective surgery in the coming 12 months. Therefore more patients will be receiving their surgery faster than would otherwise be the case.

The funding over the next four years from the commonwealth government that was secured through COAG amounts to some \$935 million. It is a mixture of capital and ongoing funding. That is about improving performance in emergency departments, improving performance in relation to key benchmarks of elective surgery and opening additional beds and growing capacity in our system. Notably more than 300 additional subacute beds will be provided. This has been called the missing link, not so much in our state but across other parts of Australia. We have a substantial subacute bed stock across our system, but these additional beds will allow us to provide better care to long-stay patients, rehabilitation patients and others who require a lower level of care acuity but a longer day — that will be good for them — and it will also mean that as they move from an acute bed it will free up that acute capacity for patients who need that level of care. This is a very important boost, and we are delighted to have been able to secure it through that COAG process.

I mentioned this was a strong budget outcome for the health system both recurrently and also in terms of capital. There are many standout projects. As members would know, we have invested the better part of \$7.5 billion in capital works for equipment, infrastructure and renovating, redeveloping and providing new buildings across our health system. That is not just in the centre of Melbourne, Melbourne suburbs and regional centres, but in small country towns right across the state we have made sure we have provided within the framework of sound financial management strong support in terms of capital works for our health system. This budget delivers in spades and continues a strong and consistent record in terms of giving to local communities the facilities they need at their local health service. There are many jobs that are effectively secured through that capital works project and the broader infrastructure program of the government.

I have the great privilege to visit many health services in many small communities across the state, and what is clear is that often the health service is the largest

employer in a given town. What is also clear is that that employment is relatively stable. Some would describe it as climate change proof, if you like. These are jobs that are not necessarily dependent on rainfall; these are jobs that are there in good and bad times.

They are in every sense central to the security and the future of given country towns in rural and regional communities, so investment is important for a number of different reasons, both in terms of service provision but also the security and the sense of strength and wellbeing and the robustness of local areas in terms of the economic activity in those communities — plus if you are building new buildings, there is obviously a real stimulus effect there in terms of construction jobs and others who are in that important supply chain.

I spoke about cancer a moment ago, Acting Speaker. The Premier and I regard the treatment of cancer as a real priority; I think all Victorians, because members of the community know everyone will be touched by cancer or will know a cancer sufferer at some point in our lifetime, would agree with us. The house should remember that 70 Victorians are diagnosed every day with cancer; and sadly, 10 000 Victorians lose their life to cancer each and every year. Whether it is through personal experience, through family, friends, workmates, team mates, or whatever, we will all be touched by cancer in one way or another, so it is appropriate that we have not just a plan that has a title 'action plan', but one plan that genuinely is a plan of action.

That is what Victoria has. That is what we are proud and pleased to be able to provide support for, and this budget helps us take the next step. It could be bringing to book a historic partnership with the commonwealth government to build the comprehensive cancer centre on the site of the former dental hospital — and anyone who has driven through that area recently will see that work is well under way in demolishing the old hospital and preparing the site for the construction of the new comprehensive cancer centre.

This is a fantastic project, a 50-50 partnership with the commonwealth government. It will be not just a good cancer centre but a great cancer centre — one of the world's top 10 — and it will be about putting under one roof treatment, training, research — all those important parts — in the one centre, a fantastic partnership between Ludwig, the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute, Melbourne Health, the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and the University of Melbourne. It is a fantastic project which we are delighted, in partnership with the commonwealth government, to support. It will transform, as senior oncologists and others in the cancer

control community say to me on a regular basis, the way in which we provide cancer care across Victoria.

Among a number of other important projects is the next stage of the fantastic Olivia Newton-John centre. The member for Ivanhoe is in the chamber; he knows only too well how important that project is — not just more of the same but a new model of truly broadbased care beyond just the medical, surgical and radiation oncology needs of a patient, but also including wellness and all of what is often referred to as important supportive care needs being met in the broadest possible context, something that has been the dream of Olivia Newton-John and is now a reality due to the strong support of our government in this year's budget.

I was pleased also, again in partnership with the commonwealth government, to visit Ballarat with my good friend and parliamentary colleague the member for Ballarat West; that visit had some great personal meaning for Karen Overington. It was a very emotional day. We visited with federal member Nicola Roxon to announce funding of more than \$50 million in a partnership between the commonwealth and state governments to build a new and substantially bigger cancer centre there.

That centre will be purpose-built, one that builds on the partnerships between Austin Health and the Ballarat Health Service, one that will really be about, if you like, transforming oncology and cancer care in that community — not just in Ballarat itself but right across that region. I know that everybody who was there was very touched. As I said, it was a very emotional day to be able to secure that funding, which will secure jobs and very much set up Ballarat Health Service at the centre of cancer care in partnership with the Austin right throughout the Grampians region.

It is a fantastic project, and to everybody involved, particularly local members — both the member for Ballarat West and the member for Ballarat East — who have been strong and effective advocates in relation to that project.

Bendigo hospital will be the biggest health infrastructure project that rural Victoria has ever seen — in fact, it will be the third-biggest health infrastructure project the state has ever seen; I think members would be familiar with that project. It is all about transforming Bendigo Health Care group's site in Bendigo not just for Bendigo — an important and growing community, an ageing community at the same time — but so it becomes a health service that reaches out to provide care and support to the entire north-west of the state. This will be a very big project and one that

we are proud to have been able to support in this budget.

Barwon Health also received a very substantial boost to purchase land to do important planning for a second hospital in Geelong's southern suburbs as well as being able to boost its important capacity at the city campus of Barwon Health. The Geelong Hospital also received support for an expanded intensive care capacity and additional beds.

As the member for Derrimut is in the chamber, I wanted to mention the project involving the development of Sunshine Hospital. That is fully delivering on our commitments made in 2006. That project is all about teaching, training, research, additional inpatient capacity and bringing public radiotherapy to Melbourne's west for the first time. This is a very important project — as you, Acting Speaker, know only too well, your being from that community — that will be fully delivered in this budget.

There are also hospital projects at Leongatha and Coleraine, and at Monash children's in my local community. If I can turn to that now. Monash Children's is a fantastic project — the first and important stage of the expanded paediatric capacity there. The better part of 30 000 children receive their care across Southern Health. Monash Children's is not just at Monash Medical Centre but also at Dandenong and Casey. It is a very big provider of world-class paediatric care; as a government we are committed, and as a local community we are all committed, to supporting the dedicated clinicians there and the great work they do not just for local kids but also in running several statewide services — whether in terms of paediatric cancer or in a whole range of other specialties, where there is not just a local role played, as important as that is, but also with some statewide services provided, often in an unsung way.

I think it is clear to say there will only ever be one Royal Children's Hospital, and it has a special place in the hearts of every single Victorian, but Monash Children's does important work as well, and they do it without often a lot of Victorians knowing that. It was very pleasing to be able to provide that \$11 million to support the expansion of the facility at Monash Medical Centre.

There are many others, one being the Northern Hospital, and including many other different examples, large and small, of our commitment through capital works. All of those projects are important. All of them build on a strong record of investment, a strong record

of giving to local communities and their dedicated health professionals, the physical facilities and the practical tools they need to treat more patients to provide better care.

There will be more to do, but this is a strong budget, one that in every respect delivers the results of sound financial management into the health system and into other core service delivery. This is what the Victorian community expects. That is what this government has delivered clearly and unambiguously in this budget, indeed in each of its budgets during its term in office.

If I can just speak about two important projects locally: the Noble Park Special Developmental School is very close to my electorate office; a great group of very special people provide not just education but care and support there for very special kids, and I am really very proud to have been able to be associated and play a small role in securing additional funding of \$11.5 million to relocate into purpose-built facilities at the Noble Park SDS.

To Jacquie Lowther and all of her team at Noble Park, I was pleased to visit there not long after the budget was presented. There was a true celebration, a true energy, a real spark in that community. They are so pleased to have received that funding, and I look forward to working with them closely to deliver that project that will be of such importance to kids in our community who have special needs, and of course their families.

I also mention the Monash Freeway. The budget provides some additional funding for noise walls at the overpass where the Monash Freeway passes over both Jacksons Road and Police Road, near the Waverley Gardens shopping centre. That project will be an important boost as well, one that I know will be welcomed.

This is a strong budget for my local community at Mulgrave, a strong budget right across the state and which, as I said at the outset, really does in every sense invest the proceeds of sound financial management in the services that are so important for every Victorian, no matter where they live.

Ms BARKER (Oakleigh) — I am very pleased to speak tonight to the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill. This AAA-rated state budget is about the Brumby Labor government continuing its investment in vital services, building the right infrastructure for growth and protecting the lifestyle of Victorian families across the state.

During the very difficult global financial circumstances over the past 12 months this government committed to

creating and securing 35 000 Victorian jobs. We know that in fact the work of this government in respect of responsible economic management has created and secured more than 99 300 Victorian jobs, generating 92 per cent of all the full-time jobs secured in Australia over the past year. That is a fantastic achievement.

The commitment to manage the economy responsibly and invest responsibly in infrastructure and other measures to secure jobs cannot be underestimated when it comes to protecting Victorian families. In this year's state budget, again because we have a strong financial position as a result of good economic management, we can invest in services that support Victorian families and protect their lifestyle. Nothing is more important to Victorian families than job security, and that is why we will continue that work by committing to an additional 30 000 Victorian jobs in this budget.

In the past 12 months an area of focus with respect to jobs has been the automotive industry. As a government we are very aware of the need to work in cooperation and partnership with our automotive industry to ensure that we retain a strong, viable and efficient car industry. Not only does that partnership create direct jobs in car manufacturing, but it has other benefits, such as securing production of the Hybrid Camry at the Toyota Altona facility, which is a plant that employs over 3000 people. This partnership is important to our economy, because that work generates technologies and skills that can then be transferred across all sectors of Victorian manufacturing.

I mention Toyota because this government's cooperation and partnership with the company in Altona and other areas directly relates to jobs and investment in my local community. Last Friday I was very pleased to attend the opening of the new Chadstone Toyota dealership on Dandenong Road. It is a wonderful new building with a very impressive new service centre. This is a very strong investment in our local community by Graeme Ward, the dealer principal at Chadstone Toyota. This strong investment that he and his team of 65 have made in the facility on Dandenong Road certainly means that the business will remain in our community for a long time to come, and that is very good news for our local area.

I will turn to a section of the budget I am very interested in. There are always many areas of the budget I would like to speak about, but one area this year that particularly interests me is climate change. This budget commits funding for the \$175 million Jobs for the Future Economy action plan. This is a fantastic plan, which is about tackling climate change and generating new jobs, innovations and new

opportunities. Importantly it is about a partnership between government and the community to do that. The action plan outlines Victoria's next steps — what we will do to develop industries for the future, secure jobs, foster new skills and ensure our economic, environmental and social development for the long term. The plan will ensure that we in Victoria can take advantage of new areas of opportunity. As the Premier has said, climate change presents challenges but it also presents opportunities. These are new areas of opportunity that we need to look at as we reduce carbon emissions and, importantly, as we tackle climate change.

I will outline some areas of the plan. I think they are very important. There is an allocation of \$60 million to improve the energy and water efficiency of the state's hospitals, schools and government buildings under the Greener Government Buildings program; this will secure an additional 250 jobs. The program will also save more than \$7 million per year through reduced energy and water consumption and will save 130 000 tonnes of greenhouse gases each year.

There is an allocation of \$5 million for up to 10 solar hubs, delivering 8.6 megawatts of community-based solar power and providing job opportunities for more than 500 accredited installers.

There is \$10 million for new water measures for households and industry. This will deliver opportunities for thousands of our registered plumbers. Importantly this will deliver some 5000 additional rebates for rainwater tanks and 12 000 additional rebates for dual-flush toilets and bring the total number of low-flow shower heads exchanged to 500 000, which is a great achievement.

There is \$10 million for new skill initiatives that will ensure the green skills needs of today and of the future are met. This will help more than half a million vocational education and training students, including over 100 000 apprentices and trainees, access green skills.

There is \$12 million for seven new research and industry partnership projects to develop new renewable energy, water, construction and manufacturing technologies, which will help make Victoria a more productive and sustainable state.

There is \$57.9 million to help increase recycling and to tackle litter. Together with the recent increase in the levy for sending recyclable material to landfill, this will support up to 700 jobs.

The issue of climate change is extremely important to residents in my electorate, and I have informed residents of this plan. I have received a great deal of very interested response to the plan, with many residents seeking more detailed information, and of course I am very happy to provide that. In particular I have been very pleased to receive more information from local residents about products they are developing and producing that will help reduce our carbon footprint and, importantly, provide jobs.

Antonella Benvenuto contacted me, and I have been in contact with her. She has a wonderful company down in Cheltenham called Stikki. She has provided me with information about products they are producing here in Cheltenham using 100 per cent carbon neutral paper produced in Australia by ENVI. This is a fantastic initiative. Not only are the notes self-adhesive but they are made, as I said, on carbon neutral paper, as the company's other products are, and they are printed on 100 per cent Australian paper.

I have also received information from Ian Edmeades about OES CNG SmartGas, which is compressed natural gas for use as a fuel in vehicles. I admit that I do not know a lot about this, but I intend to find out more. It does look like something that is innovative and is certainly producing jobs. I note that they have opened Australia's first natural vehicle fuel centre in Aspendale Gardens. I think that is close to your electorate,
Speaker.

What this clearly shows me is that many residents and companies are actively seeking ways we can tackle climate change while protecting and creating jobs, and I am very pleased that as a state government we are also focused on the ways we can develop those industries for the future, secure jobs and, importantly, foster new skills. The companies that have already contacted me show quite clearly that the opportunities are there for government, community and business to work in partnership on this important issue.

I now turn to health, an issue that I have spoken about at every opportunity in any budget debate because it has always been an area of high priority for residents in the Oakleigh electorate. This government has invested very strongly in our health system in every budget since coming to office. Since 1999 recurrent funding for health and aged-care services has increased by 130 per cent. An extra \$5.2 billion of capital funding was invested between 1999 and the 2009–10 budget to build, upgrade and modernise health and aged-care facilities across Victoria. We have the rebuilding of the Austin Hospital and the Royal Women's Hospital, and

the new Royal Children's Hospital is rising out of the ground as we speak.

I will give a few examples of how we have been able to progressively improve health service infrastructure which is used by and of local interest to residents in my electorate. There is \$60 million for a purpose-built elective surgery centre at the Alfred hospital, which has helped enormously in terms of elective surgery. Monash Medical Centre, which is part of Southern Health, is very important to my community. There is \$10 million to expand and improve the emergency department and \$4.8 million for the new pregnancy and assessment unit, which is going to be a fantastic initiative in our local area, to be finished this year.

The Monash Moorabbin campus will have a \$3 million upgrade for same-day elective surgery; there is \$19 million to expand the cancer treatment facilities; \$1.8 million for the dialysis patient unit at Monash Medical Centre; and \$3 million for new operating theatres at the Moorabbin elective surgery service. These are a few examples of the great work that has already been done by this government in the health area. This budget delivers record investment in health, and with the COAG (Council of Australian Governments) agreement on health reform our state budget investment sees a \$4 billion health budget boost.

At a local level for my electorate this record investment will see the provision of \$407.5 million to redevelop Box Hill Hospital, which is part of Eastern Health. My electorate touches on that area, and a lot of people look to Box Hill Hospital for their health services. Importantly, as the minister touched on before, there will be \$10.9 million to expand acute and intensive care services at the Monash Children's hospital, which will double the number of paediatric intensive care beds from 5 to 10 and provide 10 additional paediatric inpatient beds, taking the number from 54 to 64, and 4 extra neonatal intensive care cots, taking the number from 20 to 24. That is an important boost for Monash Children's hospital. The funding will also be used towards the construction of a family room, and I thank Ronald McDonald House, which will contribute \$350 000 towards that family room which is so essential — —

Mr Andrews — A great partnership.

Ms BARKER — It is a great partnership. That family room is essential for children requiring ongoing treatment at Monash.

This funding for Monash Children's hospital is most important. The figures I have been given indicate that

last year over 27 000 children, including 1195 premature babies, received care at Monash Children's. There is absolutely no doubt that we will need to continue to work with Southern Health on the future development of more children's services for the south-east. I am certainly committed to that task, and I know all members in that area who sit on this side of the house are of the same opinion.

Capital funding is always very important, but what is also important is recurrent funding to provide clinical services. The COAG agreement along with record investment by the state government will mean that over the next four years 150 000 more emergency department patients will be treated each year within the new 4-hour time frame, 34 000 more patients will receive elective surgery sooner and an additional 332 subacute beds will be made available, enabling the treatment of 5000 patients annually.

There are more services and more funding. As we have done since 1999, we will continue to invest in health. It is very important to my electorate, and I congratulate the Minister for Health on his efforts to ensure that not only did we get more money but we got a record boost in health funding in this state budget.

I will very quickly touch on education. I have heard a lot of comments in this place about the BER (Building the Education Revolution) buildings. I was very proud to be at Amsleigh Park Primary School last Friday morning with Anna Burke, the federal member for Chisholm, when the beautiful BER building was opened, and it is operational. We will need to continue to work with the school in the future to see that the junior school area is rebuilt, and I am committed to that.

At Sussex Heights Primary School I think the BER building is finished, and we are now moving to the \$2.25 million state funding for the remainder of the school. Oakleigh Primary School has received \$500 000 in modernisation funds from the state government in the last 12 months to complete an outdoor performing arts area, and the BER building is well under way. At Hughesdale Primary School the BER project is under way. For Glen Huntly Primary School the budget confirms \$300 000 of state funding to support its BER project and the same for Carnegie Primary School.

Education is extremely important. We have some issues with the Carnegie kindergarten, and we have a capacity issue in the Glen Eira City Council area, but unfortunately there has been no cooperative approach from the council.

I will very quickly touch on a project for Oakleigh which I spoke about on the adjournment debate and which will be extremely beneficial to my local community. It is the Cultural Precincts and Community Infrastructure Fund. I am committed to seeing Oakleigh declared a cultural precinct. We have known it for many years.

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

Ms BARKER — The member for Bulleen knows it very well. He visits it often; so he should, and so should all members, because it is a great place to go.

We also have an additional \$1 million for community grants, bringing the total to \$5.6 million in the coming year. This is a huge boost to funding for those very important multicultural groups in all of our electorates. They do fantastic work and they deserve the funding. This is a great state budget once again, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr LANGUILLER (Derrimut) — It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak in support of the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill and to commend Treasurer John Lenders, who delivered this wonderful budget in May, because the budget is important for all Victorians but particularly for those in the western region. This budget is about jobs, and that is why it is a good Labor budget, one that only a Labor government could deliver to Victoria.

To put it in context, the budget was delivered during a very difficult time in the world when the worst economic downturn in many decades was occurring, and it aimed at securing 35 000 jobs over the coming year fundamentally by investing in infrastructure and stimulating economic activity. Acting Speaker, as you know, over the past 12 months almost 100 000 new jobs have been created in Victoria by good, sound economic management and by good policies, good programs, a good government and good stewardship by the Premier, the Treasurer and the other ministers. We have recorded the highest full-time jobs growth of any state and accounted for almost half of all new jobs created nationwide. What a record creation of employment!

As you know, Acting Speaker, if there is one thing that is important to all Australians and all Victorians, to the people you represent and those I represent and to my colleagues on both sides of the house but especially on our side of the house, it is jobs, because with jobs comes education, with jobs comes good health, with jobs come security and housing for families and a

whole range of other important matters that translate into quality of life.

Victoria is now undeniably the engine room of Australia's jobs growth. No other state comes near Victoria's jobs growth of 100 000 jobs, which have been created here in Australia. These are jobs that did not exist at this time last year, which create income and security for Victorian families, new opportunities for Victorian workers and indeed good opportunities for local businesses with the confidence and capacity to employ other people.

These things do not happen by accident. They happen when good governments put good policies in place, provide stewardship and are decisive about making the right decisions and the tough decisions to ensure that the economy continues to grow. We have done so responsibly because with every budget we have delivered surpluses, and as we are particularly aware in the western suburbs, these surpluses are the services of the future. They are the health workers, the hospital workers, the teachers and the public transport workers who will provide services to our communities. I am proud of this budget, because it is the kind of budget that Labor governments deliver, and deliver responsibly. I commend the Minister for Health because this budget delivers record funding to health, which is a fundamental area for all Victorian families. I know this only too well, because my parents, for example, have been the recipients of wonderful services provided by the Sunshine Hospital.

What a great budget it is for the western suburbs! Only this government, as the member for Melton no doubt remembers well, has had the capacity to deliver budgets like this to the western suburbs under the leadership of premiers Bracks and Brumby over the last decade or more.

Acting Speaker, I know you will remember that Jim Cairns, a minister in the Gough Whitlam government, laid the fundamentally important foundation for the Sunshine Hospital when he said, 'We should have a hospital to provide services for people in the western suburbs'. Jim Cairns, said we should have one, and it was the Bracks and the Brumby governments and the current state Minister for Health who actually delivered a proper hospital for the western suburbs — a generalist hospital, which is a teaching hospital for both nurses and doctors. It is a hospital that works in partnership with the community and a hospital that includes an emergency department, which we did not have when we came into office.

We remember well that it has been only this government that has delivered these kind of services and this hospital to the western suburbs. Let there be no mistake — the people of the west, at the coming election, will remember that it is this government that delivered \$90.5 million in the last budget in addition to the funding of \$73.5 million delivered in the 2008–09 budget. As the minister correctly summarised today, this funding will deliver the completion of the hospital, which will be a holistic hospital in the sense that it will be able to provide all the services that are required for the western suburbs. The \$90.5 million boost for the Sunshine Hospital redevelopment will deliver beds for patients and additional capacity in the form of a new special nursery. These are some of the features of this \$90.5 million continuation of the redevelopment of the Sunshine Hospital.

I recently had the pleasure of attending with you, Acting Speaker, and indeed with the Minister for Health, a post-budget inspection of the hospital for the purpose of examining what that budget allocation will provide to the west. Let me inform the house that there was a great deal of excitement, as you know, Acting Speaker. Western suburbs constituents are genuinely excited about this government delivering what is understood to be fundamental for the region.

This important redevelopment will provide 128 inpatient beds, 30 day medical and chemotherapy chairs, a special nursery with 8 extra cots and clinical support services. This important redevelopment will significantly boost the capacity of Sunshine Hospital to meet the demands in Melbourne's growing western suburbs, and it will enable 22 000 additional patients to be treated at the hospital each year. What a great achievement by a good government with good policy! What a great budget, indeed, for the western suburbs.

Since the budget was handed down, people have asked me, 'What does the budget mean for the western suburbs?', and indeed the media and constituents have raised that question in relation to kindergartens. It gives me great pleasure to be able to put on the record tonight that the funding for additional kindergarten places will ensure that we keep pace with the baby boom and provide funding for every child enrolled in four-year-old kindergarten, regardless of their location. This is a very important qualification, because this government delivers to all Victorians wherever they live, and it has done so from 1999. We have made sure that all of Victoria grows and benefits from the dividends of good government and good financial management, and that no matter where a family lives, no matter what its postcode is, it will benefit.

I also note for the record that the East Sunshine Kindergarten will benefit from a funds allocation of \$44 781 — a very important amount of money for that kindergarten in East Sunshine. Equally the Sunshine South Kindergarten will benefit from \$57 630; the North Sunshine Kindergarten will benefit from \$30 000 and the list goes on, including further funds that will benefit St Albans Anglican Kindergarten. These kindergartens have contacted my office. Many of the people and the parents who have benefited from this budget, and from the funds provided to them and to their children, have made sure that the government hears loudly and clearly that they acknowledge what the government does.

There are other benefits arising out of the budget and it would require much more than 15 minutes to place on record what the benefits are, particularly for the western suburbs. People have asked about level crossings to be upgraded and it pleases me that the government completed the Taylors Road grade separation in 2008. Late last year the minister announced that the government would investigate a grade separation — rail under road — for Main Road, St Albans. This is one of the issues, Acting Speaker, that you and I have shared for a long time. It is very good that commitments are made in relation to dealing with and addressing this long-term issue and that we are getting on with this job.

Another issue that is important to the community is security or safety. The Brumby government understands the importance of Victoria Police and the Victoria Police command being able to decide where their resources are allocated based on independent operational needs. It is wonderful that we have increased the number of police and have increased the commitment that we made to police officers. Since 1999 the number of first-response officers has increased in all police regions across Victoria, with Brimbank now having 26.5 per cent more police than it did in 1999.

We could and should put on the record the amount of additional expenditure. It would be remiss of me not to mention other important commitments that we have made. The Bendigo hospital has been allocated \$473 million, I have mentioned Sunshine Hospital. Monash Children's has been allocated \$11 million. I know many residents in those regions, and I know how happy, excited and committed they are to the redevelopment and expansion of those services.

This is a good budget for working families. This is a good budget for jobs. It is fundamental that members on both sides of the house understand that without jobs

other things do not come. I am really happy with and committed to the leadership that the government has provided in relation to securing employment. I suggest there is nothing more important in the western region or all around Victoria than securing employment, because with employment comes family security, the provision of health services — —

Mr Andrews interjected.

Mr LANGUILLER — The provision of opportunities, as the Minister for Health correctly interjects. It gives all of us the opportunity to advance and do better things in life. Education is also important. I have been one of those who has benefited from good Labor policies.

It would be remiss of me if I did not say that my father has unfortunately had cancer. He has had to deal with his cancer at the Sunshine Hospital and has said to me many times that on many occasions he wishes he could ring up the talkback programs in order to put on the record what good services health workers provide to patients; what a great job doctors, scientists, surgeons, nurses and cleaners do; and what a great service they provide to workers and working families who on occasion may require the services of the Sunshine Hospital.

I will conclude by again mentioning the Sunshine Hospital, because I think it is one of those extraordinarily good facilities that we have in the western suburbs. It is one that works in partnership with Victoria University, that works in partnership with the Western Bulldogs and that works in partnership with the whole community. I am delighted to conclude by saying that it was Gough Whitlam's dream to have a hospital for the Sunshine area and the western suburbs, and it was this government that delivered it.

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — It is a great pleasure for me to stand tonight and speak about the 2010–11 Brumby Labor government's budget. It has been very interesting to listen to the other members make their contributions and hear of all the wonderful initiatives that the Labor government is rolling out, not just around Melbourne and the metropolitan area but throughout regional and rural Victoria as well, because that is truly what we try to do — that is, to govern for all Victorians.

In my contribution I will give a bit of an overview of the Victorian budget, and then I will talk particularly about some economic aspects. I will talk about the health investment that we are currently in the process of implementing in Victoria. The investment that is being

rolled out across the state is truly extraordinary. Then I will talk for a little while about my electorate and the initiatives that are being put in place for the people of the Mordialloc electorate.

Firstly, I would like to offer my congratulations to the Treasurer and to the Premier, who was the previous Treasurer and who really laid the groundwork for the economic certainty that we are currently privileged to enjoy and pass on to the people of Victoria. As previous speakers have noted, this is during the time of and shortly after the global financial crisis. Due to the strength of the budget we are actually able to cut taxes and give back to business, increase the infrastructure spend for all Victorians and at the same time keep a surplus in the Victorian budget. I think that is a AAA situation where we are cutting taxes, we are doing a record infrastructure spend and we are still keeping a surplus. In my previous committee life I was a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee where we worked through the budget papers, and there is no smoke and mirrors in this. It is straight up; it is what it is. It is a great, solid budget.

As an overview, this budget will, as the member for Derrimut said, deliver jobs. That is what we do: we deliver jobs to working families so that they can manage all the other aspects of their lives. In this budget 30 000 jobs will be secured during 2010–11. In health, as the Minister for Health previously said, this is going to be a record \$4 billion health budget in partnership with the commonwealth government, and that is an enormous investment in our health system. I spoke with the Minister for Health earlier, and he indicated that that contrasts with a \$1 billion investment over the seven years of the Kennett government from 1992–99. Between 1992 and 1999 the previous government invested \$1 billion.

Mr Nardella — How much?

Ms MUNT — One billion dollars over that entire seven-year span. We are investing \$4 billion in one year, for the people of Victoria with the budget in surplus. That is one budget. I think it is a mighty proud achievement for this government.

There will be a record \$9.5 billion infrastructure investment in 2010–11, which will include a new regional rail link that, by the way, will free up the metropolitan system. There is the Parkville comprehensive cancer centre and new and upgraded hospitals, roads and schools, and I will return to that in a bit more detail later. In transport there is an additional \$5.8 billion to deliver new rail lines, trams and train stations, and there is the building and upgrading of key

roads. That is part of the Victorian transport strategy. I remember the criticism at the time, that there was no money attached to that strategy. Here it is. We are starting, and we are getting on with the job.

In education we will fund the completion of the rebuilding or modernising of 553 government schools, which will exceed the government's 2006 election commitment. My memory goes back longer than that. There are many more schools that have been rebuilt or refurbished under this government. We have also had a massive, record spend on education in Victoria.

That is because we believe every child should have a good start in life. To do that we are funding an additional 3590 kindergarten places so that every child's education can begin when they are four years old. I was also very pleased when this became part of the early childhood ministry so that those two different parts of children's education — the four-year-old kindergarten and then the start of their school year — could be coordinated.

We did not sack 800 police. We had promised an additional 1200 or 1400 police, which has been delivered in full; now we are guaranteeing another 1966 front-line police for Victoria over the next five years. They will be delivered and will be on the force. For bushfire recovery there is \$254 million to rebuild after the February 2009 bushfires and to continue to support those communities that need our support so much.

We have created close to 100 000 new jobs in Victoria over the past 12 months, which is almost half of all jobs created in Australia. Victoria is the powerhouse of the Australian economy. I would also like to note that Victoria has probably got the strongest budget in Australia. Of all the state and federal government budgets, it is the Victorian budget that has stayed in surplus every year while continuing to deliver record spend on all of the areas on which the government has to deliver record spend.

We also have a forecast economic growth of 3.25 per cent in 2010–11, which reflects our economy's resilience and also the prudent management of the Treasurer, John Lenders, and the previous Treasurer and now Premier, John Brumby.

We have kept our AAA rating. I am not going to skip over the AAA rating, because it is very important to the Victorian people. What the AAA rating does is allow us to access funds at the lowest possible interest rate to continue that infrastructure spend. Some people say, 'Why do you not spend more and just blow it out?'

Because it would actually increase the costs of funds for the people of Victoria, and we will not go there. We have had a commitment to keep in surplus every year, and we will continue that commitment.

I would like to spend a moment talking about business. Most members on this side of the house probably do not talk about business, but I do because I have been involved in it. The Braeside and Cheltenham East area in my electorate is one of the biggest business areas in Victoria. The arc between Dandenong and Cheltenham East covers the second biggest business area in Victoria; it actually has more business than Perth and Adelaide combined. It is a huge business area, and it is in or close to my electorate.

I would also like to add that while we have been implementing this infrastructure spend, the government has not forgotten about business — it is business as well as government that generates jobs, and I remind the house that 31 000 Victorian businesses will benefit from \$193 million worth of payroll tax cuts over the next four years thanks to a 0.05 percentage point reduction in the payroll tax rate effective from 1 July.

The rate of payroll tax will reduce from 4.95 per cent to 4.9 per cent, so Victoria will now have its lowest rate of payroll tax for 35 years. Businesses in Victoria with a payroll between \$5.5 million and \$17.95 million will pay the lowest payroll tax in Australia. Victoria is the best state in Australia for mid-sized businesses to do business. But that is not all: Victoria's businesses will also be \$240 million better off over the next four years thanks to a 3.5 per cent cut to WorkCover premiums. That is happening because the government supports small business and the individuals who work so hard to make a go of them.

I would quickly like to go through the highlights of the Victorian budget in health and then speak a little about my electorate.

Mr Andrews — That will take you a while.

Ms MUNT — Yes, it would probably take more than 50 minutes, I think, and certainly more than 5 minutes. The budget highlights include the Aged Care Land Bank stage 5; Austin Health Community Care Unit; Ballarat Regional Integrated Cancer Centre; the expanding health service capacity of Barwon Health to service Geelong and its southern growth corridor; the Coleraine Hospital redevelopment; the expansion of intensive care and theatre capacity at the Royal Melbourne Hospital; the Healesville Hospital upgrade; the Leongatha Hospital redevelopment stage 2; the \$11 million Monash Children's acute and intensive care

services expansion — and I will return to that shortly; MonashLink Community Health Service, Glen Waverley; and the new Bendigo hospital — an investment of \$473 million.

There is also the Northern Health Catheterisation Laboratory expansion, the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre, the Royal Melbourne Hospital Allied Health redevelopment and the Sunshine Hospital expansion — that joins a new women's hospital, a children's hospital currently under construction, and a new dental hospital. Compare that health spend to the paltry amount spent by the opposition in its years in government; I would be ashamed if I were an opposition member.

I return to mention the \$11 million Monash hospital redevelopment. Some years ago a member of my family was in Monash Medical Centre. It was in 1998, which was at the end of the Kennett years, and this member of my family was in there for a month. During that time the centre was so short staffed that the staff were beside themselves. There were no cleaners; I think the cleaning had gone out to contract. If the sheets got changed, I changed them. I stayed there, I changed the sheets and I provided the food.

I was so proud to go there with the Minister for Health recently and announce \$11 million for the redevelopment of paediatric services at Monash Medical Centre. I was proud to be a Labor member doing something which will totally transform the paediatric and the neonatal intensive-care facilities at that centre. I will read out the list: 10 extra paediatric beds, 4 additional neonatal intensive care beds and 5 extra paediatric intensive care beds.

But that does not do justice to what we are really doing — there will be a \$600 000 'family room', to which the government is contributing \$250 000, with the rest being provided by Ronald McDonald House Charities. The staff at the centre are absolutely thrilled with this, and we thank them for the hard work they do. While I was visiting the facility, tiny twin babies had been born prematurely. These facilities will support those families at the time of greatest need with sick little children, and that is where governments should be. That is the space where we should be, and we are.

In the couple of minutes available to me I would like to talk about my electorate. This budget will provide funding for a premium station upgrade for the Parkdale and Highett railway stations. With the premium upgrade there is first-to-last staffing; from the first train to the last train the stations will be manned. That will mean that every premium station in my electorate will

be manned from first train to last train. When I was first elected there may have been one station that was manned, and now all of them will be manned. That is a great comfort to all of those in my electorate who use those train stations, particularly schoolchildren. There are a lot of schools in my electorate, and many schoolchildren use those stations to go to and from school.

There is also \$500 000 for the renewal of visitor facilities and walking tracks at Braeside Park. The Friends of Braeside Park is a fabulous little group. Its volunteer members work so hard and for so long. They will work with Parks Victoria to look at where this funding can best be spent. I do not think they have ever seen funding like it before.

I would like to sum up by saying that this is a good Labor budget. It is a surplus budget while still providing record spend in all of the areas where governments need to spend. It is not just about money and figures. We are supporting people and families. We are providing a safety net and conditions for them to live their lives hopefully without government interference but with all of the services provided for them so they can make their choices. It is a good Brumby government budget, and I congratulate Treasurer Lenders.

Mr LIM (Clayton) — I am delighted to be joining other members in singing praises about this budget brought down by our illustrious Treasurer. Tonight I am going to pay homage. I know that a member in another place will take me to task about using the word ‘homage’, but this is a truly incredible budget.

I will start with a subject that is very close to my heart — that is, multicultural affairs. I note that the member for Bulleen is sitting at the table in his capacity as the shadow minister for multicultural affairs and citizenship. I have a lot to say in that area, not just because I am the member of Parliament representing the most multicultural electorate of the 88 seats in this chamber but because we tend to forget that something like 26 per cent of the people in this state are of ethnic backgrounds or related to such. In my electorate 56 per cent of the people are from non-Anglo backgrounds. Therefore it is appropriate and only fitting that I spend a bit of time on this subject.

The other area which is also very close to my heart is tourism, trade and investment from overseas and here. My list goes on. But in the short time I have, let me start with multicultural affairs. I cannot help but notice that just about every year, every time we have a budget debate, the member for Bulleen cannot help himself. He

tries to talk down, criticise, blame or condemn the multicultural affairs budget of this government. I remind him while he is sitting at the table that during the first term of the Kennett government there was zero — nil, nothing — funding in that area. The Kennett government scrapped the multicultural commission, and 80 staff there were just gone and were without jobs. They were front-line people who were servicing the ethnic community. Not a cent was disbursed or given to the ethnic communities. It took that government until the end of its seven-year term to reach the \$700 000 a year mark.

This government picked it up from there. With the last budget we reached \$4 million plus, and with this budget we are going to \$6 million. This is more than a 1000 per cent increase, if you want to talk about percentage points. Has any other budget anywhere in the world increased by more than 1000 per cent? No. But the Bracks and Brumby Labor governments have been caring, concerned and very focused on the sharing and engaging with communities of people from other cultural backgrounds.

It is not just that. A couple of times the member for Bulleen has raised the cultural precincts and the so-called funding. The last budget allocated something like \$3 million to upgrade and beautify the Chinese precinct in Chinatown, the Greek precinct next door and also the Italian precinct in Carlton. This budget takes the amount to \$12 million. That is a 400 per cent increase for just one area — the cultural precincts. No other government in Australia has done that, but this Brumby government has done it. It knows that people from different cultural backgrounds have a lot to share and to be proud of and that it is only appropriate that the government take action to highlight, foster, develop and increase cultural sharing by people of what they have to offer other communities.

It is not just that. It also means jobs, because by beautifying those ethnic precincts naturally tourism is also increased. Let me take my electorate as an example, particularly the Springvale area in the south-east corner of my electorate. I am talking about more than 151 languages being spoken and more than 200 nationalities mixing vibrantly on a day-to-day basis. We have a mosque, two Buddhist temples — Mahayana and Hinayana — different sects of Christianity, and the list goes on and on. If you took a trip in the area just visiting all those religious places, it would almost be like a cultural and religious trip that would enhance your awareness of what a multicultural society in Victoria is all about. Therefore you are creating interest, tolerance, understanding and a feeling of sharing and togetherness. This is very important, and

the government knows that this is a very important element in a community like Victoria. That is why former US President Clinton always regarded Australia, and particularly Victoria, as a shining example of how we can live together as a community.

In relation to funding in the ethnic affairs and multicultural affairs areas, we have diversified the different grants to the community. One has to admit that the Victorian Multicultural Commission has done a fantastic job in terms of meeting the needs or the aspirations of these communities. It has gone from being a simple organisation with support funding — so-called, going back to the Kennett years — to seven, eight or nine different varieties of funding, which has helped the elderly ethnic groups. There are a lot of them now, especially when you are talking about the post-Second World War communities like the Italian, Polish and Greek communities. They are now ageing and they have their different needs. They have their own clubs, they need to upgrade their cooking facilities and their kitchens, and funding that especially targets that area has been so well received. I cannot stop thinking about how they are smiling. The number is so many, but the funding meets their needs and helps to pay off those upgrades; it really makes a difference to their lives and to their retirement years.

We are also funding festivals, and Victoria holds a whole range of festivals from around the world. In my electorate the City of Kingston has come up with these fantastic ideas through its Greek-born councillor Cr Arthur Athanasopoulos, who dubbed the annual summer event the Globe to Globe Festival. This is a whole range of festivals of dance, music and you-name-it events which come into the local park and people have a real ball. It is fantastic.

Just across the road in Monash the so-called Clayton Festival has brought out a whole different community, parading and playing music and song in the Clayton shopping strips. Every year in February it coincides with the Chinese New Year celebrations. In the Springvale shopping centre the Chinese New Year lunar celebration, now in its 18th year, is also being funded by this government through the Victorian Multicultural Commission. Each one of these has deep and profound effects on the lives of the people, because it means a lot to them. It means the government recognises their past, their roots, their contribution, their sharing of this culture, this diversity through the whole community, making them proud and making this state proud. It is very significant in terms of that funding. The list goes on and on.

I am aware of the short time I have left. Many other members have quoted figures about Victoria's AAA credit rating and about jobs. It is an understatement to say that this budget is about jobs, jobs and jobs; it is about unemployment. To talk about employment is also to talk about unemployment. Victorians can walk proud and tall when it comes to unemployment figures.

I had the opportunity to be part of a parliamentary delegation to Europe three months ago. We visited Germany, France, Belgium and England. It is common knowledge now, as we have heard, that Spain has unemployment of more than 20 per cent. At the time we were in Europe the rate of unemployment in France was 12 per cent while Italy's rate was 16 per cent. People in those countries are so envious of us.

Australia has come through this so-called global financial crisis with flying colours, and people overseas know Victoria leads the pack. This has not happened overnight, this did not just happen because we were lucky; it is because we have people like the Premier and the Treasurer. That is why I say I pay homage: both are very special; they care, they are very focused and this is a Labor government. We are leading the pack in Australia. Nobody can compare to us; they do not even come near, so we should be very proud and recognise where credit is due.

I could go on and on. I have statistics about our exports, particularly to China, which is now our top trading partner. I notice that the Minister for Industry and Trade is at the table. She, more than anybody else who has inherited this portfolio, should be very proud of our great effort in selling Victoria to the rest of the world and particularly to northern Asia. In my capacity as special adviser to the Premier on Victoria-Asia business relations I am very proud of everything we have achieved in that field. We are second to none. In fact our 13 overseas posts are forging ahead, selling Victoria non-stop so that we can bring the bacon home here. We have got product to show the world; other states cannot compete.

Members should not forget that we are not a resource-rich state like Western Australia or Queensland. We have only our brains, our efforts and our concentration that we sell to the world, especially to the Chinese. We have our services. We have a whole range of products that the Chinese want to learn from us. We know that China competes very quickly, but we still have to stay ahead of them so that we can continue to sell and make money.

Of course we can talk about education export and we can go on talking about tourism. I have many times

sung the praises of the Minister for Tourism and Major Events for doing the right thing for Victoria and beating the other states. We do not have iconic buildings such as the Sydney Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and we do not have the iconic beaches of the Gold Coast or the north-western part of Western Australia, which are all iconic, yet we are ahead because we do the right thing. The minister and the Premier have mentioned during question time how successful Victoria has been in attracting tourism from overseas and interstate through the various iconic events.

We are well known; we were voted the event capital of the world, let alone the whole range of other titles won. It has been on the Labor government's watch under the Premier and the Treasurer that we have achieved all this. Therefore I pay homage to them. I think it is only appropriate we recognise that this government has done the right thing by Victoria.

I do not have a chance to talk about my electorate, but let me point to one thing in the short time I have left. That upgrade to Westall station cost \$153 million. I do not want to mention the whole range of funding for hospitals and schools — the people at every school in my electorate have not stopped smiling when they walk into the schools and into all those other places, including the hospital. The Minister for Health has been visiting the local hospital, the Monash Medical Centre at Clayton, more often than I have, every time to announce more funding, more money to give us the best health care system in the world.

I think it is only appropriate that we recognise that this is the budget that cares. I have not even talked about it being a budget for a fairer Victoria, but we should all recognise its importance.

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — Tonight I will do something outrageous — and, as the 3AW program introduction goes, I will tell the truth — and say that this will be my last budget speech! That is the truth! Having started that way and got the attention of all members with this opening remark, it is with pleasure that I support the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill and the budget presented by the Treasurer. This is a budget that I am pleased to see as it involves the finishing of an almost lifetime job I had commenced — that is, lobbying for the building of a hospital in St Albans. It is called the Sunshine Hospital, and it is in Furlong Road.

The history of it is that it was to be built on Ballarat Road in Sunshine. However, the site was too small, reflecting our aims and aspirations of some 30 years back, and we later convinced the powers that were there

at the time, through lobbying, to purchase a new site. I believe the new site is almost going to be too small given the money that has been allocated for that hospital!

I well recall having been on the hospital committee when we were lobbying the then Liberal government to build it because the funds were available through the Whitlam government. But then Premier Bolte had the final say on where the hospital was going to be and what was going to happen; all he did was dig a big hole and stop at that. For years we had nothing there but a big hole in the ground.

Again then, as a young activist I and some colleagues organised protest meetings in the lead-up to every budget to try to get some work done. Eventually we finished up with a concrete shell, and that stayed there for several years; it was called a hospital. The late Jack Refshauge was the chairman of our building committee and hospital committee, the only trouble being that the committees were for a hospital without any doctors and without any services.

My question was always: when will I be able to go there? When will I be able to take my kids there when they have an accident and break a leg or an arm? As members know, children have a lot of backyard accidents. There was nothing there; we always had to take the kids to the children's hospital.

I am pleased to say that with the progressive Labor governments, particularly in later years, we have achieved a very good facility. In the Cain era Prince Henry's Hospital was closed and the government was going to shift the hospital holus-bolus out to the Furlong Road site in the western suburbs. However, the unions, the staff and just about everybody opposed that. We were only given a quarter of it; the rest went to Monash, and we lost out once again at that time.

But with the Bracks and Brumby governments we have been going ahead in leaps and bounds. With the universities coming in behind the push and the current minister making big announcements about the development of cancer treatment, bunkers being built, increases in the number of beds and refurbishments. Well over \$200 million of state government money has been spent there in several budgets. In particular there was a recent announcement about a further \$90 million extension.

I have asked the current chair of the board of Western Health, Ralph Willis, a former federal Treasurer, how he intends to spend all that money within the budget period. He needs one brilliant project after another to go

ahead, so it is a constant building site; there is constant development in the area. That is very pleasing and feels very supportive. It is fitting, given that this is my last budget speech in this chamber, to see that project being completed and being complemented with another iconic project, the Victoria University campus.

We established the university's forerunner, the Western Institute, in St Albans with Ian Cathie, the Minister for Education in the Cain government at the time. That evolved into Victoria University having a school of nursing, which complements the fact the hospital is in the area. When we look at it we can see that the nursing needs and expansions on the part of this government at the Furlong Road hospital have doubled and tripled as time goes on.

We have been putting in medical practices, doctors, nurses and radiology services and many other services. We have the maternity wing. We have had refurbishment and modernisation constantly going on, keeping up with modern technology. Initially we were not able to get an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) unit; we had to go across the road to a private one at Footscray. Patients used to be put on stretcher beds. Even at Footscray patients were wheeled across the road to have MRIs carried out, because not even Footscray hospital had an MRI unit, because the previous federal Liberal government minister would not approve it.

We have come a long way in our medical care for the people of the western suburbs. This being my last budget speech in this house, I can say I will certainly continue to agitate for services for the western suburbs after I am retired from Parliament, because it is the squeaky wheel that gets the oil, and we need to do that.

I turn to health and education facilities. My electorate has tertiary education facilities now. It has the Victoria University Secondary College, again a project that has been in the making for the last 10 years. The local community lobbied to achieve that, and the local western suburbs members backed the principle of that being established; they supported it. This was a fantastic step forward for the people of the western suburbs. We have the students, the people and the intellect in the area, which means we are able to utilise those facilities, have the services and provide our own doctors and nurses in the future. We are also able to get the people we will need in the medical field, including lecturers in the university. That is what is important in the Labor government having committed itself to the western suburbs in terms of those suburbs developing their own base and people so they can service their own community.

I recall one Victoria University chancellor saying, 'You haven't got the IQ scores out in the western suburbs, so we have to get people from the eastern suburbs.

Therefore we are shifting our campuses and concentrating in different areas of the west' — instead of positively supporting the people of the western suburbs. We need the government to continue to positively support the people of the western suburbs. The western suburbs of Melbourne will always have a high level of migrant population, including of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

In recent years we have been fortunate that the members of the Indian community settling in the area have had a good command of the English language. This is tremendous. They have a lot to offer. They have the ability and the aspiration to undertake higher education and to move in those fields, which is tremendous. We often see full-fee paying students being pushed into hairdressing and catering. Their ability, their IQ and their mental capacity is far greater than that. They provide services within their own area. In the future the government needs to allocate money to study how we use and keep those people in the western suburbs.

Once they graduate as doctors, chemists or dentists they shift out to the eastern suburbs and other areas. We now have estates, we have facilities that are socially acceptable and we have all the private schools in the area that are needed. They have these services. The husband may be a doctor who works in the western suburbs, but the wife does not want to shift and she does not want to move their kids because the new area does not have appropriate schools for them.

Dr White served with me on the Sunshine Hospital committee years ago. He travelled from Dromana. He worked there in the aged-care field, but his family did not shift into the area. This situation has changed in the western suburbs, particularly in the last 10 years, because of this government. Bus services have been provided. Road infrastructure and train services have been modernised in our area.

We were always the last to get new trains and new services on the Sydenham line. We electrified the Sydenham line; we are now going to electrify the line to Sunbury. That is a tremendous project. It has a great community benefit.

There was the grade separation of Taylors Road, which cost \$60 million. The grade separation of Kings Road cost \$25 million. It makes it safe to commute across those areas. There is still more work to be done. I would particularly like to see a grade separation take

place around the St Albans level crossing. It is a shame I cannot say that has been achieved during my term in this Parliament or during the term I have served my electorate, but I will be lobbying for that and will continue to support the grade separation on that great project. It will require a lot of money. It will need federal funding. The federal government needs to commit itself to this like it committed itself to the Springvale crossing project. That project had 50-50 federal-state funding. The federal government needs to do the same for the St Albans level crossing. This concerns two federal electoral seats at the moment. Only a small amount from each of their budgets is needed.

It is also important that we improve the Calder Highway. The Calder Highway Improvement Committee has campaigned for years for developments outside my electorate of Keilor. In recent years it has campaigned to have an overpass at Calder Park Drive and a cloverleaf interchange on the Calder Highway. We have got funding in the budget to start works on the Kings Road overpass cloverleaf interchange on the Calder Highway to make it safe. There is still the Sunshine Avenue part of that project left. I am pleased to see the Calder Highway Improvement Committee is now raising those issues rather than looking further afield, as it has in the past. It is an important thing.

We developed the Deer Park bypass. That is fantastic for my community in the Keilor electorate, which includes Caroline Springs, Taylors Hill and Hillside. People go down Gourlay Road, Caroline Springs Boulevard and then onto the Deer Park bypass and 20 minutes later they are in the city. It is of tremendous benefit to the community in my area.

The Deer Park bypass enables access to the city for those in the western suburbs. It is a great leap forward. People neither understand nor realise that they are so close to the city. I cannot understand why people want to buy land in Casey, Whittlesea and those sorts of places from where it takes them an hour or an hour and a half to get into the city. From Rockbank, Caroline Springs and Melton you are about half an hour from the city on a good day. That is the longest trip you need to take.

That is fantastic work that has been carried out by this government in successive budgets.

Mr Nardella — And the local member.

Mr SEITZ — Yes, and the local member for Melton who lobbied on that one. We all have.

It is a great pleasure to stand here and speak on behalf of the people of the Keilor electorate. The Keilor electorate — if, Acting Speaker, you will let me indulge the house — is a big area. The western suburbs and the northern suburbs were in my electorate when I came into Parliament in 1982. The electorate started from Geelong Road. Polling booths were all over there. I had all of Sunshine and part of Altona. My electorate went right across to Whittlesea, Broadmeadows, Bulla and the old cities, as they were known then, and across to the Hume Highway on the other side. I had all of that region in the outer area.

Seeing the development that has taken place under this government is fantastic. I have also seen the development of the SES, which is the State Emergency Service, which was a volunteer organisation. The government has now put money into that and put it on a professional footing. The government is funding and developing it. The Brimbank SES unit received \$42 000 for a new vehicle; the Melton SES unit that operates at Taylors Hill and Hillside has received extra funds for new vehicles and equipment. It is very important that we have community safety in mind, particularly because of the freak storms and the weather we experience these days. We can see the important part those organisations play in our society. The community comes to rely on them, as evidenced by the number of calls they receive all the time from people who need emergency services because of road accidents or storm damage or when some kids get into mischief and get stuck in a storm drain somewhere in the area. That has happened in Broadmeadows West at times.

I wish the bill a speedy passage through the house. I say to the Treasurer in regard to the next budget not to forget the Keilor electorate where I live and have lived for the last 50-odd years or more. I will be reminding people we still have needs in that area. The 3000 people in the area who have come to see me to say goodbye have suggested 31 items that have not been completed but are on their wish list; they wish them to be funded and carried out. One of them, which is their no. 1 priority, is a roundabout at the Taylors Road and Kings Road intersection — that wish is expressed by all sides. That item is followed by the wish to have a grade separation at the St Albans level crossing.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — What a ripper budget. What a budget for the great people of Victoria. What a budget that is a Labor budget, a budget for all Victorians — a growth budget, a jobs budget, an education budget, a health budget, a public transport budget, a roads budget, a budget for the environment. The list goes on and on.

The first thing I want to talk about is the Friends of the Melton Botanic Garden (FMBG). What a great organisation it is and what a great team of people is involved in building a dream and having a vision to establish a botanic garden in Melton. The group is expertly and professionally led by John Bentley, with the help of his wife, Jill Bentley, and includes Alan Benson and his wife; Alan and Jean Partridge; Margaret and Dave Peters and their son David; Janet Dyke and her family; Lyn Nardella; Lynette Reihling; David and Barbara Pye; Lyn and Simone Holdsworth, who are also involved in the Friends of Toolern Creek; Cathy Powers; Graham Proctor; Verna and John Reed; Glenda Hutchinson; Cassie Broughton; Sophie Ramsay; Broden Borg; and many other volunteers.

Much planning and work has been done to establish the Melton Botanic Garden with the assistance and leadership of Neville Smith, CEO of Melton Shire Council, Brett Luxford and the other council officers and councillors. Max Coster from Vision for Werribee wants to help to establish the first stage of the eucalyptus arboretum, and a working party has been established to do this. The FMBG needs some support to plant this first stage, and I will be talking to ministers and asking them to provide funding for this great initiative, which should be supported.

I now want to talk about the opposition response to the budget. I think the Leader of the Opposition is a superhero par excellence. No-one comes close to him as the invisible man. Why? Because in this house he is invisible. He has not spoken on the budget. He has not come into this house and spoken on the budget.

All the other members from the other side of the house — —

Ms Allan interjected.

Mr NARDELLA — Yes, Minister, it is a no. All the other members from the Liberal Party and The Nationals and the Independent member for Gippsland East have spoken, and the Leader of the Opposition has had since 3 May 2010 to do some work, to do some research, to develop a speech and deliver it. But no, he is missing in action. He is the invisible man.

I call on him to come into this house by the end of tonight; we still have quite a bit of time. We will give him his 15 minutes of fame and glory to come into the house by tonight or by the close of business tomorrow to deliver a speech — any speech. I do not care what is in the speech — he can talk about the budget; that would be really nice — but he can make any speech he likes to this house.

I am going to make the Leader of the Opposition an offer he cannot refuse. I am prepared to sit down with him and help him prepare a speech, a draft response for him to deliver in this house. That is how I would like to help the Leader of the Opposition to do some work in the house, because he is invisible. He does not speak on bills. He has not spoken on the budget. It is beyond him to speak on bills. Fancy that — a Leader of the Opposition who rarely contributes to debate in this house other than to front up at question time when the cameras are rolling. You want to have the cameras rolling; you want theatrics — and I am not bad at theatrics — but he, par excellence, the invisible man, needs a camera rolling to come into the house to make a contribution.

He fronts up at question time, but he has not really got the ticker to come in here at any other time to make a contribution. He is pretty lazy; he has no policy and he does not speak on other matters in the house that give him the opportunity. Virtually every week we have a matter of public importance to debate. Has he come in here to give a contribution? No, he is missing in action.

Then there is the grievance debate. He can have up to 15 minutes to make a contribution, but no, the invisible man is not here. He does not want to make a contribution. It is a bit beyond him. He is missing in action.

There are also the 90-second members statements, when the Leader of the Opposition could have 90 seconds to make a contribution to the house, to earn his pay in this place, but no, he is missing in action. Then he could have 3 minutes out of the 30 minutes for the raising of matters in the adjournment debate to make a contribution to debate in this house, but again he is missing in action.

Yet if you compare this situation to that of previous opposition leaders you see that former opposition leader Mr Doyle, my good friend, now the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, was constantly in here making contributions to debate in the house, and his example should be used as a yardstick.

What about the member for South-West Coast? He is still in here making contributions, always speaking, always active, always up, always making sure that the government is taken to account regardless of whether the cameras are on him or not, yet the Leader of the Opposition is still the invisible man.

I now want to talk about the contribution of the shadow Treasurer, the member for Scoresby. What an embarrassment! What a lack of understanding he shows

of basic economics, of economics that should be understood by anybody who has done form 5 — yes, I am showing my age; I mean year 11! Anybody who has done form 5 economics could come into this place and give a contribution and understand what the Victorian budget is about, but no, we have a shadow Treasurer who has no understanding of that.

This superhero really does wear his underpants on the outside. That is how good he is, and you can see that in the privacy of his own home, because he does not understand the budget. He went on about debt, but he has no understanding of what good debt is, no understanding what bad debt is. If you use debt to pay recurrent funding, recurrent funding is — —

Mr Clark interjected.

Mr NARDELLA — The honourable member for Box Hill understands this. He should have been the shadow Treasurer; he has the work ethic to be the shadow Treasurer but has been bumped off. But the shadow Treasurer should understand that if you create debt to provide programs with recurrent funding, that is bad debt. But you have good debt. You have debt that does things like build infrastructure, major projects, schools, hospitals, roads, kinders, community centres, opening rail lines, extending rail lines, implementing the Victorian transport plan, buses, new trams, new V/Locity trains, new railways carriages, new platforms at Southern Cross station that are being built at the moment, new sports facilities for soccer and rugby, local recreation fields and sporting facilities, super-clinics, Country Fire Authority tankers, State Emergency Service tankers, new police stations, and refurbishing police stations. If you spend the debt in creating the things that make our society better, if you spend the debt in upgrading the schools, our no. 1 priority, in making sure that the teachers and students have the best places to learn, that is good debt. That is a lesson that the shadow Treasurer should learn very quickly.

Opposition members who have spoken in the house about this budget do not understand what good debt is. Opposition members do not understand the needs of the Victorian community, the needs of young people in our community or the needs of our rural constituency and rural families out there where the good debt provides facilities and infrastructure for the future, for things like the irrigation upgrades up around Shepparton; the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline; the Ballarat super-pipe; the Bendigo super-pipe; the desalination plant that means we will not have to rely on rain falling from the sky to provide our drinking water; the north–south pipeline, 75 gigalitres; the Tarago Reservoir that has been put

back into the system. This good debt also provides the roads that we are putting in place; the freight action plan that we have developed and will be implementing; and the road upgrades.

All we get from the opposition is criticism of the things that we are doing, when we are funding projects such as the M1 upgrade; over \$1 billion of funding has been allocated to deal with the congestion that was created by the Kennett government when it put together that stupid traffic configuration at the end of the West Gate Bridge and on the other side as well; the member for Geelong will understand that.

We have had criticism from the opposition about one of the greatest achievements of our government, because it is about creating jobs for now and into the future — that is, the dredging and deepening of the Port Phillip Bay channel. All of these projects have been criticised by opposition members and the superhero, the shadow Treasurer, who wears his underwear on the outside, because they have no understanding of the needs of a modern society or of a modern community.

The bypass at Geelong would not have been built in our lifetime under the Liberal-Nationals coalition. It might have been built if the coalition had been given the chance to put a toll on it, but this government has built it. If you have a look at the water supply connection to Geelong, you see it is good debt that goes to providing drinking water security for the Geelong community.

This project was not done in the seven long, dark years of the Kennett government. The school upgrades that have occurred in country and rural Victoria were not completed by the coalition when it was in office. The coalition parties became the real estate agents of Victoria, looking after the spivs and their mates in the real estate industry, looking after themselves, lining their pockets with gold by selling off the assets of the people of Victoria.

Members of the opposition do not understand good debt. They do not understand the needs of the people in Victoria who want the new hospitals at Box Hill and Bendigo — \$400 million worth of expenditure on new construction and the creation of jobs. The new facilities at the Royal Children's Hospital, the Royal Melbourne Hospital and the Royal Women's Hospital — these are the things that the Liberal-Nationals coalition did not believe in. When it was in office all its members believed in was closing 12 country hospitals, closing 6 country rail lines, running down the system, running down the assets and selling off the assets of the people of Victoria. Members opposite have the gall to promote

the member for Scoresby, this economic illiterate, as the shadow Treasurer of Victoria.

I will make a prediction: if, by chance, the coalition gets into government on 27 November — and I am not saying that it will, because I intend to fight with every breath in my body to make sure that does not occur — the member for Scoresby will not become the Treasurer of the state of Victoria. I support the bill before the house.

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — I must say at the outset that it is always a pleasure to follow the member for Melton — a man of great wisdom, knowledge and experience in the house. However, I must say he is a very hard act to follow.

I am very pleased and proud to once again be speaking in support of a budget of the Brumby Labor government, in this case the Appropriation (2010/2011) Bill 2010. This is a great budget for Victoria. It is also a great budget for Victorians and for regional Victoria, and I must say it is a great budget for the region of Geelong. It is a great budget for my electorate and the wider region of Geelong, because it continues to build on the priorities of the Brumby Labor government in areas such as health, education, transport, community safety, job creation — and the list goes on.

As has occurred over the last 10 years, following the government's introduction of the budget, the Premier came to Geelong in his capacity as Premier — in the past he came in his capacity as Treasurer — to meet with the community organisations, business organisations and trade union organisations of Geelong. At our budget luncheon this year this budget was widely applauded and accepted by the community and business community of Geelong. From the outset I take this opportunity, as other members on this side of the house have done, to congratulate the Treasurer on once again proving beyond doubt that he is the best Treasurer in this nation at present.

As I said before, it is beyond doubt that he has delivered a great budget for all Victorians, including the good people of Geelong. I say this in light of the fact that, as we all know, this budget and last year's budget were framed against the background of the so-called global financial crisis. In contrast to that, over the last 12 months this state has gone from strength to strength.

Last year the Treasurer predicted growth in Victoria of around 35 000 jobs, but as members are aware, over the last 12 months this figure has been well and truly left behind. In Victoria over the last year we have seen close to 100 000 new jobs — I think it is exactly

92 000 — created, and importantly Victorians have not really felt any pain in this financial downturn as have other countries across the globe. It has to be noted that these close to 100 000 new jobs represent the vast majority of the new jobs created in Australia, and something like 26 000 of these new jobs have been created in regional Victoria.

It is good to see the Minister for Regional and Rural Development at the table at the present time, and I say without flattering the minister that she has done a great job over the last 12 months. I do not know how many times the Minister for Regional and Rural Development has come into my electorate of Geelong and the greater Geelong region announcing new jobs here and there through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and the Geelong Investment and Innovation Fund in partnership with companies such as Ford at Geelong. I congratulate the minister. We have created a lot of work in Geelong and stimulated the economy, and that has been in no small part due to the minister at the table.

This budget builds on the work that has been done over the last decade, especially in the areas of health and education, which are major priorities of the government. Schools across my electorate have prospered under the Brumby Labor government. Right across my electorate over recent years, with allocations in budget after budget, Geelong schools have been transformed, and one cannot help but compare this government's record in education to those of previous governments. Under the Kennett government schools across my electorate were closed down. Great schools like the Swanston Street Primary School, a school that was nearly 100 years old, and the North Geelong Primary School, also in my electorate, were closed under the previous government.

In stark contrast every school in my electorate, without exception, has been subject to upgrade. They include East Geelong, Tate Street, South Geelong, Chilwell, Newtown, Hamlyn Banks, Herne Hill, Manifold Heights and Bell Park North primary schools, and the list goes on. Every primary school in my electorate has been upgraded. One has only to look at Tate Street Primary School: under the Kennett government this school, in a low socioeconomic area, was forced to compete with other schools. In 1999–2000 it was a run-down school under threat of closure. It was a very basic school. I was there on Monday night, and it now has a new multipurpose room and new classrooms. It is fair to say that Tate Street Primary School is once again a very proud primary school that has flourished under the Brumby Labor government.

Every secondary college in my electorate has been upgraded. They include Matthew Flinders Girls Secondary College, Geelong High School, North Geelong Secondary College and Western Heights Secondary College, which is the subject at the present time of a multimillion-dollar upgrade courtesy of the Brumby Labor government. Western Heights Secondary College was on three campuses and is being built on one brand-new campus in Vines Road. Stage 1 was funded through the 2009–10 Brumby Labor government budget, and stage 2 has received \$13 million in this budget. I must say congratulations to former principal Chris Dower, with whom I worked very closely until his retirement a couple of years ago, and now Kris Rooney is the principal.

The school community — the principal, teachers, parents, staff and students — have done a magnificent job in partnership with the state government, the City of Greater Geelong, the Vines Road Community Centre and the Vines Road Senior Citizens Club. They have all worked hard to ensure that Western Heights Secondary College will be a state-of-the-art school and community centre.

Under this government Barwon Health has gone from strength to strength. Again you cannot help but compare this to the situation in the 1990s when under the former Kennett government a large percentage of the hospital, namely Baxter House, was sold off. I know I have told this story on a number of occasions, but the Grace McKellar Centre, which was an aged-care facility in the north of Geelong, had been run down by the then government and was all but flogged off by the Kennett government. Now the McKellar centre is a world-standard rehabilitation and aged-care centre and also incorporates wards such as a palliative care ward. The Andrew Love Cancer centre has had a \$20 million injection from the Brumby Labor government in past budgets, and the emergency department has had a \$26 million upgrade. There is no exception in the 2010–11 budget, where we see more record spending at Barwon Health.

In recognition of the massive population growth that is to occur in the region south of the Barwon River, especially around the Armstrong Creek area, this government is committed to building a brand-new community hospital — a massive project that will serve the people of Geelong well, especially those on the south side of the river. Importantly it will also free up capacity at Geelong Hospital.

The government in committing to a second hospital for Geelong has also allocated \$33 million to securing land for the site and further planning. In addition, as part of

the funding, it has committed to six new intensive care beds and expanded the acute-care capacity at Geelong Hospital. In meeting with board members and executive staff of the hospital over the last two or three weeks I have found this funding is very warmly welcomed by Barwon Health.

It is easily forgotten that when we talk about new beds in a hospital we are not just talking about new beds, we are also talking about the staff that go along with those beds. With the new beds that will be going into the Geelong Hospital we are also talking about extra staff and, importantly, extra nurses in the wards. Not only is this government employing new nurses in the wards but this is in stark contrast to the 1990s, when nurses were made redundant by the Kennett government and never replaced. Under the Brumby Labor government's 2010–11 budget, health is the big winner in Geelong.

I mention very quickly that in relation to infrastructure we see \$77 million of funding for section 4C of the Geelong Ring Road. This is a great budget. It is a budget that will benefit all Victorians, including regional Victorians, and I can assure you, Acting Speaker, that it will benefit the people of Geelong for many decades to come. As I said before, it is warmly welcomed by the people, the businesses and the community sector in Geelong as well as the trade union movement. I wish the bill a speedy passage through the house.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Autism: western suburbs schools

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — I wish to raise for the Minister for Education a matter regarding the provision of education for 5-to-18-year-old autistic children in the western metropolitan area of Melbourne. I ask the minister to visit the electorate and meet representatives of the parents of these autistic children and explain why there is no provision for full education for 5-to-18-year-old autistic children in the western area of Melbourne. It is available in all other areas of Melbourne. I have been contacted by many concerned parents of autistic children and they would like an answer to that question.

A new educational facility for autistic children, Western Autistic School, is opening in Laverton. It is a wonderful facility, which I have seen, and it will incorporate a training institute for teachers of children with autism. That will be a great service not only for the Western Autistic School but also for mainstream and special schools that cater for children with autism. The new Western Autistic School will only be for five to nine-year-old children and has been called an early intervention centre. However, from my knowledge of autism, early intervention should really be for children up to the age of five years, and a number of those children require special autism schools after that.

The theory is that after four years — that is all the students would need — they will be ready for mainstream school. What actually happens is that after those four years, 80 per cent of those children go to special schools but only 20 per cent go to mainstream schools. In many cases special schools are not the right option for these children. In fact the school council president of Jackson Special School told me that 25 per cent of the children in that school are autistic and that it is just not working. At Sunshine Special Developmental School 34 per cent of children are in a similar situation. As I said, 20 per cent of children go to mainstream schools to start with, and often, many of those children cannot cope and have to go back to a special school.

The minister has recently announced a P–12 autism school for Wantirna Heights. Bulleen's autism school is also P–12, as is the northern suburbs school, whereas the southern suburbs school is P–9. In the western suburbs, however, the only provision is for five to nine-year-olds. Autistic children comprise a wide range of children with a wide range of needs. Some are suited to mainstream school with some support, some need to go to autistic schools, for others a special school is the right place, and some students need a combination of schools for the best result. Parents are saying that they are being neglected. Everyone else in Melbourne has a choice. Those in the western suburbs do not.

Country Fire Authority: Whittlesea station

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. The action I seek is for him to investigate providing additional funding to support the Whittlesea fire brigade for the building of a storage at the new Whittlesea fire station, which is currently being built in Laurel Street. The brigade has expressed its gratitude to the government for building the new station. Its construction fulfils a commitment made at the last election. The station will be operational before the next fire season.

As their local MP, I am enormously proud of the work that the Whittlesea brigade does and, indeed, has done for many decades, especially since the tragic fires of Black Saturday. These humble men and women led by Captain Ken Williamson saved many lives in the most heroic of circumstances. They have sought no accolades for their bravery but have continued the important work of keeping Whittlesea and the surrounding district safe, as well as working diligently in support of the significant recovery effort despite their own personal distress and losses sustained in their own community and backyards.

The brigade is so well respected by the local community that it gets a great deal of support for its fundraising efforts. That has meant that the brigade has contributed an outstanding \$85 000 of its own funds to accommodate its members' needs by increasing the meeting room area, kitchen area and turn out room. The brigade estimates that it needs around \$25 000 for a 14 by 16-metre storage shed to house their own brigade equipment and memorabilia, and also equipment of the Diamond Valley group. The station will also incorporate a divisional command facility. It is with great pleasure that I support the brigade's request for funds for their brand-new station. I know that the minister has seen firsthand, on many occasions, the great work of this outstanding brigade. I urge him to look at all the available options to support this worthy request.

Sewerage: Lake Bolac

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — The issue I raise is for the Minister for Water and the action I seek is for the minister and GWMWater to recommit to the 2007 Lake Bolac sewerage proposal which applied to the whole town, including properties on Frontage and South Beach roads. The background to this proposal is evident in a Victorian Water Industry Association press statement of April 2005 entitled 'Small towns, big impact on sewerage solutions', which states:

Launched on 31 January by the Parliamentary Secretary for Environment, Elaine Carbines ...

It went on to say that 15 towns, including Lake Bolac, would have sewerage, and that:

Infrastructure works are expected to be completed within the next 18 months.

That was in 2005. The *Ararat Advertiser* of 27 October 2009 reported that:

... the Lake Bolac community remains committed to the development and support of businesses, services and social and recreational activities.

This was summed up in statements by Karen McIntyre, president of the Lake Bolac Development Association published in the association's annual report, extracts from which were quoted in the *Ararat Advertiser* article, which goes on to note that:

The township has also seen new infrastructure spring up.

This includes the Lake Bolac Bush Nursing Centre and the Lake Bolac Information and Business Centre. The article further reports:

In her report, Mrs McIntyre said the Lake Bolac sewerage scheme remained the top priority of the development group

She said it is critical to the future economic and residential development of the town ...

I also have letters from other people. One is from Tom Atkinson, the honorary secretary and treasurer of the Lake Bolac Foreshore Committee, who said:

GWMWater's most recent proposal in the light of presently inadequate funding is to reduce the area of the township ...

This is an unacceptable proposal as far as the Lake Bolac community is concerned.

I also have a letter from Colin McKenzie, sent to GWMWater, which states:

Thank you ... for the information night held last Wednesday, 28 April. Many points were cleared up to the satisfaction of residents ... However, I feel that it is a very grave error of judgement not to service the houses and blocks on Frontage Road, as this will be the growth area of the future.

I ask you to please reconsider this decision

The most telling letter is from the chief executive officer of Ararat Rural City Council, which says:

I wish to reiterate council's previous position that all those properties on South Beach Road currently outside the proposed sewerage area should be included in the current scheme. Very early in the development of the proposal GWMWater staff verbally agreed with Cr Colin McKenzie and environmental health officer Robert Jehu that these properties would be included. Subsequently, new GWMWater staff have failed to uphold this commitment, despite the matter being raised on several occasions.

Again I call on the minister to take action: work with GWMWater, work with the community and recommit to the 2007 Lake Bolac sewerage proposal.

Factory Rehearsal Centre for the Arts: funding

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Community Development. I ask the minister to support an application from Casey City Council to the Community Facilities for Growth Areas program for the extension and refurbishment of

the Factory Rehearsal Centre for the Arts. The Factory Rehearsal Centre for the Arts provides a space for local performing arts groups, dancing groups, budding filmmakers, community bands and others to rehearse and practise their craft. It is in a terrific location, surrounded by the Casey Indoor Leisure Complex, a community centre, library and road safety education centre, and it is also not too far from the Chisholm Institute of TAFE.

The issue at the moment is that the centre cannot accommodate large or particularly loud bands due to the inadequate acoustic treatment. As a result the facility is underutilised and is unable to meet the needs of some local and culturally important groups, such as the Casey Pipe Band. A facility that can meet the needs of groups like this is in regular demand, and the refurbishment of the existing rehearsal centre would enable us to address this need. A number of arts groups in the area have been consulted about the design of the centre, and their feedback is incorporated in the final plan. The refurbishment would include soundproofing the walls, floor and ceiling of the facility; installing acoustic wall and ceiling coverings; and relevant carpet and plumbing treatments.

This rehearsal space is the only facility of its kind in the region and is likely to attract both locals and people from outside the immediate area if refurbished. In a rapidly growing area like Cranbourne it is really important that residents have access to a range of facilities and services to keep people active, engaged and connected. The refurbishment of this facility would increase participation across a range of pursuits and provide opportunities for community members to try out new things. It is undoubtedly a valuable project for the area. That is why I call on the minister to support this grant application by Casey City Council.

Doyles Road, Shepparton: upgrade

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — I would like to raise an issue with the Minister for Roads and Ports. The issue I raise is about a very dangerous and busy road in Shepparton, Doyles Road. In 1992 it was designated as the Shepparton alternate route to take away the trucks and heavy vehicles from the city centre, and it is the responsibility of the state government. The action I seek is for the minister to widen and upgrade this dangerous road and increase safety at all its intersections.

Concerns have been raised with me about the intersections of Benalla Road, Knights Road, Ford and Grahamvale roads, Channel Road and Poplar Avenue. The concern of local residents is that Doyles Road has

gone from being a local, dead-end road to being an interstate road with minimal improvements. It takes the Melbourne to Brisbane freight traffic. Local farmers whose businesses are on Doyles Road still drive their tractors and farm machinery between their properties. There are also many commercial businesses as well as private properties along that road.

In 2006 the *Greater Shepparton 2030* report on infrastructure said about 6000 vehicles per day travelled on that alternate route, which is Doyles Road, and 40 per cent of that traffic is commercial traffic. This week VicRoads has acknowledged that heavy traffic on the road is increasing. There is a mix of B-doubles, articulated vehicles, cars, trailers, caravans, motorbikes, fuel tankers and, most importantly, school buses, because there are two schools — Grahamvale Primary School with 350 students and Orrvale Primary School with 400 students — in close proximity to that road.

Residents and users of the road are angry and frustrated at the lack of action by the state government. I met with the Doyles Road Action Group spokespersons, Peter Beaumont and George Bitcon, who want that road upgraded. They told me of their experiences, because they both live on the road. Both men have seen Doyles Road deteriorate and the interstate, local and other traffic increase significantly. When the road was made a bypass of Shepparton the locals were promised that the road would be widened, but nothing has happened. There are safety concerns about trucks thundering down the road and there being no areas to pull off the road because the road is too narrow and there are deep, open table drains on either side of the road.

The speed limit was lowered from 100 kilometres per hour to 80 kilometres per hour, but most trucks ignore the speed limit. Mr Beaumont had a number of experiences, which I do not have time to describe, but they are quite substantial experiences of near misses. I received letters from 13 residents and regular Doyles Road users about near misses, tailgating by trucks and there being no room to get off the road when wanting to enter their properties. They have to wait in the middle of the road and hope they are not hit.

I first raised the issue of the danger of Doyles Road in 2003 after a spate of accidents, including a death. The then Minister for Transport made a commitment to work with the City of Greater Shepparton and asked VicRoads to give guidance to the council about engineering changes or reduced speed limits. VicRoads has advised that it is completing a major review of the road network in Greater Shepparton and that the results will be available soon. Sadly there have been a number

of deaths already on this road, and Doyles Road must now be upgraded to avoid any more deaths.

St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten: redevelopment

Mr CRUTCHFIELD (South Barwon) — The issue I raise is for the attention of the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, and the action I seek is that she support the application by St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten in Grovedale for a renovation and refurbishment grant of some \$200 000.

As members would be aware, the aim of the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, which was signed in 2008 by the Council of Australian Governments, was for every child to access the kindergarten program for 15 hours a week during the 12 months prior to full-time schooling. The commonwealth has committed considerable funds over a five-year period for the implementation of what is called universal access. The Victorian government has recognised that kindergartens will face some challenges in implementing those 15 hours, including infrastructure problems, staffing problems and not displacing existing programs. The grants are part of our government's response.

I am well aware of this kindergarten's urgent need for an expansion of its facility. Grovedale, and the accompanying Marshall on the other side of the Surf Coast Highway, is an expanding and growing area full of young families. St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten has long furnished a very worthwhile contribution to the Grovedale community in the provision of kindergarten services, and I want to acknowledge a number of people who have contributed to an application which the council supports.

I acknowledge Cr Andy Richards, who has contributed some of his ward contributions to that kindergarten for kitchen upgrades and fences. I also acknowledge Ron Bond, former president Tamara Jennings, current president Cheryl Beris, teachers Linda Leaman and Margaret Shaw, assistants Debbie Woodman and Michelle Borg, and Michelle Morant, who have all worked very diligently for this project to expand the facilities at St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten. A number of works have already been undertaken on the original building, and a large structure has also been removed from that facility. The St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten is eager to access funds from this government to expand its services to the Grovedale and Marshall communities.

Rail: Ferntree Gully station

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) — I raise a matter with the Minister for Public Transport, and the action that I seek is for the minister to investigate the construction of additional shelter on the city-bound platform at the Ferntree Gully railway station. The Ferntree Gully station has recently undergone an upgrade to premium status. This upgrade has included the creation of an enclosed waiting room area on the city-bound platform, plus the installation of improved lighting and upgraded closed-circuit television technology. In recent years patronage at the station has significantly increased as Knox residents have sought to find an alternative method of commuting to Melbourne.

This station acts as a major public transport hub for many residents in Knox. Not only does it serve the Ferntree Gully community, but it is also the closest railway facility for Rowville and Lysterfield residents. Rowville and Lysterfield residents have been ignored by the Brumby government as part of its ongoing refusal to complete the long-awaited Rowville rail feasibility study that was promised by the Labor Party in 1999. In 2006 the Liberal Party committed to funding this study and has recommitted to completing the study after this election.

The upgrade of Ferntree Gully railway station to premium status was a great victory for the local community. For four years I have worked with local residents to pressure the state Labor government to upgrade this important facility. As I said, during the 2006 state election the Liberal Party committed to upgrading the station to premium status — an action that was not matched by the former Bracks government. Upon my election I committed to continue my advocacy for an upgrade of this important community facility. During the current Parliament I have raised concerns in relation to this station on numerous occasions. Finally, the government agreed to upgrade the facility, and in December 2009 the new facility became operational. Whilst this upgrade is an important first step, there is still more action required to improve the amenity at the station. Improving safety at the station by locating two protective services officers there between 6.00 p.m. and the last train would be one such benefit.

I have recently surveyed a number of commuters at the station. Another area of improvement which was raised was that whilst the recent upgrade has provided an enclosed waiting area, the upgrade has resulted in a reduction in covered areas. Consequently commuters have identified the need for the construction of more covered shelter along the platform for city-bound trains.

This will greatly improve the travelling experience for commuters during periods of inclement weather.

This upgrade is something that is greatly needed, particularly during the winter months. As I said, a number of residents are now using this facility. The number of people using the facility has certainly increased over the years, and it behoves this government to work with local residents to ensure that these facilities are upgraded to meet the needs of the travelling public. I therefore ask the Minister for Public Transport to not leave Ferntree Gully residents out in the cold but to take action by providing additional shelter for commuters on the Ferntree Gully railway station platform for city-bound trains.

Rail: Fyansford line

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — I raise an issue with the Minister for Public Transport relating to the official closure of the now disused rail line that runs between the old Fyansford cement works and the port of Geelong. It is commonly known as the Fyansford line. For the information of members, this line has not been used since the early 1990s, but in the books of VicTrack it is officially still an open line. The action I am seeking is for the minister to declare the Fyansford rail line in Geelong officially closed. If this is done the state government, together with other interested stakeholders such as the City of Greater Geelong and other community organisations or businesses in Geelong, could look at options for the use of the rail reserve into the future. Importantly, the rail line closure will also enable VicTrack to remove signals on level crossings that still officially remain. Those crossings are, for example, at Church Street and Ballarat Road. Those crossings still have lights, although, as I said, the line has not been used since the early 1990s.

In 2009 VicTrack, to its credit, prepared a strategic plan for the future use of the land along the Fyansford rail line. As I understand it, this has been presented to the City of Greater Geelong. The strategic plan provides a number of options for the land, although to this day no further work or action has been taken on the plan. There is one small section of the land that I would like to see removed forthwith, or as quickly as possible, and that is the section of track that currently divides the Bell Park Sports Club and the Western Heights secondary college, which is currently being constructed. Under the plans for the new school and community centre the school's sporting facilities, such as its new oval and netball courts, will be used by the sports club and vice versa, in true partnership. However, currently people have to traverse the old rusted tracks and the ballast to utilise the sporting facilities, which creates a hazard.

The removal of the track and some basic landscaping will enable the sports club and the school to use this land. I therefore look forward to the minister's decision.

Crime: Doncaster electorate

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) — I rise to call on the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to take action to dispel the concerns of Doncaster residents who are living in fear in their community. I recently conducted a survey of residents to hear their views on crime and whether they felt safe in their neighbourhood. Over 40 per cent of residents who responded said they had been the victim of a crime at some stage in their lives. To my horror I found that 88 per cent of respondents did not feel safer in their homes than they did 10 years ago. Nearly an equal number, 87 per cent, did not feel safe using public transport after dark. Nearly all, 94 per cent, believed alcohol-fuelled violence was a problem in Melbourne. It is clear from these figures that there is considerable concern among residents about crime in our community. Every Victorian should feel safe in their homes, on their street and in their community. Yet in reality many of us do not.

Two older female residents reported stalkers following them in Doncaster in the early morning and evening. One told me she lived in constant terror of a man following her on a motorcycle. She had informed police, only to be told he was only after her handbag. Another East Doncaster resident told me that they would not walk out at night, they did not feel safe in the daytime and that 10 years ago they did not worry.

A 66-year-old Doncaster resident, who has been living in the area for 34 years, told me she had always felt safe in her home. However, with the incidence of house break-ins increasing and possibly more widespread reporting of incidents, she feels less comfortable. She said that she would certainly not walk the streets alone at night nor would she open her door at night. I think these comments are a sad indictment of the mood of our community, and it is one the coalition is determined to change.

One Doncaster resident said she believed street lighting was 'dangerously dark' at night and thought solar-powered lights would make streets more safe and secure. An 83-year-old Doncaster East resident told me that she believed hoon cars should be crushed after the first offence as their drivers know they have broken the law. This was echoed by others in my electorate. This resident also said she believes that fines and sentencing are soft. She said that she did not believe there was any respect for police from adolescents.

These sentiments make it clear this government is failing on law and order. A coalition government would move quickly to ease these concerns of our residents. We have a plan to have 1600 new police on our streets, abolish suspended sentences, introduce tough new anti-hoon laws, make our transport network safer, ban the sale of knives, outlaw criminal bikie gangs, restore information to local Neighbourhood Watch groups, ban violent drunks, shake up liquor licences and end home detention.

Of course the government has recently taken up a number of our law and order policies. I believe we should cut out the middleman and put the coalition into government so that individuals and families can once again feel safe in our homes, streets and communities.

Consumer affairs: Parke Lawyers

Mr LIM (Clayton) — The matter I raise tonight is for the attention of the Attorney-General. It relates to the actions of Parke Lawyers in relation to claims for liquidated damages and related legal expenses. The action I seek is that the Attorney-General initiate an investigation of the practices of Parke Lawyers. Parke Lawyers operates on behalf of Care Park Pty Ltd, a company which has been the subject of previous complaints in the Parliament regarding its claims for liquidated damages in private car parks.

When a person parks in a private car park and does not follow the instructions relating to the use of the car park, they are issued with a notice seeking 'liquidated damages'. If this claim is not paid, the person can receive a letter from Parke Lawyers, which threatens legal action unless the original claim of \$88 and legal fees of \$77, a total of \$165, are paid. However, I understand the legal basis of the claim is highly questionable and as far as I am aware the firm pursues persons who do not pay. The Consumer Action Law Centre has warned consumers regarding Care Park and sought to run a test case on the validity of the claims for damages.

The claim for legal damages by Parke Lawyers seems to be an old-fashioned shakedown of those who are unaware of their rights, and the role of Parke Lawyers in these sharp practices seems, at best, highly questionable. I urge the Attorney-General to investigate Parke Lawyers and to ensure that the vulnerable are not victims of legal firms who prey on the weak and ignorant. This is clearly nothing less than intimidation, bullying and victimisation, especially for people in my electorate who have difficulty speaking English properly and negotiating the system.

Responses

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Community Development) — I thank the member for Cranbourne for his enthusiasm for the project that he raised for my consideration. I know it is a project he has taken significant interest in, and he certainly works very hard on behalf of his community to get great outcomes. He has just returned from being on the phone to some local constituents about this project.

As the member for Cranbourne pointed out, the Factory Rehearsal Centre for the Arts is a special community facility and is home to a number of local performing arts groups, dance groups, amateur movie makers and community bands. It is a space that brings together people of all ages and interests. It also has the benefit of being ideally located within a community precinct that includes the Casey indoor leisure complex, the Cranbourne library, the Balla Balla community centre and Chisholm TAFE. Without doubt it is a very important facility for the Cranbourne community.

As the member for Cranbourne is aware, Casey City Council has applied through the community facilities for growth areas program for \$450 000 to refurbish the rehearsal centre. This is an \$11.6 million program directed to areas experiencing significant population growth. Casey is one of these areas.

Whilst it is exciting to watch areas grow and develop and families build homes and take root in new communities, it is a challenge for governments to make sure that the provision of infrastructure and services keeps pace with the changing and growing needs of a community. Making sure that communities have accessible public places and spaces where they can get together is crucial to building healthy and inclusive communities.

Facilities that provide opportunities for people of all ages and abilities and life stages to come together can also help develop strong and resilient communities. That is why facilities like the Factory Rehearsal Centre for the Arts are so important. They are so much more than just buildings — they are places where people can come together to meet, share ideas and problems, make friends and learn new skills. That is why they are so valuable.

I understand that a lot of work has gone into putting together this funding application and that it has really been an organic process. I am aware that Casey City Council has consulted various groups and individuals within the community to make sure the facility meets the needs of the community and the many groups

within it. I would like to commend the individuals and community groups who have contributed to the design that has been put forward.

Partnership is very much valued by this government, and when planning for a large and diverse community, partnership is instrumental in achieving concrete outcomes. It is the only way to ensure that facilities such as the one being proposed here meet the needs of the whole community both now and into the future.

I understand the application is currently being considered, and I will be looking carefully at the proposal in the coming weeks. I thank the member again for bringing this matter to my attention.

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Water) — The member for Lowan raised with me a matter in relation to a proposed sewerage scheme for the community of Lake Bolac. I thank him for doing me the courtesy of raising the matter with me yesterday so that I was able to obtain some information for him to provide to residents in Lake Bolac who have an interest in this scheme.

As members of the house would note, particularly those who represent country areas, we have established a country towns water supply and sewerage program. The purpose of that program is to ensure that wastewater from septic tanks does not present a public health or environmental risk by finding its way into groundwater, rivers, lakes or the ocean. Nevertheless, we know that if properly managed, septic tanks generally can manage wastewater efficiently.

Lake Bolac is an unsewered town located about 50 kilometres south of Ararat, and about 176 lots are proposed to be serviced by the scheme. The Ararat Rural City Council applied for funding to sewer Lake Bolac, and through the country towns water supply and sewerage program, GWMWater, in the Grampians-Wimmera-Mallee area, was given \$519 000 for the Lake Bolac sewerage scheme. My understanding is that the total project cost is somewhere in the order of \$2.8 million. The balance, after the \$519 000 grant is taken into account, will need to be funded by GWMWater, and customers will contribute towards the capital costs of this scheme at an amount capped at \$800 per lot, with customers paying their own connection fees.

The project, as is proposed, will provide sewerage for almost all the lots in Lake Bolac. However, about 10 lots located along South Beach Road have been excluded from the scheme, and it is these lots that I

think relate to the issue of concern that has been raised by the member for Lowan.

My understanding is that these residents would like to be included. The background to this situation is that the average size of each block in Lake Bolac is about 0.1 to 0.4 of a hectare whilst most of the 10 or so excluded lots are about 1 hectare. These larger lots are also located a long way from the other lots, which are in a concentrated part of Lake Bolac.

The application from the Ararat City Council for the country towns water supply and sewerage program funding did not include the larger lots. This is because council, via a GHD study commissioned by council, assessed that the larger lots provided sufficient space for the management of wastewater on site through the current septic system.

I acknowledge that about four of the excluded lots are not large in size, but they are set apart from the remainder of the lots that are proposed to be seweraged. If they were to be included it would mean extending the pipeline that would be part of this project by about 500 metres, which could cost something in the order of — and this is a very rough estimate — an additional \$500 000.

The challenge then is with the excluded lots. We can certainly connect them to the system, but the issue is who would pay and how to apportion those costs fairly over the cost of the total project. Obviously some challenging policy issues arise as a consequence of that. The construction works on the program have not yet started. A tender for a constructor is expected to be advertised later this year. We would say that if it is the case that those smaller lots would pose an environmental or health risk if they were not connected as part of the scheme, there are some issues around the best way of managing the apportioning of costs in order to connect them. GWMWater has made provision in the design of the scheme to connect these smaller lots. However, it would need to contribute financially.

The Ararat Rural City Council wrote to GWMWater, I think on 7 May, asking it to meet with these residents, and GWMWater wrote back to the council to say it would be happy to meet with residents. A time will now be arranged so that those discussions can take place to progress the matter in the most appropriate way.

The member for Nepean raised a matter with the Minister for Education.

The member for Yan Yean raised a matter for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

The member for Shepparton raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports in relation to the upgrade of Doyles Road, Shepparton.

The member for South Barwon raised a matter for the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development in relation to an application for a grant for St Paul's Lutheran Kindergarten.

The member for Ferntree Gully raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport in relation to shelters at Ferntree Gully railway station.

The member for Geelong raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport in relation to the declaration of the official closure of the Fyansford rail line in Geelong.

The member for Doncaster raised a matter with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in relation to a survey of residents she conducted in her electorate.

The member for Clayton raised a matter for the Attorney-General in relation to Parke Lawyers. I will refer each of those matters to the relevant ministers and seek a response.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) —
Order! The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 10.38 p.m.