Tuesday, 3 October 1995

The SPEAKER (Hon. J. E. Delzoppo) took the chair at 2.06 p.m. and read the prayer.

RETIREMENT OF CLERK

The SPEAKER — Order! I inform the house that I have received a letter from John Gregory Uttle, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, indicating his wish to retire from the Parliament's service on 29 September 1995, and that, until further notice, I have directed the Deputy Clerk to perform the duties of the Clerk.

CONDOLENCES

Sir William John Farquhar McDonald

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of the Honourable Sir William John Farquhar McDonald, and places on record its acknowledgment of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of Dundas from 1947 to 1952 and from 1955 to 1970, Speaker from 1955 to 1967 and Minister of Lands, of Soldier Settlement and for Conservation from 1967 to 1970.

Sir William McDonald will be remembered as a long-serving stalwart of this institution who served as a minister, Speaker and a tireless advocate for his constituents. Sir William was born and raised in South Australia on a property located only miles from the Victorian border. At the age of 19, Sir William purchased grazing property on the Victorian side of the border, near the town of Neuarpurr. We are fortunate that Sir William chose to cross the border, as he went on to make a significant contribution to the prosperity of this state.

Sir William married in 1935 and together with his wife they expanded their farming operations to include a shorthorn cattle stud and grain cropping. In 1940 Sir William joined the war effort as an officer with the 19th Machine Gun Battalion and later with the 25th Battalion. During his war service Sir William was promoted to the rank of captain and saw active duty in northern Australia and New Guinea. After demobilisation Sir William returned to the land; however, he close to initiate a political career, being elected to a shire council in 1946.

Sir William remained a shire councillor until 1961, having contributed enormously to progress in the local community. He was particularly effective in bringing about the development of transport infrastructure in the district.

It was Sir William's strong commitment to his local community that made him such a valued representative for the state electorate of Dundas. Indeed, Sir William was returned as the member for Dundas for a period spanning 23 years, with the exception of only one term.

All who knew Sir William would agree that he had a presence and a style that were particularly noted in this house. In 1955, at the age of 43, he become the youngest Speaker in the history of this Legislative Assembly. In 1958, Sir William was knighted for services as Speaker and continued to serve Parliament in that role until 1967. He is remembered as a Speaker who carried out his role with integrity and distinction. During that time Sir William was also involved in many of the house committees which contribute to the effective operation of this Parliament.

In 1967 Sir William was appointed to the cabinet of the then Premier, Sir Henry Bolte, as Minister of Lands, Minister of Soldier Settlement and Minister for Conservation. He set about his ministerial responsibilities with the vigour and enthusiasm which had become his hallmark. Although some of his proposals attracted controversy, he should be remembered for his innovative approach to his portfolios. Indeed, during the 1967 drought Sir William was credited with devising a new response scheme that become a benchmark for drought relief in the Wimmera and Western District.

Sir William retired from politics in 1970. He remained an active member of a number of state and local committees. In 1990 Sir William and Lady McDonald sold their property interests in western Victoria and moved to Melbourne. Sadly, after a long illness Lady McDonald passed away in 1992.

Sir William held an enterprising and community-minded spirit that fuelled his service to the local community and to Victoria. This state is very much indebted to civic-minded individuals like Sir William who dedicate themselves to work for the benefit of all Victorians. Many honourable members
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will have known Sir William in latter years in his role as councillor of the Royal Agricultural Society. Because of his farming background and interests, he took a very lively interest in the development of the showgrounds and all matters agricultural.

As I said earlier, Sir William was a man of incredible integrity, presence and bearing; he was a well-educated man. On behalf of my government, I extend condolences to the family of Sir William McDonald — his daughters, Sandra and Jacqueline, and their respective families.

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I join with the Premier in expressing condolences at the passing of Sir William McDonald. As the Premier has said, Sir William served in this house as the Liberal member for Dundas from 1947 to 1952, and again from 1955 until 1970, when he was defeated as a consequence of the then Country Party preferences being directed against him.

Sir William was Speaker of the Legislative Assembly from 1955 to 1967. As the Premier remarked, he was then the youngest person to have been appointed Speaker of this house. In 1967, he was appointed Minister of Lands, Minister of Soldier Settlement and Minister for Conservation by the then Premier, Sir Henry Bolte. During his time in Parliament, Sir William served as a member of the house, library, printing and standing orders committees, and as temporary Chairman of Committees from 1950 to October 1952.

In some respects, his time as a minister was controversial. Many members will remember debate at the time about the proposed subdivision of land in the Little Desert National Park. He was also involved in controversy over plans for the establishment of a restaurant in Melbourne’s Royal Botanic Gardens.

As the Premier said, Sir William’s greatest achievement as a minister was the much-lauded drought response scheme devised by him during the 1967 drought. That scheme continued to serve as a benchmark for the handling of future drought situations.

Mr McNAMARA (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I join with the Premier and Leader of the Opposition in the condolence motion for Sir William John Farquhar McDonald, who served as the member for Dundas from 1947 to 1952, and from 1955 to 1970. He was one of the longest-serving Speakers in this house — from 1955 to 1967.

Sir William also served from 1967 to 1970 as Minister of Lands, Minister of Soldier Settlement and Minister for Conservation.

As has been mentioned by the Premier and Leader of the Opposition, Sir William had a farming background from both sides of the South Australian-Victorian border and was involved in a range of activities. He will be remembered for his innovative approach to drought relief, which many regard as having established a benchmark for drought relief around Australia, and something on which we have subsequently built.

Sir William’s early education was at Scotch College, Adelaide. At 18 years of age he returned to a family farm. Then, in the early 1930s, he took up property interests. In 1940, at the outbreak of war, he joined the army and served in Darwin and Papua New Guinea, rising to the rank of captain.

In 1955, Sir William became Speaker. At that time, he was the youngest Speaker in the history of this Legislative Assembly. He continued to serve in a range of capacities following his retirement from politics, including as a councillor for the Kowree Shire Council, trustee for the Victoria Amateur Turf Club and the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Vice-president of the Poll Shorthorn Society, and a member of the Royal Agricultural Society. He is remembered by those who knew him well, including the current Chairman of the RAS, Mr Keith Buchanan, as a forthright and straight-talking individual, and one who always had a very strong point of view.
As the Premier said, Sir William certainly felt a keen sense of loss when his wife died in 1992. He was not in the best of health in recent times. He is survived by his two daughters, eight grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. I join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in expressing my sadness at the passing of Sir William McDonald.

Mr W. D. McGrath (Minister for Agriculture) — I join with the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Premier in contributing to this condolence motion on the passing of Sir William McDonald. As has been said, for a number of years he was the member for Dundas. At that time, Dundas covered an area of the Western District now represented by the honourable member for Portland and a large amount of area that is now in the electorate of Wimmera, which I represent.

As Minister of Lands and Minister for Conservation he was involved in wide debate in 1969 about the development of land in the Little Desert. Many good farms were developed within that region after the opening up of that land, fragile though the ecology may have been. At that time fertilisers were available at reasonable prices and the terms of trade for farmers were then better than now apply. It was then considered profitable and progressive to develop that land.

One must applaud the decision of Sir William as the then responsible minister for taking such a courageous step. He received criticism about the $600 000 made available from the government for the development of those farms and the roads in the region. In fact, a public inquiry was held into the land development.

Having said all that, I point out that Sir William McDonald was a very good farmer and grazier. His expertise with merino sheep and Poll Shorthorn cattle in particular was well known and was recognised by the Royal Agricultural Society.

Sir William's property, Brippick, which is near Neuarpurr, was considered to be a very good station. He was one of the leaders in lifting the productivity of the south-west, which was opened up and developed much later than most of the farming land in other regions of Victoria.

In a way Sir William was somewhat of a pioneer, even as late as 1935, when he bought and developed the Brippick station. The property is now owned by Mac Hawkins and his family and continues to be a very good grazing property.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the fact that Country Party preferences were directed against Sir William in the 1970 state election, which resulted in his losing his seat. It is fair to say that even today some people in that corner of the state still bear the scars of that decision.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr W. D. McGrath — No, I was not involved in politics in those days; but it was a very controversial decision.

To my way of thinking Sir William McDonald was more of a statesman than a politician. He had an aura about him, a certain charisma that made him stand tall among his peers. Wherever he was, whether in the city or out in the country, he carried himself well. He was seen not only as a fine ambassador for country Victoria but as someone who could walk among and hold conversations with leading businessmen in Melbourne.

In paying tribute to Sir William, I speak on behalf of the many people in Edenhope, Goroke and Neuarpurr who want me to pass on their special thanks for the contribution made by Sir William to life and society in that part of the state. I was sorry to hear of his passing.

Dr Napthine (Portland) — I join my colleagues in paying tribute to Sir William McDonald. On behalf of his former constituents, whom I now represent, I recognise his contribution to the electorate of Dundas during his 21 years as its member. Today is Sir William McDonald's birthday. He was born on 3 October 1911, exactly 84 years ago.

As other members have said, Sir William served as the member for Dundas from 1947 to October 1952 and from May 1955 to April 1970, when he lost the seat to Mr Eddy Lewis, the Labor Party member who was elected on the preferences of the then Country Party candidate. The 1970 election was very interesting. A number of traditional Liberal Party seats were lost to the Country Party under a preference arrangement between the Labor and Country parties. It is a great tribute to the current coalition that those days are well and truly gone and will never be seen again.

Sir William McDonald served his area not only as the member for Dundas but also, for much of that
time — from 1946 to 1961 — as a councillor of the Shire of Kowree. As the Premier said, he was famous for his work in developing infrastructure in and introducing modern road-making methods to that area. Dundas was abolished in the mid-1970s. A major portion of the electorate was incorporated into the electorate of Portland, which I now represent. The people of Hamilton, Balmoral and Coleraine certainly remember Sir William McDonald.

As the Minister for Agriculture has said, Sir William will be remembered as a successful farmer on Brippick station. He was a famous breeder not only of merino sheep but, in particular, of Poll Shorthorn cattle. He was famous throughout the Shorthorn industry and served as a member of both the Shorthorn breeders council and the Royal Agricultural Society. Indeed, my last meeting with Sir William was at last year’s Royal Melbourne Show.

He was also a close friend and confidante of the late Sir Henry Bolte, the Premier of Victoria for many years. They shared a love of horse racing and raced a number of horses, including the famous Ramleigh, one of the great steeplechasers of the time. Sir William had a great love of agriculture, being a member of the Royal Agricultural Society; and he also had great love of the people he represented.

I pay tribute to his work in all the other aspects of his public life, including his initiative in the late 1960s in establishing footrot control in western Victoria. It was the first time that footrot in sheep had been tackled over a large area — and over the years it has been tackled successfully. That culminated in the building of the state’s first regional veterinary laboratory at Hamilton, which was named the Sir William McDonald Laboratory. I have worked at that laboratory; it was my first appointment as a veterinarian after graduation.

Sir William was well respected and is well remembered by the people of Portland, whom he represented for many years. I pass on my condolences to his family.

The SPEAKER — Order! I join with the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and other members of the house in offering condolences to the family of Sir William John Farquhar McDonald. In doing so I pay tribute to a man who occupied the Chair from 1955 to 1967, a considerable contribution.

Many members would have met Sir William at the Royal Agricultural Show. As a matter of fact, he attended the Australia Remembers celebration at Parliament House a few months ago, when he was warmly received by both new and former members. I join other members of the house in paying tribute to his unique contribution to the state of Victoria.

Motion agreed to in silence, honourable members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — I move:

That, as a further mark of respect to the memory of the late Honourable Sir William John Farquhar McDonald, the house do now adjourn, until 4.00 p.m. this day.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 2.29 p.m.

The SPEAKER took the chair at 4.04 p.m.

Hudson Conway: fraud allegations

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Treasurer to the fraud allegations made against Hudson Conway in connection with the proposed Gas and Fuel building in Spring Street and ask on what advice the government decided to refer those allegations to the Victoria Police?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — The litigation is being conducted by an organisation known colloquially as the SECV shell. I understand the administrator of the shell takes the view that I am the appropriate minister for that organisation. When he made me aware of an application that was to be
made to the Supreme Court. I formed the view that the ministers relevant to the casino commission and the police force should be made aware of the fact of those allegations. I met with them and advised them of the fact of the allegations. I understand they took the view that they should pass that information on to the relevant agencies. I understand those agencies are investigating the matters.

**Small business: growth initiative**

Mr TURNER (Bendigo West) — Will the Premier advise the house of the government’s consideration of the Westpac- Yellow Pages initiative to increase small business growth in Victoria?

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for his question because it reinforces the government’s commitment to creating in Victoria an environment in which small, medium and large businesses can grow — particularly small business, because it is the engine of growth and has the capacity to be the most flexible and, ultimately, to employ the most people.

The Minister for Small Business has been working for a long time on a range of projects that have resulted in the substantial growth of small business activity in this state. One of the latest initiatives is declaring this month Small Business October. The minister has been working with a number of very large organisations to try to offer new opportunities for small businesses.

Together with Mr Robert Joss of Westpac and Mr Bob Johnson of Yellow Pages, the minister and I today launched two initiatives that I believe will not only give men and women in small businesses added incentives and opportunities to grow their businesses but, importantly, lead to many young people being trained in business principles and practices while they are still at school.

As part of Small Business October, Westpac today announced that it will make available $100 million in loans and overdrafts, with no mortgage security at all being required. Perhaps the greatest concern of men and women in small businesses — and their parliamentary representatives — is where they get the capital from to advance their businesses beyond an idea or beyond the first few weeks or months of operation.

It has been almost impossible to get venture capital. As I have indicated, Westpac has today made available $100 million in this state that will not require mortgage security; 20 per cent of this $100 million must be for new business ventures, or new starts in small business, and the rest for businesses that already exist.

We will have to test it — and Westpac understands this — to see what the take-up and failure rates are, if any, and to see how it works through the system. But if it works as I hope it will, it will become a forerunner to a new approach by banks generally towards this very important small business sector.

The Yellow Pages initiative also announced today by Mr Bob Johnson will provide an opportunity for 15 000 — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr KENNETT — It is interesting that members of the opposition are not interested, particularly the member for Bundoora and the shadow Minister for Education. They have no concern at all about the importance of small business, or more importantly about the education of young people in the ways of small business so they can be independent and grow through society and secure their own future independent of government resources.

Mr Baker — Sit down, you’re boring!

Mr KENNETT — The honourable member for Sunshine finds himself sitting on the back bench after a career in the ministry on the front bench.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the honourable member for Sunshine if he persists in interjecting with that very recognisable voice.

Mr KENNETT — It is a tragedy that the only one who smiles when the member for Sunshine interjects now is the Leader of the Opposition, who gets a great deal of pleasure from seeing him make a fool of himself.

Yellow Pages is providing the capacity for 15 000 young Australians to gain first-hand experience in developing a new product, setting up a small business and then, after a period of time, winding it up and, it is hoped, distributing the benefits to the shareholders. This important incentive will help develop a risk appetite among our young that I hope will lead them to greater security as they move through life.
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I congratulate and thank Westpac and Yellow Pages for seeing fit to work with this government and particularly the Minister for Small Business, the Honourable Vin Heffernan, for announcing these programs in Victoria. I commend Small Business October to the entire Victorian community because it reinforces the importance of this sector not only in what we do today but more importantly what we can achieve in the years to come.

Hudson Conway: fraud allegations

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — Can the Treasurer confirm that a leading Melbourne QC has looked at the documents about fraud allegations against Hudson Conway and has provided advice on this matter to the Treasurer and the government? If so, what was the QC’s advice?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — I cannot confirm the allegations of the Leader of the Opposition. This matter involves issues about information that has been gained in the course of legal proceedings, the access to which is restricted to the parties to those proceedings. There was additional information that was not gained as a result of those proceedings, a summary of which has been made available to me, and I have had certain advice about the appropriateness of —

Mr Mildenhall — Whose friends are you protecting?

Mr STOCKDALE — I have had appropriate advice about the appropriate course to follow. That information is privileged in order to support the decision made by the administrator.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr STOCKDALE — If you are not interested in the answer to the question perhaps I should just sit down. The administrator’s decision was to seek leave of the court to make information available only to the casino authority and to the police. For the purpose of understanding the issues involved I have been made aware in summary form of some of the information that was not gained as a result of the proceedings. Quite properly, on the basis of the advice given to him, the administrator has declined to make information available to any other person without the leave of the court. We have neither sought nor been granted leave for such information to be made available to the government.

We have taken the appropriate course of action. We have advised the relevant authorities that there are allegations being made but that we are unaware of the substance of them and that they are subject to control by the court as to access. As I understand it, an application has now been made and consented to by the other parties that the relevant information be made available on a voluntary basis to the casino authority and to the police and the matter is being properly and appropriately investigated by those relevant authorities. It would not be appropriate for the government to seek access to that information.

King Street: violence

Mrs McGILL (Oakleigh) — Will the Premier advise the house of the government’s response to the latest incidence of violence in the King Street nightclub district?

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — All members of the house are disturbed, as I am sure the majority of the public are, that there has been another incident in King Street. It would have been preferable had it not occurred, but on the other hand we could have been talking about five deaths rather than five stabbings had those stabbings been to different parts of the anatomy.

It is true that the number of incidents in King Street has recently dropped because of the police presence and the efforts of nightclub proprietors that no acts of violence take place. As members are all aware, King Street has a number of nightclubs one upon the other and a certain environment is created from numbers of people wanting to enter them, waiting on the streets outside and then congregating on leaving. People leave themselves open to the risk of disturbance from time to time.

After the report of the incident in King Street the other evening, I discussed with my colleague, the minister responsible for the liquor commission, the Minister for Small Business, the prospect of looking at a number of alternatives to try to reduce the risk of acts of violence taking place along this King Street strip. The minister met last night with the proprietors of all the nightclubs in King Street. I understand that the discussions were amicable as both sides obviously want to try to prevent a repeat occurrence of what took place recently.

The minister informed me that the nightclub proprietors will come back to him within two weeks after further discussions and consultations on a range of options that have been suggested over the
past few days. One option is to video view the strip, and another is to increase the police presence and for the nightclub owners to accept more responsibility for the provision of any extra policing that takes place.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr KENNETT — It happens to be the same procedure that is used for the football, and unless you know what you are talking about I suggest you keep your mouth shut.

It is another example of how totally out of touch with the aspirations of this community the Labor Party in this state is when, on an issue as important as this, the honourable member, supported by some of his party, considers this a matter for humour.

Mr Dollis — Tell us about the two reports that exist.

The SPEAKER — Order! I advise the honourable Deputy Leader of the Opposition that he may not engage the Premier in conversation across the table.

Mr KENNETT — Within the next two weeks I look forward to hearing from the minister the results of the investigations, which will include reports from the nightclub owners and the Victoria Police.

Mr Batchelor — What about stabbings in other nightclubs; you don’t hear about them?

Mr KENNETT — The Leader of the Opposition actually said what he thought of you and some of your colleagues at a function the other night. I shall not repeat his comments here because we want him to remain as leader — but when I reveal his thoughts many members of the opposition will be in for a bit of a shock!

This is a serious matter which is being addressed not just by the minister but by the government as a whole. I hope we will find a resolution that will substantially reduce the risk and threat to people posed by the operation of the nightclubs in King Street.

**Hudson Conway: fraud allegations**

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Treasurer to his previous answer, in which he confirmed that he had referred fraud allegations to the Casino Control Authority — or, as he said, the casino commission. Did the Treasurer refer the matter to the authority because he was advised of the requirements of section 9 of the Casino Control Act, which says that casino operators must be persons of good repute and must not have any business associations with any person who is not of good repute and which was considered relevant by the authority?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — When I was asked questions like this they usually came typed on pieces of paper with pink ribbons around them, and with the appropriate fees inscribed on the front. The questions from the Leader of the Opposition today have disclosed two things. First, he does not listen to what is said because I did not say I had referred any matter to the Casino Control Authority.

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr STOCKDALE — Perhaps you do not hear because your mouth is open all the time! I invite you to listen to the tape; and when Hansard comes out get somebody to read it to you. I said the SECV shell administrator had made me aware of the fact that it proposed to make an application to the court. He made me aware that allegations of possible criminal behaviour were being made. I formed the view that it was appropriate for me to advise the ministers responsible for the Victoria Police and the Casino Control Authority of the fact of those allegations.

The content of the allegations — in so far as they are based on the information available in the proceedings — has not been made known to me or to other ministers. I understand that as a result of their advice to me they each advised the Chief Commissioner of Police or the chairman or some other officer of the Casino Control Authority of the fact that the allegations would be made and that proceedings were being taken in the court so that they could take whatever action they considered appropriate in discharging their statutory duties.

I have not formed any conclusion as to the nature of the allegations. I have not seen the substance of the allegations; I have formed no view as to whether or not they are accurate. I understand from reading the newspapers that they are disputed by the people against whom they are made. Before Captain Smear starts throwing around his own lack of information it would be appropriate for the house to preserve the convention that persons against whom allegations are made are entitled to be presumed innocent until they are proven guilty. The allegations are being investigated by the appropriate authorities.
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An honourable member interjected.

Mr STOCKDALE — I pick up the interjection.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Treasurer should ignore interjections and conclude his answer.

Mr STOCKDALE — When I discovered that the information given to me was not accurate, I withdrew and apologised. When the Leader of the Opposition discovers that his latest round of smears are unjustified, I hope he will have the grace to apologise.

**Wool industry: processing initiatives**

Mr SPRY (Bellarine) — Will the Premier inform the house of the progress made during his recent trip to Italy to make Geelong the wool capital of the world?

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — The house will be aware that one long-held objective of the government has been to have more wool, especially ultra fine wool, processed in Victoria — particularly in Geelong — rather than having overseas countries purchase raw wool, refine it and export the finished products back to Australia.

In Geelong we have a unique opportunity, through a combination of the existing CSIRO research and development plant, an already established large wool industry and Deakin University, to put together a new institute that examines not just the training of people in fabric design — and I do not mean garment design — but the possibility of developing the industry. When I was overseas I contacted not just educational institutions but companies in northern Italy, particularly those near the Biella region, including one called Texilia, with the idea of developing a joint venture that would result in two or three people going to northern Italy for six months, learning about the process and attracting to Victoria a new educational facility. That facility could be established in Geelong in conjunction with the university to further advance the training and development of young people in the wool industries.

We also met with spinners and weavers. Honourable members may be aware that many of the Italian companies are family owned, and until now it has been difficult to get them to enter into joint ventures outside their own country. However, a new Italian company, Simest, has been established through a combination of government and private sector money. It will have capital of $300 million and will be involved in joint ventures offshore. The government is confident that it can use the contacts made with Simest and the spinners and weavers to develop a new joint venture in Victoria that, together with the training facility, will be located in Geelong. That will not happen today or tomorrow; it will take some time.

The head of Simest is coming to Victoria either later this year or early next year, together with some of the heads of the spinning and weaving companies to see the opportunities available in Victoria, particularly in Geelong. We hope that over the remainder of the decade something so many of us have talked about will become a reality — the combining of the high-technology industry that we now have in Geelong through the wool-combing operation and a spinning and weaving operation that will allow Victoria to make better use of its fine quality merino wool. That will lead to extra jobs not just for the people of Geelong but for people throughout Victoria.

The honourable members who represent Geelong, both on this side and on the other side, have shown interest in the Geelong selling centre. That has been located in Geelong for many years, and it is important that it be retained. I have made a number of inquiries to make sure that as we go through the reorganisation of the industry the Geelong selling centre is not closed. Today I received a letter and sent off a reply on the very issue.

When I was overseas, the number of people particularly in northern Italy who spoke to me of Geelong wool, more so than talking about the wool symbol, was something that impressed me very much, indeed. In other words, to be able to receive and then process and make up garments from Geelong wool is terribly important. If the wool authorities in Australia were to be so short-sighted as to close down that facility, our ability to sell wool internationally would be substantially damaged. It requires the wool authorities here in Australia to understand that as you go through rationalisation there is a very important marketing aspect associated with the Geelong wool sales facility, and we must do everything we can to keep it open and to enable Victorian growers to sell wool through Geelong to the rest of the world, where the Geelong name and reputation is very high indeed.
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Hudson Conway: fraud allegations

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Treasurer to the Premier’s comments last week when he said that the decision to approve in principle Crown’s application for expansion of the permanent casino was made by cabinet prior to the Premier going overseas on 7 September. Is this correct, and if so — —

Mr Kennett interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Because I’m asking is it correct. I wouldn’t ask you if I want to know whether it’s correct, would I?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask members on the government benches to come to order.

Mr BRUMBY — I refer the Treasurer to the Premier’s comments last week that the decision to approve in principle Crown’s application for expansion of the permanent casino was made by cabinet prior to the Premier going overseas on 7 September. Is this correct, and if so, what was the date of the cabinet meeting and was the Treasurer present?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — The Leader of the Opposition constantly demonstrates the absolute absence of any ground for this boundless self confidence he has. If the Leader of the Opposition is concerned with the accuracy of some statement the Premier has made, may I suggest he ask the Premier?

Child care: places

Mrs ELLIOTT (Mooroolbark) — Will the Minister for Community Services inform the house of additional child-care places being made available for Victorian families?

Mr JOHN (Minister for Community Services) — I thank the honourable member for her question and for her great interest in the provision of child care in this state. Earlier this year, I signed the commonwealth-state child-care agreement on behalf of Victoria. I am very pleased to inform the house this afternoon that under the latest round of funding we will be providing 400 extra year-round places to be established in 14 programs across Victoria. This will provide some 930 children with out-of-school-hours care.

This announcement and this provision of the extra 400 places are part of the government’s strategy to provide flexible and innovative child-care services for young Victorian families. As I said, the additional places are part of the commonwealth-state child-care agreement we signed earlier this year. The agreement provides for $17 million to be provided between now and 1997 for building and upgrading child-care centres and some $10 million in recurrent funding for extra places.

Further places will be funded under the agreement and they will be announced as they become available. I expect to announce a further round of places prior to Christmas and these will also be needs based throughout the metropolitan area and the country.

Hudson Conway: fraud allegations

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Treasurer to the Premier’s comments last week on 3LO that the decision to approve in principle Crown’s application for an expansion of the permanent casino was made by cabinet prior to the Premier going overseas on 7 September. Did cabinet make that decision before or after fraud allegations against Hudson Conway were brought to the Treasurer’s attention?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — The government has been involved for some time in consideration of issues raised by the proposals to expand the casino. Some of the matters fall within the responsibilities of the authority itself and other matters require broad policy decisions by the government. The decisions on matters in which the government was required to set the parameters within which the authority would then approach the resolution of the application were set before the Premier went overseas and before any suggestion was brought to me of an application being made in the court which would raise these matters of criminal conduct, and I had no
information about those matters before the administrator spoke to me.

**Children's Court**

**Mrs PEULICH** (Bentleigh) — Will the Attorney-General inform the house of developments regarding the Children's Court?

**Mrs WADE** (Attorney-General) — Recently, Mr Speaker, as you will be aware, there has been some criticism of the Children's Court. Most of it, I have to say, has been unsourced and most of it has been unjustified. I think it is most unfortunate because it has reflected on those magistrates who work at the Children's Court and also on the staff of that court.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Mrs WADE** — I said most of the criticism was unjustified. In so far as it relates to the building in which the Children's Court is housed, there is some justification for that criticism. Mr Speaker, as you will be aware, the decision to place the Children's Court in a most unsuitable building was made by the previous government immediately before the 1988 election. I understand it was made on the direct instructions of the then Premier, John Cain.

My department has said it was amazed that such an unsuitable building was chosen for the court. I understand that mistake was made in the rush of an election, when the then government was being criticised about the then Children's Court in Batman Avenue.

Mr Sandon interjected.

**Mrs WADE** — As the honourable member for Carrum interjects, that decision was made seven years ago. Unfortunately, the then government entered into a 10-year lease of those premises, and that lease does not expire until 1998. While the Children's Court building is not suitable for that court — —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

The **SPEAKER** — Order! There is too much audible interjection.

**Mrs WADE** — The Children's Court is by no means the worst of the courts this government inherited from the former government. Since being elected, the government has embarked on a court building program. It has built a new Melbourne Magistrates Court, new courts at Frankston and Dandenong, and refurbished the Court of Appeal. That program is continuing.

A new court will be opened in Ringwood to replace extremely unsuitable magistrates courts in that area, where magistrates have nowhere to sit if they are not in court; also, people who go there to conduct business or who may be called before the court have nowhere where they can speak to their legal advisers. They have to stand outside the court and in some cases, they have no place to sit and talk while awaiting the calling of their cases.

The conditions I am speaking of could not be envisaged by members of the opposition who have not bothered to see the courts and in fact, could not be envisaged by somebody speaking from the luxury of, for example, the Family Court. I have asked my department to prepare a brief for the future needs of the Children's Court. When the lease is up in 1998, I anticipate the court will be moved to a more suitable building.

In the meantime, it is important to ensure we have at the court a senior magistrate of high calibre. We have had, and we still have, a senior magistrate of high calibre at the Children's Court, Mr Greg Levine, but he has announced he wishes to leave that position and that he wishes to sit as a magistrate at the Melbourne Magistrates Court. There is no doubt that Mr Levine has served the Children's Court with dedication and with distinction. The government thanks him for his efforts in his seven years in that position.

Mr Levine will leave the Children's Court on his own wishes and on his own desire, and on a date nominated by him.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

The **SPEAKER** — Order! I warn the honourable member for Yan Yean that his insistent interjections are out of order. I ask him to remain silent.

**Mrs WADE** — I am pleased to announce that this morning the Executive Council has appointed Ms Jennifer Coate to the position of Senior Magistrate at the Children's Court from that date. Ms Coate has been a magistrate since 1992 and is highly regarded. She has previously been a magistrate at the Children's Court. At present, she is in charge of committals at the Melbourne
Magistrates Court. She has wide experience in family law.

Mrs Wilson interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will ignore interjections and conclude her answer.

Mrs WADE — She was a school teacher and has been involved in a wide range of community activities. She was nominated for the position by the Chief Magistrate, Nick Papas, and I believe the appointment is an excellent one.

Hudson Conway: fraud allegations

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I ask the Treasurer: after the Treasurer became aware of fraud allegations against Hudson Conway, did he suggest to other ministers that cabinet postpone any further decisions or considerations relating to government licensing and taxation arrangements with Crown Casino?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — No, these are matters to be considered by the casino authority. It is surprising, since it is set out in the act and since the Labor Party established the system it has not penetrated the head of the Leader of the Opposition that the casino authority acts as a body providing advice to government and the government is at arm’s length from the casino operations.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house will come to order.

Mr STOCKDALE — The reaction of the opposition speaks volumes about the way it operated when in government and its expectation of how it would behave if Victoria had the misfortune to have it back in government. The Labor Party set up the system; the Labor Party appointed the authority; the Labor Party set out the policy framework; the Labor Party short-listed Hudson Conway and ITT Sheraton as the bidders for the casino. The process followed has been squeaky clean all the way, and despite nearly two years of smearing by the opposition, it has yet to establish any instance in which the authority and the government have not followed the appropriate processes.

I reject entirely the inferences in the question from the Leader of the Opposition. As is often the case, it is simply uninformed and has not presented any evidence to substantiate the inferences cast.

Agriculture: environmental controls

Mr BILDSTIEN (Mildura) — Is the Minister for Agriculture aware that without warning in New South Wales the government has introduced new environmental controls which prohibit farmers from ploughing their properties unless they first get permission from the bureaucracy, and that permission costs $100 in the form of an application fee and the application can take 60 days to answer? Can the minister assure the house that Victoria has no intention of following suit?

Mr W. D. McGRATH (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank the honourable member for Mildura for his question and simply because — —

An Opposition Member — Ten minutes!

Mr W. D. McGRATH — If you like! Because the honourable member for Mildura comes from an agricultural area, he knows that farmers make provision for the sowing of seeds, but I wish he had not said it quite like that in front of the Treasurer because we need to ensure we keep things in perspective in Victoria.

The Minister for Natural Resources and I have worked hard and cohesively with the farming community in Victoria to ensure that the Landcare programs and the salinity programs are worked up in consultation and cooperation with the farming community. That seems to be in contrast to the approach taken by the new Labor government in New South Wales, where I understand that in an interview last week with John Laws, the Minister for Land and Water Conservation, Kim Yeadon, the indication was that to bring about environmental controls on farm land, the plan in that state is — as has been outlined by the honourable member for Mildura — that if a farmer wishes to plough a field — —

Mr Batchelor — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, questions to ministers must relate to areas of their administration. I am at a loss to understand why what happens in New South Wales is relevant to the minister’s administration. He should just simply answer yes or no to the question put to him rather than relating to events in New South Wales.

Mr W. D. McGRATH — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, the honourable member asked whether
we were considering applying a $100 fee to ploughing land for sowing. I am giving the house the reasons why we will not be making that sort of application. I am also giving the house an indication of what may happen if a government with a similar philosophy were elected here in Victoria.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Mildura has drawn to the minister’s attention the taking of certain actions in New South Wales and is seeking an answer as to whether that policy will be introduced in Victoria. There is no point of order.

Mr W. D. McGrath — As I said, the honourable member for Mildura outlined the policy that has been put in place in New South Wales requiring a farmer to pay a fee of $100 and to ask two government departments for the right to plough a property for the purpose of growing a crop. There is also a time scale of some 60 days —

Mr Gude — How much?

Mr W. D. McGrath — Some 60 days must elapse before approval is given.

Mr McNamara interjected.

Mr W. D. McGrath — Exactly. The Deputy Premier knows a little bit about farming. You would miss a break in the weather.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr W. D. McGrath — You have to utilise the moisture that is available to get the seed to germinate. Apparently the Minister for Land and Water Conservation in the new New South Wales Labor government has no knowledge of the moisture requirements that are needed to germinate the seed that materialises into a crop! As I said, it was interesting to read the explanation given by the minister on this question.

There is no chance of that type of policy being adopted in Victoria under a conservative government. We want to work cooperatively with farmers to ensure that they are productive and are able to provide the necessary resources for this state — particularly for the food processing sector, which has been strongly supported by the Deputy Premier.

It is interesting to note that Victoria is now putting the runs on the board. Enormous amounts of capital are coming in for infrastructure for the food processing industry. Therefore, we must encourage our farming community. We must ensure that farmers pursue quality assurance programs, are highly productive and utilise the capacity of the land to the maximum benefit of not only themselves but the state as a whole. In another three to four years we will be so far in front of New South Wales and its Labor government that it will not be funny!

The SPEAKER — Order! I advise the house of a joint display of various Telstra and Vistel office equipment that could be used both in Parliament and in members’ electorate offices. I ask members to interest themselves in the equipment to see whether any of it is suitable, because I would like some feedback.

PETITIONS

The Acting Clerk — I have received the following petitions for presentation to Parliament:

School levies

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state showeth that the fees and levies charges by school to compensate for the government’s budget cuts and to restore important curriculum activities are:

1. placing an undue burden on parents with low incomes;
2. creating administrative and management problems for school; and
3. threaten to undermine the viability of a free public school system.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the government hold a parliamentary inquiry into the levels of fees and their impact on schools and families, and to establish clearly what will constitute free education in Victoria.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Ms Garbutt (37 signatures)

Public health system

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria showeth that:
the massive funding cuts to the public health system by the Victorian government have led to a crisis of declining standards of health care and are limiting the access of growing numbers of Victorians to the health services they need.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the state government restore adequate funding to the public hospital system and immediately injects $46 million to address this crisis.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Ms Garbutt (37 signatures)

**Paintball or skirmish games**

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria sheweth their total opposition to any attempt by the government to prevent them from participating in the sport of paintball also known as skirmish, either by banning the sport or not issuing Sunday shooting permits to legitimate paintball operators/clubs.

Your petitioners therefore pray that paintball or skirmish games shall not be banned in Victoria, that legal paintball operators/clubs be allowed to conduct games on Sundays and that holders of a current shooter's licence should continue to be allowed to own registered paintball markers.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mr Finn (431 signatures)

Laid on table.

**Alert Digest No. 10**

Mr PERTON (Doncaster) presented Alert Digest No. 10 on:

- Appropriation (1995-96, No. 1) Bill
- Appropriation (Parliament 1995-96, No. 1) Bill
- Building (Amendment) Bill
- Competition Policy Reform (Victoria) Bill
- Heritage Bill
- Local Government (Elections) Bill
- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Amendment) Bill
together with appendix and attachment.

Laid on table.

Ordered that report and appendix be printed.

**PAPERS**

Laid on table by Acting Clerk:

- Glenelg-Wannon Water Board — Report for the year 1993-94, together with notification from the Minister for Natural Resources of the failure to submit the annual report and reasons therefor
- Melbourne Water Corporation Employees' Superannuation Fund — Report for the year 1994-95
- Parliamentary Committees Act 1968 — Response of the Minister for Health on action taken with respect to the recommendations made by the Community Development Committee's First Report upon the Needs of Families for Early Childhood Services in Health, Welfare and Education
- Parliamentary Officers Act 1975 — Statement of Appointments and Alterations of Classifications during the year 1994-95 in the —
Department of the Legislative Council
Department of the Legislative Assembly
Department of the Parliament Library
Department of the House Committee
Department of the Reporting Staff of the Victorian Parliamentary Debates

Statement of Persons Temporarily Employed during the year 1994-95 in the

Department of the Legislative Council
Department of the Legislative Assembly
Department of the Parliament Library
Department of the House Committee
Department of the Reporting Staff of the Victorian Parliamentary Debates

Planning and Environment Act 1987 — Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

All Planning Schemes — No. 551
Alberton Planning Scheme — Nos L41, L42
Avon Planning Scheme — No. L11
Bairnsdale (Shire) Planning Scheme — No. L50
Ballaarat (City) Planning Scheme — No. L60
Berrigan Planning Scheme — No. L95
Boroondara Amalgamation Amendment
Bulla Planning Scheme — No. L108
Buln Buln Planning Scheme — Nos L41, L42
Camberwell Planning Scheme — No. L46
Castlemaine Planning Scheme — No. L15
Chiltern Planning Scheme — Nos L24, L25
Cranbourne Planning Scheme — No. L100 Part 1
Darebin City Amalgamation Amendment
Diamond Valley Planning Scheme — No. L59
Doncaster and Templestowe Planning Scheme — No. L91
Essendon Planning Scheme — No. L65
Fitzroy Planning Scheme — Nos L36, L37
Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme — Nos L23, L35
Greater Geelong Planning Scheme — No. R122
Hastings Planning Scheme — No. L54
Hawthorn Planning Scheme — No. L28
Heidelberg Planning Scheme — Nos L71, L73, L75
Keilor Planning Scheme — Nos L84, L96
Knox Planning Scheme — Nos L77, L87
Korumburra Planning Scheme — No. L67
Kyneton Planning Scheme — No. L4
Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme — Nos L1, L24
Maffra Planning Scheme — No. L29
Malvern Planning Scheme — No. L29
Melbourne Amalgamation Amendment
Melbourne Planning Scheme — Nos L191, L193
Mildura City Planning Scheme — No. L49
Moira Planning Scheme — No. L4
Moorabbin Planning Scheme — No. L55
Narracan Planning Scheme — No. L43
Nunawading Planning Scheme — No. L82
Omeo Planning Scheme — No. L13
Pakenham Planning Scheme — Nos L91, L98, L103
Port of Melbourne Planning Scheme — No. L13
Portland City Planning Scheme — No. L39
Port Phillip Amalgamation Amendment
Prahran Planning Scheme — No. L54
Preston Planning Scheme Consolidation
Ringwood Planning Scheme — No. L29
Rodney Planning Scheme — No. L88
Rutherglen Planning Scheme — No. L9
South Melbourne Planning Scheme — No. RL167
Springvale Planning Scheme — No. L93
St Kilda Planning Scheme — No. RL167
Stonnington Amalgamation Amendment
Sunshine Planning Scheme — No. L91
Talbot and Clunes Planning Scheme — No. L16
Traralgon (Shire) Planning Scheme — No. L50
Upper Murray Planning Scheme — No. L9
Upper Yarra Planning Scheme — No. L45
Warmambool Planning Scheme — No. L7
Yarra Amalgamation Amendment
Yarra Planning Scheme — No. L1
Public Prosecutions Act 1994 — Statement of reasons by the Attorney-General under section 46

Sale City Council Water and Wastewater Operations — Report for the year 1993-94, together with notification from the Minister for Natural Resources of the failure to submit the annual report and reasons therefor

Stamps Act 1958 — Report of exemptions approved and refunds made pursuant to section 137R for the year 1994-95

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

- Building Act 1993 — S.R. No. 121
- Country Fire Authority Act 1958 — S.R. No. 125
- County Court Act 1958 — S.R. Nos 118, 119
- Evidence Act 1958 — S.R. No. 109
- Financial Institutions Duty Act 1982 — S.R. No. 112
- Fisheries Act 1968 — S.R. Nos 111, 114
- Health Services Act 1988 — S.R. No. 110
- Juries Act 1967 — S.R. No. 117
- Magistrates’ Court Act 1989 — S.R. No. 120
- Planning and Environment Act 1987 — S.R. No. 124
- Road Safety Act 1986 — S.R. No. 115
- Supreme Court Act 1986 — S.R. Nos 113, 116, 117
- Tattersall Consultations Act 1958 — S.R. No. 122
- Transport Act 1983 — S.R. No. 126
- Water Act 1989 — S.R. No. 123

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 —

- Minister’s exception certificates in relation to Statutory Rule Nos 111, 114
- Ministers’ exemption certificates in relation to Statutory Rule Nos 106, 107, 110, 112, 122, 124

The following proclamations fixing operative dates were laid upon the Table by the Acting Clerk pursuant to an Order of the House dated 27 October 1992:

- Coroners (Amendment) Act 1995 — All unproclaimed sections except sections 4 and 5 on 21 September 1995. Sections 4 and 5 on 1 October 1995 (Gazette No. G37, 21 September 1995)
- Infertility Treatment Act 1995 — Sections 5 and 199, Part 9 (Except section 137 and paragraphs (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f), (h), and (i) of section 122(1)) and Part 13 on 1 September 1995 (Gazette No. G34, 31 August 1995)

APPROPRIATION MESSAGES

Messages read recommending appropriations for:

- Building (Amendment) Bill
- Competition Policy Reform (Victoria) Bill
- Heritage Bill
- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Amendment) Bill

PUBLIC BODIES REVIEW COMMITTEE

Mr GUDE (Minister for Industry and Employment) — By leave, I move:

That Mr Dollis be discharged from attendance on the Public Bodies Review Committee.

Motion agreed to.
Mr GUDE (Minister for Industry and Employment) — I move:

That, pursuant to sessional order no. 6(3), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 4.00 p.m. on Thursday, 5 October 1995:

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Amendment) Bill
Building (Amendment) Bill.

Motion agreed to.

APPROPRIATION (1995-96, No. 1) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 5 September; motion of Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer).

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — Victorians are worried about the Premier. They are worried that he has gone too far. He has trampled on people's rights and he has taken away the checks and balances that keep governments honest and accountable.

As the budget shows, while families are being hit with massive tax hikes and cuts to health and education there are millions and millions for the government's mates all over the state. Under this government, Victorians are paying more but getting less. For as long as the Premier and Treasurer try to hide the truth the situation will get worse and not better.

Look at this budget and try to find in which department the Premier and the Treasurer plan to find a further $600 million in spending cuts. There is nothing! Flip through some pages and find out how much tolls are going to cost families in Knox and Cranbourne each year. There is not a word! Perhaps there is an explanation for why we are the only state in the country selling off our electricity industry in a fire sale which even Terry McCrann has described as a $3 million disaster. But in the budget there is only silence.

The Treasurer wanted a boring budget. But a budget that shows Victoria is the highest taxing and charging state in Australia — the highest taxing and charging state in history — is not boring. It shows the massive cuts which have already hit our schools and hospitals. It may be boring for the Treasurer but it is certainly not boring for ordinary Victorian families. It is not boring for patients in public hospitals who now have to wait on trolleys for more than 24 hours, for the children who have dropped out of the state education system or for the women and children who are now too scared to use the public transport system at night.

A budget that regards a fall in unemployment of just 1 per cent by 1999 as acceptable is not a boring budget, it is an appalling budget — a budget that has given up on this state. It is a disgrace that we have a government that has given up on jobs or simply does not care.

This is not a boring budget. At best, it is a litany of the Kennett government's skewed priorities — of higher and higher taxes and more and more cuts to services. It is the budget of a government more interested in looking after its mates than the needs of ordinary Victorians. At worst, it is a grossly dishonest budget designed to hide the truth until after the next election. It is designed to hide from Victorians the government's real intent to sell off water and gas, to slash spending in the vital areas of education, transport, health and community services by a further $600 million, to impose tolls on Victorian families for the next 34 years and to further remove the basic democratic rights and freedoms of Victorians.

I understand the Premier received a cake this morning to mark his three years as Premier. It set me wondering how he would divide up the cake. I know one thing: it would not be divided up equally. There would be one big piece for the Premier, another for the Treasurer and some large pieces for Mr Ron Walker and Mr Lloyd Williams. The rest, if there were any left, would be left for the rest to fight over. The Premier would say, 'They can fight over the crumbs'. After all, the Premier's philosophy is to let the fat men get fatter! That is how he has treated the rest of Victoria. The cake has not been shared equally. The Premier and his mates have taken the biggest share.

I turn to address several of the key areas of the budget. Firstly, I turn to the dishonest forecasts. This is the seventh major economic statement handed down by the Treasurer. Consistently in delivering those statements the Treasurer has on each occasion been able to point to 'better than expected outcomes'. Tables 1 and 2, which I seek to have incorporated in Hansard, indicate the variability of
Table 1
1993/94 Budget Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Forecast Results ($m) (Source: 1993/94 Budget)</th>
<th>Revised Forecast ($m) (Source: Autumn Economic Statement April 1994)</th>
<th>Actual Result ($m) (Source: 1994/95 Budget)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Outlays ($m)</td>
<td>14094.9</td>
<td>14045.5</td>
<td>13737.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Revenues ($m)</td>
<td>12586.6</td>
<td>12939.3</td>
<td>12934.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Account Deficit (-)/</td>
<td>-1508.3</td>
<td>-1106.2</td>
<td>-802.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surplus (+) ($m)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
1994/95 Budget Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Forecasts Results ($m) (Source: 1994/95 Budget)</th>
<th>Revised Forecasts ($m) (Source: Autumn Economic Statement - May 1995)</th>
<th>Actual Results ($m) (Source: 1995/96 Budget)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Outlays ($m)</td>
<td>12906.0</td>
<td>12708.7</td>
<td>12649.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Revenues ($m)</td>
<td>13298.2</td>
<td>13509.6</td>
<td>13581.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Account Deficit (-)/ Surplus (+) ($m)</td>
<td>392.2</td>
<td>800.9</td>
<td>931.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mr BRUMBY — As table 1 shows, the actual current account deficit in 1993-94 of $802 million was just on half the amount originally budgeted for. Due to lower outlays and higher than expected revenues, in 1994-95 the actual current account surplus of $931.9 million was more than double original expectations. The expectations were $392 million, the revised forecast was $800 million and the actual result was $931 million!

The Treasurer has on numerous occasions argued the need to provide conservative forecasts, and the opposition accepts the need for some conservatism. It is reasonable, indeed sensible, to err on the side of caution. But the figures in the tables suggest more than a pattern of conservatism. They suggest a deliberate, orchestrated policy of understating expected outcomes to maintain a climate of fear and to minimise the pressure for desperately needed public expenditure in schools and hospitals. It is a strategy of using government estimates to justify slash-and-burn policies.

It is a strategy which, on the basis of previous forecasts, means that this year's current account surplus will be well in excess of $1 billion rather than the $706 million currently estimated in the budget. Victorian Labor welcomes the fact that this budget is back in the black — and I say without hesitation that in government we plan to keep it there. That is why the first major policy I put through the party was the financial management paper, which commits Labor to maintaining a substantial surplus on the current account.

But Labor's financial management policy commits us to more than that: it commits us to honesty in the budget process by our moving to whole-of-government reporting, enshrining that in a fiscal disclosures bill and strengthening the role of the Auditor-General. It is apparent from the budget that the Treasurer has backed away from whole-of-government reporting and has failed to implement the recommendations on accrual accounting of his own commission of audit.

What's more, the application of section 40 of the Financial Management Act is fast becoming a farce. Pursuant to section 40, the government is supposed to provide worthwhile expected performance outcome measures for each government department, together with comparisons for the previous year. Instead, the application of the section is being deliberately thwarted by the use of meaningless or irrelevant measures. If you look through the budget papers you will see that little information is provided on matters about which people really want to know — for example, how many passengers are using public transport compared with previous years. That figure was provided previously, but it has now been removed because it showed the catastrophic effects of the government's policies on the public transport system.

There are no statistics on the average size of classes in our primary school system — a figure I would have thought the Victorian public would want to know. There are no statistics on the response times of the Metropolitan Ambulance Service or on the time patients are required to wait on hospital trolleys.

The Treasurer is simply not interested in providing this information. He is not interested in providing an accurate picture of the impact of this government's policy decisions and he is not interested in providing a true picture of the budget. There is a simple reason for this, Mr Speaker: this is not a Treasurer who wants Victorians to know the truth about state finances. If he were, the Treasurer would meet the standards outlined in his own commission of audit and the standards outlined in Labor's financial management paper, including the provision of a general purpose financial report immediately before each general election. Again today I challenge the Treasurer to provide such a report prior to the next general election.

The second point about this budget is that taxes and charges are at record levels. There are, however, some things that the Treasurer cannot hide. He can't hide the fact that under the Kennett government Victoria has become the highest taxing and charging state in Australia. He can't hide the fact that taxes in 1995-96 will be nearly $2 billion a year higher than they were when the Kennett government came to office in October 1992. I seek leave to have incorporated in Hansard graph 1 showing total taxes, fees and fines over the period 1991-92 to 1995-96.

Leave granted; graph as follows:
Graph 1
Total Taxes, Fees and Fines
(Source: 1995/96 Budget Papers Table A. 6)


$ million
5000 5500 6000 6500 7000 7500 8000
Mr BRUMBY — The government cannot hide the fact that in the past three years the Kennett government has taken a total of nearly $3.7 billion in additional tax revenue from the people of Victoria — that's more than $800 for every man, woman and child in this state.

The budget simply confirms what ordinary Victorian families already know — we have a Premier who thinks the answer to every problem is a new tax on families. This is illustrated in table 3, which shows the proportion of total taxes, fees and fines raised by the various state taxes. I seek leave to have table 3 incorporated in Hansard.

*Leave granted; table as follows:*

### Table 3

**Percentage of Taxes, Fees and Fines raised by various taxes**

(1991/92 to 1995/96)

(Source: *TABLE A.6: 1995/96 Budget Paper No. 2*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employers' Payroll Taxes</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes on Property</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Authority Contribution</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambling Taxes</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes on Insurance</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Vehicle Taxes</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franchise Fees (e.g. Tax on Petrol, Tobacco, Alcohol)</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Taxes, Fees and Fines</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
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Mr BRUMBY — As table 3 illustrates, the burden of state taxation has increased in areas of state taxation that directly affect ordinary families. Franchise fees on products such as petrol, tobacco and alcohol will account for 16 per cent of total taxes, fees and fines in 1995-96, up from 13.7 per cent in 1991-92. Gambling taxes are estimated to rise from 8.9 per cent in 1991-92 to 12.4 per cent in 1995-96. Payroll tax, however, now contributes only 25.5 per cent of state taxes, fees and fines, down from 30.2 per cent in 1991-92.

As the Treasurer has indicated in his budget speech, the government has not increased taxes on business. As table 3 illustrates, the relative burden on business has actually fallen. And as the burden on business has fallen, the burden on families has risen alarmingly. Victorian families have been hit by the biggest increase in taxes and charges in Victoria's history.

Under the Kennett government they have been slugged by higher and higher taxes and charges — higher water bills, higher electricity bills, higher gas bills, higher motor registration, higher petrol prices, higher bank taxes, higher insurance stamp duty, higher cigarette prices and higher public transport fares. In all there have been more than 5000 new or increased taxes and charges under the Kennett government, and Victorian families are now paying up to $2000 extra in taxes and charges.

Due to the Kennett government's increase in taxes, charges and registration fees, Victorians are paying more for virtually every single thing they do every single day: filling up the car with petrol, sending the kids to kinder, going to the zoo, heating the home, taking a shower, taking a trip on a tram, using Lake Eildon, going to the doctor, catching a taxi, attending TAFE courses, lighting the house, washing and drying the clothes, watching TV, getting a copy of a birth certificate, taking the bus to the footy — in particular AFL Park — letting the kids go on a school excursion, having a beer, insuring the house, registering the car, going to court, parking at the snowfields, going to the dentist, washing the car, putting the kids into creche for the day, buying a TattsLotto ticket, insuring the car, going for a walk in one of Victoria's national parks, taking money out of the bank to pay the bills, or taking the kids for a train ride in the country — if you can find a line that is still operating. In every aspect of every daily activity Victorian families are paying considerably more under this government.

Another thing the budget cannot hide is how the Kennett government has got its spending priorities wrong. Key government services have been slashed. The government has been making massive cuts to vital government services in education, health and community services, yet it is able to find hundreds of millions of dollars for consultancies, advertising and office accommodation for the Treasurer and the Premier. While it is wasting and mismanaging Victoria's finances it is selling valuable state assets like the SEC, Melbourne Water and the Gas and Fuel at fire-sale prices to cover up its mistakes. The Kennett government has got its priorities totally wrong. It is more interested in selling off assets than it is in managing government properly. It is more interested in looking after its mates than providing essential community services.

An analysis of the budget shows how the government's spending priorities have changed under the Kennett government. In 1991-92 nearly 26 per cent of current outlays were spent on education. Under the Kennett government this has been reduced to just over 23 per cent. In transport the story is exactly the same with spending on transport and communication down from 7 per cent to 6 per cent of total current outlays. This change in spending priorities is illustrated in graphs 2, 3, 4 and 5, and I seek leave to have those graphs incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted; graphs as follows:
Graph 2
Spending on Education as Proportion of Total Budget Sector Current Outlays
(1991/92 vs. 1994/95)
(Source: Table A.5 1995/96 Budget Paper No.2)
Graph 3
Spending on Health as Proportion of Total Budget Sector Current Outlays
(1991/92 vs. 1994/95)
(Source: Table A.5 1995/96 Budget Paper No.2)
Graph 4
Spending on Transport and Communication as Proportion of Total Budget
Sector Current Outlays (1991/92 vs. 1994/95)
(Source: Table A.5 1995/96 Budget Paper No.2)
Graph 5
Spending on Other Spending Priorities as Proportion of Total Budget Sector
Current Outlays (1991/92 vs. 1994/95)
(Source: Table A.5 1995/96 Budget Paper No.2)
Mr BRUMBY — The budget papers show very clearly that spending priorities have changed dramatically under the Kennett government. However, what is also becoming increasingly clear is that while the Kennett government is good at slashing and burning, at downsizing and selling off, when it comes to managing people and services it has little or no idea. The effects of the Kennett government's poor management style are being felt right across Victoria. In education we now have schools seeking sponsorship from pubs. They are offering up their students as captive consumers. Enrolments in government schools are falling. Retention rates are declining and class sizes are increasing. Now the government is refusing to release the latest statistics. I seek leave to have graph 6 incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted; graph as follows:

Graph 6
Government School Retention Rates
(Source: DSE February School Census – 1994)
Mr BRUMBY — At a time when the entire world is recognising the importance of education for long-term social and economic wellbeing, in Victoria we are going backwards. Worse still, many of the students leaving our schools are just 12 or 13 years of age. They are not leaving to get jobs — they are dropping out of the education system. We will all pick up the human, social and economic costs of these disastrous policies in the years to come.

In health the minister has effectively lost control and responsibility of her portfolio. For three years now the health system has lurched from crisis to crisis. Examples of the minister’s mismanagement include capping the case-mix bonus pool in the middle of the financial year, leading to a massive closure of beds in 1994 and a blow-out in waiting lists; confusion and loss of experience caused by sacking of hospital boards and replacement by new network boards with little or no medical experience; major underspending by the department of $78 million last year; appalling mismanagement of the Metropolitan Ambulance Service, including the bungled Intergraph contract, too many ambulance officers given VDPs leading to a shortage of qualified officers, a blow-out in consultancies of administrative costs and confusion and chaos caused by private ambulance officers; and finally, long delays in starting up programs in psychiatric services to provide replacement beds and services for beds closed in psychiatric services.

Public transport has also been a total debacle. While the minister has been occupied pursuing his private interests the public transport system has slipped into chaos. The Onelink automatic ticketing system is now more than two years overdue with lost budget savings of $100 million. As yet the government has chosen not to seek compensation from Onelink as it was entitled to under the contract. Stations have been left unmanned, which has lead to massive fare evasion costing an estimated more than $20 million a year. Patronage on the public transport system fell 30 million passenger trips between 1992 and 1994 and facilities in stations have been downgraded. Many stations no longer have toilet facilities and the country rail service has been stripped back. There are now very serious safety concerns with three derailments having occurred — including the last and most tragic.

The list of mismanagement goes on and on: the neglect of the environment, particularly in our native forests; the absolute shambles which is the Victorian industrial relations system; and an Attorney-General whom the Supreme Court has found fails to understand the most rudimentary requirements of the constitution. In every portfolio as every day goes by there are more and more examples of a government that is good at slashing and burning but which does not understand what it takes to manage in the long term.

The budget shows that the Kennett government has given up on unemployment. In his budget speech the Treasurer targets an unemployment rate of 7.25 per cent by 1999, just 1 per cent lower than current levels. That means that under a Kennett government the unemployment rate in areas like the north-west of Melbourne, where unemployment is 14.6 per cent, will still be 13.6 per cent by 1999. Under a Kennett government the provincial centres of Bendigo and Ballarat can expect unemployment rates at or around 10 per cent for the rest of the decade. In the past three months there have been no new jobs in Victoria. Last month, for the first time in over a year, the trend rate of unemployment rose. At best, economic activity in Victoria is patchy.

Although there has been significant investment in the automobile, manufacturing and food processing industries — the beneficiaries of specific industry plans jointly implemented by the federal government and the previous State Labor government — the outlook in other areas is less positive. Growth in retail sales has fallen for the past four months; the number of motor vehicle registrations has declined in the last four months; and building activity, particularly in housing, continues to stagnate.

Although Australia has enjoyed 16 consecutive quarters of economic growth and although the future looks positive for the rest of the country, the question for Victoria is where its economic and employment growth will come from. The Kennett government is spending heavily on special events and monuments. Victorian Labor believes that spending such as that has its place. However, we believe — as Ken Ohrnae, the noted international commentator, has stated — that special events and circuses will not provide long-term, stable economic growth and employment.

Through its Working Nation and industry policy programs the federal government has worked tirelessly to reduce the level of unemployment in Victoria and Australia. But in Victoria, the federal government is being held back by a state government that has simply abandoned the field.
Indeed, Victoria is being held back by a state government that is more interested in building monuments to itself than in implementing policies that will ensure secure, productive and rewarding jobs for the community. The government is certainly full of bluff and bluster — but ultimately it is just a facade.

While the Premier makes off-the-cuff announcements without consulting his ministers, the government lurches from one day to the next. Decisions made ‘on the move’ turn out to be seriously flawed because the government has no clear vision, no real idea of how to build a secure and certain future for Victoria. Victorians deserve better.

Let me turn to what the budget is attempting to hide. The Kennett government has made a number of announcements on the City Link project. It has announced that the Transurban consortium is the preferred tenderer. It has also announced that Victorians will be paying tolls for 34 years, which means that when my children are as old as I am now they will still be paying tolls. It also means that a person who uses the City Link over the life of the tollway to get from one side of the city to the other and back again will pay more than $50 000.

What the government has not done — what it refuses to do — is explain how much the project will really cost and who will be paying. It has not shown why Victoria needs a project of such extravagance when new roadworks such as the Western Ring Road are fundamentally changing transport patterns around Melbourne. What it has not done — what it cannot do — is show that its plans for City Link are the cheapest way of getting the project built.

According to the head of Transurban, Mr Kim Edwards, the consortium expects to have repaid the majority of its debt after 13 years. Beyond that he says revenue from the tolls will provide the company with the return on its investment. The company expects to make about $200 million each year. That means that for the remaining 21 years of the project end up costing the people of that state $4 billion. If that seems strange, it gets worse. To receive this return Transurban needs financial help from the government. The budget states that the government’s contribution to the project will be $300 million. The government is getting no return on its investment. It is being made purely and simply to secure a return for the Transurban consortium.

As we have found out recently, the Kennett government is also looking to include secret clauses that will effectively prevent the making of any future improvements to the transport system. New roads, the upgrading of existing roads or any new public transport service — anything that has a materially adverse effect on the City Link project — will have to be compensated for. That could prevent any future government — or the next 10 governments, Labor or Liberal — making any major improvements to the transport system for the next 34 years. My children will not only be paying tolls for the next 34 years; they will not be given any choice about whether they use those roads. Indeed, they will be forced onto them. The government denies that any such clauses will be included in the City Link contract. I do not think that denial is accurate, but I hope it is the case.

I have already made it clear that Victorian Labor does not accept the need for secret clauses that would prohibit the next 10 governments from properly managing and addressing the transport needs of this state. In saying that I recognise that governments — be they Liberal or Labor — have to enter into long-term contracts from time to time. I also recognise and accept the need to ensure the security of those contracts to protect the investment environment in this state.

Victoria cannot afford to lose investments because of sovereign risk. Both the government and the opposition have a responsibility to enhance and protect a secure investment environment. To ensure certainty and security I believe governments should avoid entering into long-term contractual arrangements which are unnecessarily controversial or which create open-ended liabilities. So far as it is possible, major long-term contracts should be consistent with pre-election commitments and directions. They should clearly be established as being in the long-term interests of Victorians — as both taxpayers and members of the community — and they should seek to enjoy bipartisan political support, an example being the Alcoa contract that was signed in 1982. If that is not possible, a
government should have received a clear and unequivocal mandate for the specific contractual arrangement. If a government meets its requirements, the opposition has a responsibility to abide by the will of the electorate.

It is of increasing concern to Labor that the Kennett government appears unwilling to meet the responsibilities of government with regard to the City Link arrangements. In fact, so far it has assiduously avoided them. Before the last election the coalition did not announce that it was planning to use tolls to pay for the City Link. Indeed, when the Kennett government imposed the 3-cent-a-litre Better Roads levy in 1993 it said it would be used for major road projects such as City Link.

It is by no means clear that the method being used to finance the City Link project is in the best long-term interests of Victoria. The New South Wales Auditor-General and EPAC have already pointed to the many risks associated with BOOT schemes being used to provide road infrastructure. The secret clauses that have been suggested would also appear to contravene the spirit and content of the Hilmer reforms.

In essence, the question of City Link is really straightforward. The Premier and the Treasurer, having committed to an unnecessarily large project, are trying to make the state budget look better at the expense of making Victoria worse off. The Treasurer accepts that in the long term — after 34 years — the City Link project will be owned by the state. But in a short-sighted, politically motivated act, rather than use the cheapest method possible to finance its construction — that is, the home loan rate using the Better Roads levy — the Treasurer is effectively paying for City Link on Mastercard, at a massive cost to all Victorians.

Victorian Labor does not approve of or accept this as either necessary or appropriate. We have released a detailed policy by which Melbourne’s necessary freeway links — now and in the future — can be fully met, and in a way that would not add 1 cent to state debt or to the state budget and would require no tolls for the people of Victoria. Put simply, we have a much better way forward for Victoria, a better way of meeting our transport needs with no debt and no tolls. It is a better way forward.

I turn to the issue of sell-offs. The second issue the budget avoids is the sell-off of our valuable state assets — the SEC, Melbourne Water and the Gas and Fuel. For the past three years the Kennett government has been conducting a vast fire sale of Victoria’s assets. It has done so without consultation and against the wishes of the people of Victoria. Last month this program of selling off valuable and profitable state assets resulted in the sale of the first part of the SEC — United Energy — to a consortium led by the American company, Utilicorp. The Kennett government is now planning to sell off the four remaining electricity distribution companies — Citipower, Eastern Energy, Powercor and Solaris — and one electricity generation company — Yallourn W — in the coming months.

As this week marks the end of the third year of the Kennett government and therefore the beginning of an election year, I take this opportunity to remind the Treasurer of his statement to the house on 1 March 1995 when he said, referring to the cabinet submission:

> It makes the perfectly logical point that if a government is undertaking very large transactions involving sales to the private sector in a competitive environment the last thing it wants to do is conduct such a sale in the context of an election campaign. The preoccupation of the government would represent a risk to the sale process.

Unlike the Kennett government, Victorian Labor does not want to see our valuable state assets sold off. In this we are supported by more than two-thirds of the people of Victoria. We simply do not support the sell-offs of these valuable assets. We do not support them because we do not believe they are in the best interests of the people of Victoria. The numbers simply do not add up. They will simply lead to higher prices, higher taxes and cuts in services.

The Kennett government refuses to listen, but the evidence of the impact of its fire sales on valuable state assets is already mounting. Look at the evidence. I refer to the Bass ticket agency. In June 1985 half the company was sold to the United States company Ticketmaster, and within two months it was looking to increase booking fees by more than 100 per cent.

I refer to Heatane gas. In May 1993 the Heatane division of the Gas and Fuel was sold to Elgas Ltd. Since then the people of Victoria — and in particular country Victorians — have been paying higher prices for LPG, and the rental cost of cylinders has doubled. The new owners have already faced legal action in relation to an alleged abuse of market power under section 47 of the Trade Practices Act.

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I refer to Tabcorp. Since being floated for $2.25 on 15 August 1994, the shares of Tabcorp have risen to $3.35. Just a year later, the company is valued at $1 billion — more than $300 million more than the government received from the sale. At the same time Tabcorp is raising the limits on phone betting and closing down TAB agencies, and country racecourses are being shut down. Some people are benefiting from the privatisation but it is not country Victorians and it is not small punters.

I refer to Centaur. On 15 February 1994 Centaur International Pty Ltd purchased Victoria’s four regional veterinary laboratories. Prices for services doubled, two of the four laboratories have been effectively shut down, and 24 full-time positions have been lost. During the condolence motion today we were told about the veterinary laboratory in Hamilton named after Sir William McDonald. Its staff has now basically been slashed, its director has left for another job interstate, and this has been an appalling disaster for people in country Victoria.

The evidence of the impact of the Kennett government’s privatisation program on the people of Victoria is mounting. Prices are rising, services are falling and assets are being sold for way below their true value. Much worse is to come. In family and child-care services the imposition of compulsory competitive tendering on councils is forcing massive cuts to basic family services such as maternal and baby health, child care, preschools and libraries.

How soon before we see prices rise for electricity service charges — for the inspection of homes, connection fees, or the replacement of broken wires? How soon before elderly Victorians or low-income families face the introduction of prepayment meters?

How soon before a blackout damages small businesses in Melbourne — as is already happening to dairy farmers in rural Victoria? How soon before water charges rise even higher so that our water assets are more attractive to potential purchasers? How much higher will the Kennett government’s ‘toilet tax’ rise? How long will Victorians have to face the highest taxes and charges in the country rather than enjoy the benefits of services paid for by the dividends of profitable, publicly owned assets?

Under the Kennett government Victorians have already lost ownership and control of a range of valuable, profitable assets — United Energy, VetLabs, Heatane, and Bass. If the Kennett government is re-elected, more assets will go. That means more electricity assets, the Gas and Fuel and Melbourne Water.

I turn to Melbourne Water. The government continues to say that it has not yet made up its mind on Melbourne Water. But the facts speak for themselves. As part of its privatisation program, the Kennett government has introduced significant changes to Victoria’s water industry. It has created three companies with responsibility for distribution and sewerage in Melbourne on a regional basis and it has separated the control of the catchments and headworks from those companies. The three companies set up with responsibility for distribution and sewerage — City West Water, South East Water and Yarra Valley — are now registered companies with articles of association that permit trading in shares. Those three companies now carry much lower shares of debt than the Melbourne Water wholesale business, suggesting that those companies are being fattened up for sale. Finally, the government has passed legislation so that the Treasurer can now authorise a sale without reference to Parliament.

While the changes introduced by the Kennett government set up the water distribution companies for sale, they result in an inefficient industry structure. Due to the physical nature of the water industry, it is not economically viable to introduce competition into the water industry through the duplication of an extensive distribution network. The changes to Victoria’s water industry have been designed to enable the introduction of competition by comparison between the three distribution companies.

Competition by comparison envisages the use of benchmarks — in particular, output measures, such as profitability, speed of deliverability, water quality, et cetera — to judge and monitor the performance of separate companies. The reality of competition by comparison is that it is a joke. It is totally different. All the experts in the field — Johanna Mitchell, Professor Kearney from the University of Western Sydney, and the government’s own consultants, London Economics — look on the notion of competition by comparison with significant scepticism. They believe it is a ‘turkey’ of an idea. In its report on Melbourne Water’s operations, London Economics found that up to $50 million worth of economies of scope and scale would be lost by the government’s decision to disaggregate Melbourne Water.
Given the weight of evidence against the Kennett government's reforms to the water industry and the absolute paucity of anything resembling support, it is difficult to see any other reason for the changes than to facilitate the sale of Melbourne Water. While the Premier has announced that no final decision has yet been made on the privatisation of Melbourne Water, prospective buyers are already lining up. Among the potential buyers are North West Water Australia, of which the former New South Wales Liberal Premier, Mr Nick Greiner, is a director; Transurban, which initially appointed Mr Andrew Peacock as its chairman, although he has since resigned from that position; and the French utility companies, Compagnie Generale des Eaux and Compagnie Lyonnaise des Eaux Dumez. According to allegations from a leading French investigating judge, those two firms owed their pre-eminence to graft and were responsible for 80 per cent of political corruption in France. They will be right at home in Victoria.

Victorian Labor believes the disaggregation and privatisation of Melbourne Water is an absurd policy decision. It is the wrong direction for Victoria. The disaggregation results not only in significant losses of economies of scale and scope, it is the wrong direction for Victoria. Privatisation would lock in those changes. Privatisation would see the creation of private monopolies in the water industry, with no real prospect of viable competition.

The Herald Sun commentator, Terry McCrann, has already described electricity privatisation as a $3 billion disaster for Victoria. Under a Kennett government the disaster will not stop there — everything will be up for grabs and Melbourne Water will be history!

If the Kennett government is re-elected, more assets will be sold and ordinary Victorians will be hit three times — with higher prices, higher taxes and cuts in services. None of those assets is safe under a Kennett government.

The final aspect that the budget does not refer to is how the Premier and the Treasurer are planning to find $600 million in spending cuts. There is no doubt the Premier wants to make those cuts, even if he did not consult with his ministers before announcing them. We should remember that before the last election the Premier and the Treasurer backed away from comments that 25 000 public servants had to go. Yet, one day into office and the knives came out!

Today the Premier brags that his greatest achievement in government is the slashing of 50 000 jobs in education, health, transport and community services. If the Premier is re-elected, the same thing will happen again: more cuts to schools, to hospitals and to vital community services. The question is not how much the Premier will cut, but where. Will the cuts be schools in Tullamarine, a hospital in Mordialloc or pension concessions for electricity and water?

Only three weeks ago the Victorian Labor Party revealed plans by the Department of Business and Employment to downsize the department from 1300 to 250. This week the opposition will release another document — this time from the Department of the Treasury and Finance — which confirms that the government plans to continue downsizing.

When the budget was introduced, and when pressed, the Treasurer did not deny that there would be some redundancies this year, but pointed out that only $55 million had been allocated to redundancies. The Treasurer failed to reveal that the government plans to fund redundancies out of individual department budgets. He also failed to reveal that the redundancies would not necessarily be voluntary and that the government was considering the use of targeted separation packages to achieve its desired budget outcomes. That is more evidence of a Treasurer more interested in hiding the truth than in good government.

During the past three years the Kennett government has spent about $50 million of taxpayers' money in glossy public relations and advertising campaigns to inform Victorians that this state is headed in the right direction, but Victoria is not heading in the right direction. Having massive school class sizes is not the right direction for Victoria, nor is the prospect of no jobs for our children, nor a hospital system in crisis. There is a better way forward. Victoria needs a government to focus on building the state and working with Victorians. Victoria must have a government of inclusion, not division.

We need a government with new priorities as we head towards the new millennium. We need to build a better Victoria by investing in people through education and training, quality health care and a better environment. We need to restore democracy, create the right climate for job growth, establish fairer taxes and charges.

Labor recognises that people are our most important resource. They have the ideas, they create the wealth
and they provide the energy and commitment to build richer communities in all senses of that word. That is why the central focus of all policies of the Labor Party is people. Already we have taken tremendous strides in that direction as illustrated in our policies: Financial Management Paper, Melbourne Access 2000, Restoring Democracy and Securing the Future.

Under its financial management plan, the Labor Party is committed to a new deal on the management of Victoria’s finances. The rigorous financial management principles and practices are designed to strengthen the capacity of the government to deliver strong economic growth and jobs, and to provide a sound financial basis on which to build progressive policies in education, health, community services and the environment.

Its key principles include substantial budget surpluses, no borrowing for recurrent expenditure, fairer taxes and charges, a cap on debt and a plan to pay off debt over time through budget surpluses, and the development of benchmarks to focus on the quality and efficiency of service delivery. The principles also include comprehensive financial accountability to the public, including whole-of-government reporting, a strengthened role for the Auditor-General, and a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis on all major projects.

I recognise that progressive policies must be driven by economic strength, not by weakness. The financial management principles behind the policies must be able to withstand the peaks and troughs of the economic cycle. The financial strategy must be sustainable.

The Labor Party is committed to maintaining public ownership of Victoria’s electricity industry, to opposing the Kennett government’s rushed and illogical sell-off of Victoria’s electricity industry and to ensuring the next election is a referendum on the privatisation of essential services. Labor’s plan fully complies with the intergovernmental competition principles agreement and maximises the ability of the electricity industry to compete in the national grid.

The Labor Party’s policy — Melbourne Access 2000 — is Labor’s $700 million alternative to the Kennett government’s extravagant City Link project. It will deliver motorists and public transport users a world-class transport system without tolls and without adding to Victoria’s debt. It has been developed by the Labor Party in conjunction with leading engineers, town planners and transport experts. It takes into account the huge improvements in traffic efficiency which have been driven by the construction of the Western Ring Road. It is about making Melbourne the transport hub of the nation and the Pacific region, and a place where people enjoy living, working and doing business.

Unlike some oppositions we do not avoid releasing policy. We encourage debate and, as has been shown in the electricity industry, we are driving the initiatives to protect ordinary consumers and the environment. That will continue under my leadership. In the lead-up to the next election we will continue to release policies in key portfolio areas and will also detail the Labor Party’s commitment to developing industry and employment in Victoria.

In our industry and employment policies the Labor Party will be driven by one overriding objective — that is, to help secure existing jobs and create secure, productive and rewarding jobs for present and future generations of Victorians because we understand the human tragedy of unemployment and because we simply do not regard a projected decrease of 1 per cent between now and 1999 as acceptable. It is simply not good enough.

Victorians can do better — they must do better! Victoria cannot allow its most valuable resource — its people — to be wasted. We must work together to provide a better business environment in which to invest, which facilitates long-term jobs.

Despite the Kennett government rhetoric, the increases in employment in Victoria in the past three years have been largely the result of federal government initiatives in industry policy and in macro-economic management of the economy. Victoria now has a state government which has been happy to ride the wave of national economic recovery.

Today the only response by the Premier to developing Victoria is to offer more concessions to the casino and a pre-election promise of $600 million in tax cuts to business. For services that have already been stretched beyond breaking point, the $600 million promise means more job losses, with as many as 20 000 jobs having to go. Another $500 million will be added to state debt in new borrowings to pay for redundancy packages — all for what?
The $600 million in cuts to business taxes that the Premier talks about will most likely be targeted at the big end of town, at reducing payroll taxes. There will be no relief for the 90 per cent of small businesses that do not pay payroll tax.

The tax cuts will do nothing to help those businesses develop and create new employment opportunities. The Premier is full of empty promises. By contrast, the initiatives of the Labor Party will be built around its commitment to investing in people; by so investing, it will invest in the future. It is as simple as that. Such projects will be funded by getting the spending priorities right.

If there is something about which I agree with the Premier, I believe there are savings to be made in the budget — but not in the areas proposed by the Premier. In my contribution to debate on the 1995 May economic statement I detailed more than $700 million in waste and mismanagement by the Kennett government since coming to office. That included taxes wasted on: political polling and promotions, $24 million; Kennett government perks, $34 million; privatisation, $294 million; the Kennett government’s attacks on democracy, $23 million; and its bungling and mismanagement, $390 million. Some of that money has gone forever.

However, year after year money is still being wasted. Those funds should be put to work productively for the benefit of all Victorians. At least $20 million could be saved by cutting political advertising and insisting that all government advertising is genuinely informative rather than used simply to promote a political policy. The Labor Party is already committed to legislation which would eliminate all political advertising by a government.

On the basis of previous years, the Kennett government will spend about $100 million in 1995-96 on consultancies. Labor will slash that to its historical level of about $25 million a year. The Kennett government has spent more than $30 million rebuilding the offices of the Premier and the Treasurer. Labor would cut back on that extravagance.

Each year the Kennett government spends millions of dollars in spurious legal challenges, particularly in employee relations. Labor will move quickly to stop that waste. As to privatisation expenses, selling Tabcorp for $675 million cost the government more than $17 million in transaction costs alone. At that rate, the intended sale of the SEC will cost about $400 million. Labor is committed to halting the sale of our valuable state assets and it will simply not incur those privatisation costs.

Labor is committed to cutting the silver service government introduced by the Kennett government. Labor will cap the salaries of senior public servants and will place limits on the salaries of chief executive officers in government enterprises.

Under Labor there will be no regional directors of health networks each earning $300 000 a year. In those areas alone savings of between $100 million and $200 million are available. That money could be used more productively to facilitate the development of new industry, provide real and secure job growth and ensure the provision of much-needed government services. By stopping the Kennett government’s waste and mismanagement and by applying savings sensibly and productively, Victorian Labor will be far better placed to deliver the services sorely needed by the community and ensure the implementation of industry and employment policies that provide secure, productive and rewarding jobs for ourselves and our children.

Rather than continue the slash-and-burn policies of the Kennett government, Labor will provide a better way forward.

Today marks an end and a beginning. It is the end of three years of the Kennett government — three years of slashing and burning, of bullying and intimidation and of attacks on the basic rights and interests of ordinary Victorians. But it is also the start of an election year, one in which Victorian Labor will further detail its plans to build Victoria, produce a strong and vibrant democratic society, ensure stable long-term economic growth and secure productive and rewarding jobs for ourselves and future generations.

Victoria stands at the crossroads. The harsh measures that are the hallmark of the Kennett government are becoming increasingly less relevant to the challenges now facing us. Victorians understand that the Premier has already gone too far in his attacks on essential services, on the churches and on basic democratic rights. Victorians are increasingly coming to realise that the direction in which the Kennett government wants to go is not the right direction for Victoria.

Victorians do not want to see their valuable and highly profitable state assets sold off to overseas owners. Victorians do not want to pay tolls every time they use their cars. Victorians certainly do not
want schools where their children are in classes of more than 30 or hospitals where people must wait on trolleys for more than 24 hours before they can be given beds.

Victorians want a strong community. They want the certainty of secure, rewarding and productive jobs for themselves and for their children. Victorian Labor believes this government has gone too far, that this is not the right direction for Victoria and that there is a better way forward.

Mr McARTHUR (Monbulk) - I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in the budget debate. We have just listened to an hour of painful drivel. If the good Dr Spooner were alive today I think he would reasonably describe the Leader of the Opposition as a shining wit.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Monbulk, without spoonerisms.

Mr McARTHUR — I am sure he will now scurry out of the chamber because he will have something to do down there in the caverns!

The Leader of the Opposition spent the past hour moaning and groaning about the successes of the Kennett government. He does not like the fact that the government has been a successful economic manager for the past three years because it makes the dreaded possibility of Labor's return to government even less likely and makes it even harder for him to get a chance at the job.

I will give him credit for one thing: he acknowledged that the current account surplus is a good thing and actually congratulated the Treasurer on achieving it. We would all be with him on that! But he went on to say that he does not like the fact that the government has been successful in so many areas. Why does he not like that? He complained about the reforms to the education system, which have delivered better services to school students and parents. He complained about the changes in transport and he complained about the changes in health. In fact, he complains about changes to everything known to man! What did he suggest? He did not say what he would do. He says only what he would not do; he never tells us what he would do.

This man is so devoid of ideas that he is keeping his policies hidden under his skirts. He knows damn well that he cannot explain them to the Victorian public in a reasonable or rational fashion. If he tries to explain them I am sure they will be rejected to the same thunderous extent that we experienced in 1992.

He criticises the privatisation of the electricity industry, he criticises the water reforms and he criticises the reforms of the hospital and education systems — but he never proposes anything. He says only that he would have a current account surplus but would not charge as much for services. He also says, 'I would have a current account surplus and I would spend more on health, education, transport and employing my Trades Hall Council mates from Lygon Street'. He then says he will also cut taxes and charges. The man is in cloud cuckoo land: he says he will maintain a current account surplus while increasing spending and reducing taxes and charges. He does not understand basic accounting practices! It is pretty simple: if you want to maintain a current account surplus your revenue has to exceed your expenses.

The Leader of the Opposition will give away hundreds of millions of dollars in extra expenditure on health, education and transport because he wants to buy a few more public sector votes. At the same time he says he will reduce taxes and charges for householders and taxpayers. The second part is an admirable idea. We need to reduce taxes and charges — and I am sure the Treasurer shares that idea, because he has said so a number of times.

How will the Leader of the Opposition manage the magic trick of cutting taxes, increasing spending and balancing the books while ensuring a substantial current account surplus? Where will the extra money come from? There is only one other source — federal grants. I can imagine the result when, some time in the distant future, the honourable member for Broadmeadows trots up to Canberra and says to the Prime Minister, 'I would like you to give more money to Victoria. I think we deserve more because I would like to cut taxes and charges and spend a little more. Will you do that for me?' Can you imagine what Mr Keating would say to the honourable member for Broadmeadows? It might be fit to print in commonwealth Hansard but it would certainly not be fit to print here. He would be told to get lost in no uncertain fashion. He would get cold comfort if he went to Canberra with the begging bowl. If he is so confident that he could get a little extra in federal grants, I am sure we would welcome a little bit of it right now — but I doubt that that will happen.

In previous appropriation debates the Treasurer has spoken of the need to address the share of
commonwealth funding going to Victoria and redress the extent to which Victorian taxpayers subsidise their counterparts in Queensland and Western Australia. I look forward to the day when Victoria receives an equal share. However, I do not think the honourable member for Broadmeadows is man enough to achieve that, either now or in the future.

I will comment on what is happening in the electorate I have the honour to represent as a result of the autumn statement. I will outline some of the benefits the taxpayers and residents of Monbulk will receive as a result of this government’s proper and sensible management of the Victorian economy. For the first time a reasonable amount of the state budget is going to capital works programs. Previously the Labor Party spent that money on recurrent programs because it provided jobs for its union mates; it simply did not spend it on capital works at all!

In October 1992 most school buildings in my electorate were in a pretty sad state. Roofs and gutters that had not been repaired for many years were leaking, drainage systems did not work and the paint was peeling off the walls. Schools that were built in the 1940s, the 1950s and the 1960s, when Victoria had a rapidly expanding economy with a rapidly expanding population, had not been maintained over the 10 years of Labor government. During that time there was plenty of money for teachers’ salaries and improved conditions — but there was no money for improving classrooms.

Since that time the Minister for Education has done his level best to provide a reasonable amount of funding for school capital works programs. At the time of the election he estimated that there was a $600 million backlog in the education capital works program.

This year in the Monbulk electorate $556 000 has been allocated to Boronia Heights Secondary College for its maintenance program. That money will go to repairing roofs and plumbing, fixing structural defects, making sure the electrical system is up to scratch, repainting inside and out and repairing toilets that have not been touched for more than 20 years, all of which will bring the school up to the proper standard. Students and teachers will actually work and study in safe and high-quality classrooms and school settings. That is what we should expect of the public sector education system, but for 10 long years Labor failed to deliver it.

Boronia Heights Secondary College has probably the strongest union branch of all the schools in my electorate. Its branch of the FTUV, as it used to be called, is very strong indeed. The Premier has attended public meetings in my electorate on three occasions. On the first two occasions, in 1993 and 1994, the former FTUV branch at Boronia Heights Secondary College arranged a protest, with people waving placards, chanting and so on.

This year the meeting was held a couple of kilometres from the college. Although I advertised the meeting extensively and dropped thousands of leaflets in letterboxes in surrounding areas, members of the Boronia Heights branch of the union were conspicuous by their absence. I can assume only that they are now a lot happier about the education system and the way their school has been refurbished. That is something their former Labor Party cronies failed to do, something that was never delivered by the former members for Knox and Monbulk, who were ministers in the former Labor government.

Upwey Primary School is being refurbished at a cost of $1.3 million. The school will have 10 classrooms, a new administration centre and substantially improved facilities for students and staff, which the school has been trying to get for many years. The school is very active and progressive. Each year it takes part in an international student exchange program. Each year students from year 6 go to the USA, Mexico and other countries, and students from overseas schools come to Upwey. Upwey currently has an excellent exchange program with a school at Tokoname Nishi in Japan. That is the sort of thing all our primary and secondary state schools should be doing to encourage students to gain a broader understanding of how the world operates and the differences between communities and cultures.

The year 6 students who have taken part in exchange programs have gained enormous benefits from talking with their classmates about the differences they have seen and realising what a wonderful place Australia is and how well off we are in comparison with the rest of the world. One of the best jobs I have is to regularly visit the school and talk to the students about the exchange program — as well as talking to students from across the world about the Dandenongs and what we have in Victoria.

Tecoma Primary School also has a major capital works maintenance program starting this year. Some $311 000 will be spent on painting, fixing up
structural defects, carrying out plumbing repairs, ensuring the electrical system is safe and providing a proper and safe learning and working environment for students and teachers. This year $55 000 will be spent on connecting the Basin Primary School to the sewer.

These schools were neglected by the former Labor government. Labor members spout a great deal of rhetoric about caring for the environment and the education system. Pick a group and the Labor Party cares for them! Ask what they do for them and the answer is very little — but boy, oh boy, do they care! Labor members say, 'We love you all. We might not do a lot for you, but we love you. Please vote for us next time because we need it!'

The Labor Party consistently tells people it is the only group that has a soft and caring heart. Yet if you look at its record you will find that it consistently lets down the people who trust it. The honourable member for Bayswater described it best some time ago when he told me that to be truly compassionate you have to have a soft heart and a hard head. The Labor Party has a soft head and not much of a heart at all. It promises everything and gives away money without worrying where it comes from or who has to pay. It should take a leaf out of the honourable member for Bayswater's book and learn a little about real compassion and caring for the community.

Recently the Minister for Conservation and Environment in another place announced the redevelopment in my electorate of the part of the Mount Dandenong observatory reserve known as the Sky High restaurant. The area has the best lookout in Melbourne and offers a fantastic view of the city by day or night. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources estimates that approximately 800 000 people visit the site each year, yet it has not been maintained properly. The building, which has an unfortunate design, has been badly neglected and allowed to run down over the past 10 to 15 years.

The minister has announced that he will seek expressions of interest in redeveloping the site on a commercial footing. It will be an exciting project involving an ecotourism centre, substantial restaurant and entertainment facilities and an information centre that will give tourists information on the tourist attractions and conservation features of the Dandenong Ranges and the Yarra Valley.

The project is an example of the sorts of projects undertaken by the government, because it does not rely on taxpayers' funds to build things. The project is an excellent opportunity for the private and public sectors to combine, with the private sector running the business and providing a more cost-effective and efficient service than would be likely if it were run by the public sector. The centre should become a feature attraction for visitors to Melbourne. It is a long-term project which will not only have long-term benefits for people in my area but which will also attract visitors from interstate and overseas to Melbourne and the hills. I welcome that exciting prospect for my area.

The Minister for Conservation and Environment also recently announced a change in the management structure of a number of public gardens and reserves in the Dandenong Ranges — the national rhododendron garden, the William Ricketts sanctuary, Pirianda gardens, George Tindale gardens, the R. J. Hamer arboretum and the Alfred Nicholas gardens.

In the past those gardens and reserves have been managed and administered under a wide range of arrangements. Some are Crown reserves, some have been directly managed by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and others have been managed by locally organised management committees and have attracted small departmental grants. They all have one thing in common: they have been starved of resources and have a limited ability to raise funds and promote themselves in the wider community. As a result a vicious circle develops: they do not have enough money to develop proper programs, and without proper programs they do not attract sufficient visitor numbers to provide the necessary cash flow to ensure their proper management. The minister has decided that all of the gardens and reserves should come under the management of Melbourne Parks and Waterways.

He has provided $400 000 start-up funding this year to get the project up and running. Melbourne Parks and Waterways will be able to provide a greater line of funding to these gardens than they have had in the past because they will now have access to the metropolitan improvement fund (MIF).

As a group the gardens fit together well and will be far better placed to promote their various attractions. They are probably the best collection of native and exotic plant gardens in any small area in Australia. They are arguably up there in the top half dozen of...
the world. The gardens are a high-profile collection of world importance and present Victoria with the opportunity of attracting overseas and interstate visitors, bringing tourism dollars and jobs to Melbourne and the Dandenongs. This is another medium to long-term project that will have substantial benefits for the area I represent as well as substantial benefits for the state as a whole.

One of the most interesting local projects we will see completed this year is the new Boronia police station. This is another area where the Labor Party claims to care for people and to care about public safety, access to justice, and about a whole range of things. But what did it do? It closed the Ferntree Gully court and the Boronia police station and people had to go elsewhere. The member at the time, the former Minister for Transport, Mr Crabb, said 'go jump' when he was approached by members of the local community who wanted to prevent their police station being closed.

My colleagues the member for Knox and the member for Bayswater and I have consistently said that we want a new Boronia police station reopened in this area, and tenders were recently let for $1.6 million. That police station is currently under construction. It is expected to house something like 40 staff when it is completed. Construction is expected to end some time in March or April next year, and I hope the minister will open the new police station then. I am sure the Boronia community will welcome the opportunity to see their new police station opened. Residents will welcome the increased safety it provides and the increase in the number of police in local shopping centres and suburban streets. These are the sorts of areas where this government actually achieves something, which is in stark contrast to the Labor Party 'we care but we never deliver' rhetoric.

This government spends more time delivering results and services than it does spouting rhetoric. I welcome the opportunity over the coming months and years to see the openings of a number of projects where the government has delivered better services and better facilities for local people in the Dandenongs.

In general this budget delivers a range of very welcome things. In the first case it delivers the substantial current account surplus of $706 million. The capital account deficit is $1000 million dollars — $1 billion dollars — in infrastructure projects with an overall budget deficit of $344 million. This continues the Treasurer's very consistent, very solid and very reasonable trend towards proper public sector management, proper accounting, and conservative financial administration.

The Leader of the Opposition was earlier bemoaning the fact that the actual figures for recent years have come in better than predicted in the previous budget. He thinks it is a bad thing that a government should set out with a budget target of, for example, a $400 million surplus last year and come in with a actual surplus of $900 million. He thinks that is a terrible thing. What he is complaining about is the fact that the Treasurer has exceeded expectations.

It is strange when the opposition complains that things are going too well. There can be only one reason: that it diminishes its own personal chances. The opposition is not making that complaint in the interests of Victoria or Victorians — it is doing it out of self-interest. It sees its chances of occupying the Treasury benches fading off into the distance and complains bitterly about it.

At the statewide level there are a number of major initiatives in this budget: $112 million for acute care in hospitals; an extra $10.5 million on the taxi concessions program; $4.7 million for school bus transport; and $9.4 million on mandatory reporting and child protection programs, another area where the Labor Party said 'we care' but did nothing. This minister has made sure that treatment programs are in place for the proper protection of young people by the mandatory reporting of alleged offences and by the proper investigation of reports where the allegations were substantiated.

A $4.9 million one-off payment has been granted to municipal libraries. A substantial amount of that grant was recently allocated to the eastern regional library service which services the area I represent. There are a number of major capital initiatives: $147 million for transport projects, which the Leader of the Opposition failed to mention, and $88.9 million for the improvement of education facilities, something I spent a good deal of time talking about at the local level earlier on, and some $80 million has been allocated for health-related infrastructure. These sorts of things are never mentioned by the Labor Party. It does not mention the investment the government is putting into infrastructure and facilities on behalf of the taxpayers of this state for the benefit of those taxpayers and their children in the future. The Labor Party is being very narrow in its criticism of this budget.
The Labor Party also tends to harp on the government's so-called obsession with debt. It does not think we should be worried about the level of debt in this state. If you look at a comparison between the debt levels of the states you see that Victoria with its Standard and Poors AA rating, and AA2 rating by Moodys, has a net public sector debt to GSP ratio of about 28 per cent. If you compare that with New South Wales on 16 per cent and with a AAA credit rating you find that the effect of that difference is that the Victorian taxpayer is paying an extra $1000 million each year in interest.

If we had the same debt level to GSP ratio as New South Wales, Victoria's financing costs would be $1000 million per annum less. That $1000 million could be split up in any number of ways, between paying off extra debt, providing further infrastructure or more expenditure on public sector programs; it could be well spent on Victoria and on Victorians rather than on interest. That is the reason this government sees it as a major priority that we reduce our public sector debt levels so that we have more available funding to spend on providing services and infrastructure for the taxpayers and the residents of Victoria. It is something that the Labor Party has never managed to grasp. It simply thinks that if you borrow the money you put off until doomsday, I presume, the need to repay it.

Mr Hartigan in the other place says that debt and government borrowing should be redefined and simply called deferred taxation. He is right. What we borrow today our children pay for tomorrow by way of higher taxes. The Labor Party has never managed to grasp that fact. It is something its members should learn. It is something I hope the honourable member for Williamstown picks up. I understand he will be speaking soon.

In spite of the complaints of the Leader of the Opposition, the economy has improved markedly and consistently in the three years of the Kennett coalition government. The growth in gross state product is up from -2.4 per cent in 1991-92 to an estimated 4.75 per cent in 1994-95 and 3.5 per cent in 1995-96. That is equivalent to the Australian national level.

Business investment is up by 45 per cent compared with 35 per cent nationally. The business community is seeing the benefit of what the Kennett coalition government is doing in Victoria.

The Leader of the Opposition would have us believe the reason for growth in Victoria is that a national surge is going on and we are riding on that wave. If that were the case, we would not expect business to suddenly regard Victoria as a more attractive place to invest in than elsewhere. Why is it that business investment is up in Victoria more than anywhere else in the country? It is not because the business community now regards Victoria as having a safe economy and being an exciting place to invest! That business investment must benefit our residents and their children in the future.

Output per employee — productivity — is up by 12 per cent compared with 7 per cent nationally. The unemployment rate has come down from 12.6 per cent to 8.6 per cent. It is still not low enough and needs to go down a good deal further, but there has been a major improvement.

The budget has been well received by the financial community, the media and the general community. It has been well received by everybody except the Leader of the Opposition. It is a very good three-quarter stage in the four years of this government. Much has been achieved, as the Treasurer has said, but we need to remember there is still much to be done. As the Treasurer said in his second-reading speech:

Victoria is still exposed to risks which could undermine what has been achieved in the last three years:
- Our debt is still too high;
- Our interest bill is $1000 million a year higher than it would be if we had the same interest ratio as New South Wales;
- Government is still too exposed to the risk of higher interest rates ... 

Our infrastructure investment rates still need to be improved and we need to invest about 1 per cent of GSP per annum to put infrastructure growth in line with population growth.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member’s time has expired.

Sitting suspended 6.23 p.m. until 8.03 p.m.

Mr BRACKS (Williamstown) — In its first term the government set itself the objective of reforming the industrial relations regime, one of its key reforms. When one reflects on its three years in office one can say that the government has failed on every count to achieve industrial relations reform. Introducing changes that encourage 400 000 state award workers to drift into the federal award
system is hardly an achievement. A system with five different industrial award regimes and methods of minimum pay that confuse employers is a good example of a system that does not work.

In his budget speech the Treasurer reaffirmed his commitment to industrial relations reform, saying that the delivery of that reform is one of the key tenets of the government’s agenda. The government’s priorities for 1995-96 are listed on page 86 of 1995-96 Budget Paper No. 3. The fifth priority is:

As part of the employee relations reform, acceleration of workplace reforms in Victoria which will result in reduced industrial disputation. These reforms will be achieved through a modern straightforward safety net of wages and conditions and will be supplemented by employment agreements and the advocacy of similar reforms in the federal system.

Something is wrong with the supposed industrial relations reform if three years have passed and the government has still not enacted a safety net of wages and conditions. The Victorian industrial relations system has let down not just employees and those reliant on industrial safety but employers and the other state systems that are looking to Victoria for a lead.

During the 1992 election campaign employees were misled by the then coalition parties. They circulated an employment leaflet to try to quell the discontent that workers felt about the policies of a future coalition government. The employment leaflet said in part that under the coalition’s industrial plan no person currently in employment would suffer any loss in award wages or conditions and that all employees would have the opportunity to be rewarded for increased productivity through a more flexible system. It did not take long for that promise to be broken. The sad part is that after three years in government the coalition parties have not corrected their mistakes. Employers, employer groups and industry associations with whom I have spoken have said that the hopes they had of this government delivering industrial relations reform have gone forever. They know that the faith they placed in the coalition parties in 1992 to deliver a flexible industrial relations regime has evaporated. The government has failed to correct an industrial relations system that is not working, and it has squandered its opportunities. Approximately 400,000 workers have fled a state industrial system that is unattractive to them.

Unions and employees are not the only ones who are leaving the system; employers are leaving as well. They do not want to work in an industrial relations regime that does not provide harmony in the workplace and the opportunity for agreements between workers and management. This government has let down not just employees but employers.

I refer honourable members to the litany of broken promises and to the programs the government said it would introduce but has not. On 1 March 1993 the government abolished the state award system, even though it had given the commitment to which I referred earlier. From that date the coalition’s commitment that no-one in work would lose a dollar was effectively rescinded. Many thousands of employees were forced to sign employee contracts that reduced their wages and conditions. The Employee Relations Act no longer guarantees the 38 or 40-hour week.

Mr McArthur — On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, I have read the notice paper from top to bottom twice. I can see the Appropriation (1995-96, No. 1) Bill, the Appropriation (Parliament 1995-96, No. 1) Bill, the Competition Policy Reform (Victoria) Bill and a few others, but nowhere can I see a bill amending the Employee Relations Act. Can you tell me whether the honourable member for Williamstown has picked up the wrong notes and is debating the wrong bill?

Mr BRACKS — On the point of order, I am speaking on the appropriation bill and the budget papers, including the Treasurer’s speech and the budget estimates, which refer to the forward industrial relations agenda of the government. Page 86 of the budget estimates refers to the government’s employee relations reforms and accelerating workplace reforms. That budget paper goes on to talk about a straightforward safety net of wages and conditions. As part of the budget debate, which is wide ranging, I am seeking to establish — based on the government’s forward agenda reflected in the budget estimates, the Treasurer’s speech and the past three years of government — what success the government has had and how successful it might be during the next 12 months.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. The Chair views dimly honourable members who seek to make frivolous points of order. The house needs to be mindful that the budget debate is a wide-ranging debate, and if
honourable members keep within the confines of the budget documents there is no point of order.

Mr BRACKS — During the past three years not only has the government failed to reform the industrial relations system — which was proposed in each budget — but also it has failed to make the state industrial relations system relevant and attractive to employers and employees.

Under the Employee Relations Act a series of entitlements that were formerly available to employees were removed. They include the 38–40 hour week; equal pay for women — a provision that was previously enshrined in all Victorian awards; penalty rates for shift work, week-end work, public holidays and overtime; family or bereavement leave; meal allowances; sick leave entitlements, which have been reduced; and so forth. They are examples of the coalition’s broken commitments, promises and policy proposals. Leave loading was abolished in November 1992, despite the assurances given by the coalition in the leaflet it distributed around Victoria.

Employees were misled by the government. They were told that no person in employment would suffer any loss of award wages or conditions. The coalition made that pledge, but it broke it in November 1992. It took only two months for the coalition government to break one of its pledges, and that has occurred time and again. The federal government legislated to enable state-based workers to transfer to the federal system, and 400 000 employees have moved over to that system during the past three years.

The government has not achieved its budget objectives and promises of a flexible employee relations system involving formalised enterprise bargaining arrangements. When one compares the formalised collective agreements state by state one wonders why, if this is such a great system that the federal coalition and other states should follow, Victoria has the worst performance rate of any state in Australia. As of 30 June Victoria had 427 of an Australian total of 4900 collective agreements. New South Wales had 1400 agreements, Queensland had 551, Western Australia had 551 and Tasmania had 620.

Even though the government’s stated objective of achieving a flexible system for Victoria has not come to pass, the government has not bothered to change. It has been lazy about industrial relations and avoids talking about industrial relations. They have been subsumed as a minor part of its reform agenda ahead of time because the government knows that if the past three years were to be assessed it would have to be said that the Victorian system is a failure. Employers and employees have walked out of the system — that is the one thing they agree on!

A large number of individual agreements have been signed, but in typical fashion, despite the efforts of the opposition and others, the government will not release details of those individual agreements so that the way they have been framed can be scrutinised to see whether they conform to the minimum standard conditions that are acceptable across Australia. We are not able to scrutinise those individual agreements. The government cannot trumpet about individual agreements being part of its major reform when it will not make the details public.

In three years the government has delivered five different systems of employment. Although there are few workers left in the state system — about 380 000 — because more than half of the work force has gone to the federal system people work under five different employment systems. The government cannot work out a set of minimum standards to apply in the Employee Relations Commission. Employers are seeking a consistent set of conditions that can be applied to comparable businesses with similar regimes.

Employers do not want a system that means they do not know the proper wages and conditions system for their particular industries. The government has failed employers by not giving them any certainty in the system. As I mentioned, the government has also failed employers by failing to provide a proper system of enterprise bargaining with an adequate safety net. As a result, employers and employees have deserted the state system.

The government has bungled the introduction of the new industry sector minimum wage regime. As a result of the government’s instruction to the Employee Relations Commission that all employees in Victoria are to be included in the system, the Employee Relations Commission has been obliged to set minimum rates for thousands of accountants, lawyers and a whole series of professions that were not intended to have a safety net system of a minimum set of standards and conditions. So the government has bungled the arrangement and has had to go back to an award system because the system it has pursued has not been implemented properly.
The government has failed employers. In December last year the government amended the Employee Relations Act to include a fine of $10 000 for any employer who breaches the minimum conditions of the act. That is a $10 000 fine for employers who were not given adequate information about the five different regimes we have in Victoria. If they make a mistake and if they do not have assistance in preparing their individual agreements, they can be fined $10 000. So the system is not working effectively for employers or employees.

To round off the failure of this government in industrial relations reform we need to look at the arbitrator, the Employee Relations Commission, which this government set up through its own work. In November 1992, members of the former Victorian Industrial Relations Commission were sacked and replaced with the Employee Relations Commission and a new president. We have only to go to the criticisms of the state Employee Relations Commission and the president of the commission to see how the arbitrator, the independent commission, has also criticised the government. Under the Employee Relations Act, the government has denied the Employee Relations Commission powers of compulsory conciliation and arbitration, powers that the government’s own commission and the president of the commission on two separate occasions in two reports to the house urged the minister and the government to give it. The government has failed to do that.

The government has also failed to provide a proper method of dealing with unfair dismissals. It is worth noting that the government is a record breaker in reverse in industrial relations. Not only does Victoria have the largest number of state employees fleeing to the federal system, it also has the highest number of unfair dismissals of any state in Australia, almost twice as many as New South Wales. Something like 60 to 70 per cent of all unfair dismissals cases are coming from Victoria. So the government is breaking records and achieving benchmarks, but they are the reverse of what the government set out to do when the Employee Relations Commission was established.

We have a range of opinions on the state employee relations system from both employers and commentators that confirm that the system is not working. In the October 1993 report on the Employee Relations Act, Carol Fox from Monash University found that worst-case employment agreements under the Victorian system:

... validate the worst fears of critics of the new system, as they typically remove annual leave loadings, penalty rates and allowances by simple omission.

They simply do not have a trade-off for other benefits which would accrue to employees and:

... while the minister anticipated the act would produce genuine innovation in the workplace, this was an isolated feature of the agreements [we] obtained.

On 1 March 1993, the Professor of Legal Studies at La Trobe University, Dr Breen Creighton, said the powers of the Employee Relations Commission and the minimum employment standards in the Employee Relations Act were ‘flawed and inappropriate’. On 26 March 1993, the former federal Liberal industrial relations minister, Mr Ian McPhee, said the Kennett government’s industrial relations reforms had ‘failed predictably’. On 26 July 1993, a senior industrial lawyer at Clayton Utz, Dr Graham Smith, said Victoria’s new industrial laws had ‘failed in practice’. Nicholas Way, of the Business Review Weekly, said:

The biggest rebuff for the government has come from the business community, which has failed to run with collective enterprise agreements.

As I mentioned, the government has failed in a big way, with only 427 collective agreements in Victoria, compared with 4900 in the federal system. Victoria’s total is much lower than Tasmania’s and lower than the totals in Western Australia and Queensland. The Age in its second anniversary review of the industrial relations system said:

It was hailed as the brave new era of industrial relations. But two years on, the Kennett government’s industrial relations experiment has proved to be a flop.

Of course, if the criticism was coming only from unions, from some employees and from the federal government, you would have to say the jury was still out. But when those comments are made by independent commentators and employers, who are not only using the system but also critical of it, that should sound warning bells for the minister that he needs to reconfigure his arrangements and the act to make it more acceptable to both employers and employees.

What are some employers saying about the Kennett government’s industrial relations reforms?

Mr Shaun Palmer, personnel manager of Unifoods Pty Ltd, was quoted as saying:
Our employees had great concern about the loss of benefits and entitlements as a result of the changes to the state system. Instead of focusing efforts on developing a more efficient tea plant, we were spending a great deal of time explaining what the changes meant.

Executives from two of Victoria’s biggest companies who wished to remain anonymous were quoted in independent research conducted for the opposition in October 1994 as having said:

No-one knows whether they are coming or going in the state system ...

Of course they don’t. With the five different regimes we currently have as well as a return to the old preserved awards, of course they wouldn’t. They said the reforms were ‘ill thought out’ and that they had ‘fallen down in their application’.

The reality is that, looking back on three years and looking ahead to the next 12 months, we will see more of the same from this government — more uncertainty for employers. That uncertainty stems from the requirements they must meet because different conditions apply, depending on the date on which their employees were put on. If they were put on as new employees a different system applies from that applying to old or existing employees who have changed jobs. They are all under different regimes or systems.

We are seeing a continual flood of workers from the state industrial relations system to the federal system. Employers and employees have been let down. The system that was supposed to be held up by this government as a model for other governments, federal and state, is not working.

I compare that with what is proposed by the new New South Wales government under a new minister, the Honourable Jim Shaw. He is proposing a new industrial relations regime to re-assemble the award system. But more than that, he wants to achieve for New South Wales what Victoria should be achieving, and that is a proper enterprise arrangement with a good set of wages and conditions as a safety net. The reforms that are being planned in New South Wales, which the Victorian government should note, will retain and expand the scope for employers to negotiate enterprise agreements either with unions or directly with their employees.

They are achievements any government would seek to pursue. They are achievements this government has failed to realise. Under the new New South Wales regime all agreements will be approved by the commission to ensure that no worker is left worse off under a negotiated agreement than he or she would have been under the relative award. If this government had realised when there was a flood of workers and employers out of the state system that the system needed to be changed it would have established a system of enterprise arrangements that would have ensured negotiations would have started from a minimum set of wages and conditions.

In New South Wales, as distinct from Victoria, the government will also empower the commission to make and vary awards on a flexible basis to suit the circumstance of an individual enterprise or industry. All Victorians should be concerned that the current state industrial relations system does not suit a modern workplace, a workplace that is about achieving harmony between employers and employees and between management and workers.

Regrettably, if there is a change of government federally Victorian workers will be left exposed to the uncertain industrial relations system in Victoria. Employees will have to depend on a state regime that is not working. The protection that has been offered to them through the federal industrial relations system will no longer be there. The Victorian public has reason to be apprehensive about employment arrangements. If there is a conservative government federally and in Victoria those who have moved to the federal system will no longer have an escape clause.

In conclusion, the state opposition would undertake to implement the independent recommendations of the President of the Employee Relations Commission, which have been presented to the Parliament on two successive occasions. They would seek to have compulsory powers of conciliation and arbitration returned to an independent commission. Despite the president having reported to the Parliament and the minister twice, she is yet to receive a reply either in the house or outside; she has been ignored. On the return of a Labor government we will seek to ensure that that advice, freely given, is made policy.

Opposition members would also seek to return to a set of awards and conditions as a base for the establishment of enterprise agreements. We would not sit passively, hoping that enterprise agreements
would somehow come about, particularly in small business. We would use the base award system, the Employee Relations Commission and our new commission to ensure they played a pro-active role in assisting business and industry to establish proper enterprise arrangements.

That would ensure, firstly, that employers achieved real productivity increases from any enterprise agreement and, secondly, that employees gained a proper set of minimum conditions as well as flexible employment arrangements that suit their circumstances. We would have a guaranteed set of standards and we would call those standards an award; we would not try to mislead employees by having them agree to some new minimum standards such as those this government has pursued.

Mr E. R. SMITH (Glen Waverley) — I am pleased to support the budget and the efforts of the government over the past three years. It is disappointing to listen to the comments of opposition members, particularly the Leader of the Opposition. They take nothing other than a negative approach. Victoria has been completely turned around by a reformist government that has worked tirelessly to get the state back on its feet, but all we get from the opposition is harping criticism.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke with certainty of people losing confidence in the Premier of Victoria. Why has that not shown up in the polls? For the past three years the government has consistently taken a hard and extreme reformist approach. As a result of union membership no longer being compulsory, membership in the public sector has fallen by half. Of course, they will whinge about that.

The honourable member for Williamstown put up some idiotic reason for his not being able to see any merit in the industrial relations system. He is really saying on behalf of the industrial wing of the Labor Party that the union movement has been seriously wounded by the industrial relations policy of the government. No wonder the opposition is carping! The government has given workers an opportunity to enter individual contracts. It is an opportunity for workers to work out what is best for them and for the employer.

Of course, union membership has fallen. That fall is coupled with our taking away that wonderful aid the union had for all those years — namely, the government's collecting union dues for the union. For years the government collected union dues, and if a person did not pay his union dues he was seriously inconvenienced in the workplace. His position was jeopardised. Now there is freedom. Opposition members talk about freedom. They are the first ones to take away the real freedom of the worker. As a result of union membership no longer being compulsory, membership in the public sector has fallen by half. Of course, they will whinge about that.

The honourable member for Williamstown said nothing positive in his half-hour contribution; he gave off only negative vibes. Neither the Leader of the Opposition nor he believes what he says; both come into the chamber full of pretence. The minute they start to come up with proper policies and have credibility in the community, the government will have to worry. While all they can come up with is the usual nonsense, the government does not have any worries so far as they are concerned.

As the Premier wisely said this morning, the government is concerned that, as some of the measures we have taken have been very hard, people might think they can make a protest vote. This is where the government must be sure the type of leadership it is providing in the community will not tempt people to take up an option they might otherwise take — namely, to deliver a protest vote.
The poll figures are as they are because of the lack of leadership from the Labor Party and opposition members such as the honourable member for Williamstown.

Not just the Treasurer but every minister in every department should be congratulated on what they have done in turning the economy around. Every minister has ensured that his or her department is better managed and, in doing so, has ensured the budget could come in on target. As well as congratulating the Treasurer, we should congratulate all ministers who have managed to deliver a budget with the admirable feature of having a surplus for the first time in many years.

Many policies and parts of government have been turned around. The hectic pace of the past three years has been such that opposition members have been quite taken aback as they become used to the sound leadership being provided by the government. I am concerned that the opposition has not put forward any policies, except the one about legalising drugs as proposed by the Leader of the Opposition. God forbid that it should be re-elected because many of the law and order policies of this government, introduced in the past few years, could be reversed!

Honourable members will be aware of the document the Leader of the Opposition took to the conference of the Labor Party on 15 October 1994. It referred to policy and standing committee reports. The Leader of the Opposition then discarded this policy — at least for the time being — because some semblance of commonsense had been introduced. That is not to say that the civil libertarians and the people who direct the Labor Party will not return and jeopardise those very sensible measures in law and order policies of this government, introduced in the past three years, or at least for the time being.

I draw the attention of the house to references in the Labor Party document to criminal process rights. It states that on election to government:

Labor will immediately review the increase in police powers under the Crimes (Amendment) Act 1993.

Labor is particularly concerned at the introduction of an extremely broad police power to demand name and address.

That means, in effect, the Labor Party wants to disband or completely change the system introduced by this government — that is, a simple process for the police so that when they feel it necessary they could take the names and addresses of suspects who may be able to help them with their inquiries. The opposition wants to withdraw that provision.

The document also states that Labor is particularly concerned:

... about the abolition of the requirement for a court order to permit police fingerprinting of citizens whether or not they have been charged with an offence and the delegation of authorisation of reasonable force to senior station police.

When in opposition for years we fought to give police the simple power to take fingerprints of suspects or of people who had previously been convicted. Already the number of crimes being solved has increased significantly as a result of the police being given that power. The removal of that right would be a complete travesty of justice.

To prove my point, tonight we see the reaction of the Labor Party — that is, it has a secret agenda: it will reverse the provision if it comes to power again.

In the past three years, Victoria has been in the enviable position of being the safest mainland state. The crime rate reduced by 2.9 per cent in 1993-94 — the third successive year of crime reduction. The single year clearance rate of 75.1 per cent of crimes against the person and 30.4 per cent of crimes against property was higher in 1994-95 than in previous years.

Yearly crimes against the person now total about 30 000; crimes against property total about 275 000. Also, the overall single year clearance rate of a 3.2 per cent reduction on last year’s figures offers strong support for the view that the additional powers granted to police in 1993 are having an impact on our ability to solve crime. Theft was the most frequent charge laid by police during 1994-95.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr E. R. SMITH — It is not theft, as was considered previously. Theft is the most frequent type of charge. Burglary remains the most common crime, numbering about 68 000 per year. This year we have seen the fourth successive year of a decline in the number of burglaries. The number of residential burglaries is the lowest recorded since 1988-89. In other words, Victorians are now safer in their homes.
One should examine the effects of some of the policies developed by the government since its election. One is the comfortable living program for older Victorians. Crime has had many detrimental effects on our community which go beyond physical suffering or loss of property. The media — and I do not blame the media — on almost a weekly basis produces graphic headlines and accounts of crime. While we recognise the tragedy and loss caused to individuals by crime, the pervasive intrusion of mass communications causes the community to lose its perspective on crime and the relative safety and security enjoyed now by the community.

In other words, many older people have been led to believe by the occurrences in the past few years that they are not as safe as they could be. However, that is not borne out in the statistics.

An examination of the statistics published show that the number of people aged over 60 on whom such crimes as homicide and sexual offences are committed is very low, and at the bottom end of the scale. With homicide, it is less than 4 per cent of the total, and with robbery the figure is much the same. Unfortunately, the elderly have been led to believe during this period that their lives are not safe. The government is now running particular police programs to try to assure the elderly of their safety.

Mr Haermeyer interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! Normally, I am fairly patient, but the honourable member for Yan Yean is starting to test the patience of the Chair. I suggest that he conserve his energy for his budget speech, which will follow shortly.

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The two honourable members sitting on the government back bench might be of better service somewhere else rather than disturbing the house.

Mr E. R. SMITH — The point I am making is that many older people in the community have an unnecessary feeling of fear. In the past few years since this government has been in office it has built up an environment where more criminals are caught. You cannot take away from people their feeling of insecurity, but the government has to try wherever possible to turn the perception older people have away from the fear that has been built up unnecessarily.

One of the big success stories of the government in the past 12 months has been the introduction of a program called Operation Cabool. That operation was introduced because of the 30 per cent increase in violent street crime in the 12 months leading up to April this year. That is one of the areas that concerns not only the police force but also the government.

Operation Cabool has been operating since April this year in streets and lanes and on footpaths. It has been an effective means of reducing the previous year’s figures in respect of the incidence of violent crimes on the streets. That is not to say that what happened on the weekend could have been completely avoided. The government is saying that Operation Cabool has put the police back onto the streets and the trains in a much more visible way so that the outbreak of violence which has manifested itself in the past 12 to 18 months has been tackled in a more professional way by the Victoria Police.

The crimes being targeted are not robberies; they are vicious acts without a motive. On Saturday night in King Street we heard about such an incident, although the full facts are not known at this stage. Nonetheless, motiveless crimes occur with innocent people being the victims. Operation Cabool has involved police going to the obvious places, such as hotels and pinball parlours and travelling on the trains. The police are not making a big fuss; they are entering hotels and the like in a quiet way saying, ‘We are here to protect people. We are here to provide protection for you. Do let us know if things are going wrong’.

As a result of Operation Cabool the government is pleased to say that the police are having a success rate of about 10 per cent. One point coming from Operation Cabool is the suggested use of closed-circuit television cameras in areas like King Street. Recently when I was on my trip to the UK I saw closed-circuit cameras being used successfully in a number of places, including Newcastle upon Tyne, where the cameras had resulted in the solving of two murders. Another example was the famous case some two years ago when two little boys murdered a four-year-old boy. Those boys were also picked up by closed-circuit television cameras.

One suggestion to be considered carefully in the short term is the use of closed-circuit television cameras in King Street. The critics will say, ‘They will go around corners to carry out their acts of violence’. So be it! That is not to say that the whole area could not completely be under surveillance by these cameras eventually. To my way of thinking the
The deterrent effect is certainly worth the experiment of trying it in places such as King Street.

I believe the Premier's suggestion about police booths and a mobile-police presence, together with more self-discipline in areas such as King Street, will start to have a marked effect on the safety of people, especially the normal run of young people who go to such places as King Street to enjoy themselves and not be harassed by people who have set out with the intent of creating havoc.

Another one of the success stories has been that of Project Beacon. I have spoken before of this project and it is having a marked effect on the culture of the Victoria Police. Project Beacon is the retraining project involving at least 8000 of the 10 000 to 11 000 Victoria Police. It has completely changed the culture. On a weekly basis Assistant Commissioner Schuey has been providing figures of critical incidents which normally would have precipitated a reaction involving the use of firearms. As a result of this new retraining program the number of police shootings is down to a bare minimum.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr E. R. SMITH — There has been one, so I am not claiming a complete zero. There has been a turnaround which has been reflected not only in the number of police shootings but in the attitude of the police towards the community. Operation Beacon has had a practical and positive effect.

I shall cite one of the incidents the police have been faced with. As recently as last month in a country area an offender who had a psychiatric history and a propensity for violence was a suspect in an attempted theft of a motor vehicle. Police attended the offender's address and he threatened them with a knife. Police withdrew and a local psychiatric hospital was contacted. It sent down a team known as a triage team and it attended the address together with the offender's brother. They spoke with the offender for about an hour to an hour and a half, when the doctor advised that the police resolve the situation as the offender had become more aggressive. The police then decided to bring in the canine unit — the dog squad — and the situation was resolved.

The point I make is that perhaps in the past there could have been precipitate action or reaction by the police, but with retraining and with the cooperation of the CAT teams there is now a different attitude that the public feels more comfortable with. I believe the community feels far more comfortable with the way the police are now tackling the problem of psychiatric offenders.

The government has brought in many reforms over the past three years, particularly in the area of law and order. Crime figures are down dramatically. The leadership shown by the government has caused many people involved with the system to have a change of heart.

It is disappointing that we are yet to hear what the opposition would do. Instead of policies all we get is continual criticism. Members opposite never say, 'That is a good system; it is working well'. The facts and figures speak for themselves. It is sad that the opposition cannot come up with anything worthwhile. While the government has been carrying out its reform programs the opposition, which should have been trying to develop credible policies, has done nothing. It has failed in the polls because it has shown no leadership and lacks credibility. As a result the polls show the government to be far ahead.

Everyone on the government side can take great comfort from the budget, which contains no new taxes or tax increases. The state deficit levy was removed from 1 July, which will save $100 on each rateable property and release another $175 million back into the community. We have cut the stamp duty on listed marketable securities — that has been offset by raising the tobacco franchise fee to the national standard — and have reduced our reliance on land tax.

However, we cannot afford to lose momentum. The debt and the interest burden are still too high. The previous government left us with a deficit approaching $3 billion. We cannot afford to lose momentum because sustainable tax reductions are required. We have to get tax down for everybody. We cannot go on with the current tax levels; nor can we go on with the consequences of the previous government's borrowings. Investment in infrastructure has been too low — the government is taking the correct steps to remedy that — and structural reform is just beginning.

We went through 10 years when all the normal economic factors were disregarded, when Victoria had a government that could operate only on debt and borrowing, running up a debt in the vicinity of — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! the honourable member's time has expired.
Mr HAMILTON (Morwell) — I intended to be kind to the house tonight, given that only the poorer members of the government are here — not in quality, of course! Those who are left obviously did not have the $1000 they needed for the Liberal Party dinner at the World Trade Centre, or wherever it is.

Mr Cooper interjected.

Mr HAMILTON — I thought I would take pity on you! In his inimitable style the honourable member for Glen Waverley spent 27 of his 30 minutes beating up law and order, yet he had the audacity to get stuck into the media for doing the same thing. What a contradiction! I intended to spend my time talking about Victoria on the move — —

An Honourable Member — Victoria on the take!

Mr HAMILTON — Victoria is on the move to Queensland and New South Wales. Then I planned to talk about Victoria on the take, which would probably be more apt, given some of the recent goings on that have been reported in the media.

While the honourable member for Glen Waverley was spending 27 minutes speaking about so-called law and order — I would prefer to call it crime and punishment, not pro-active policing that produces positive results — he forgot to mention that since his government came to power the biggest growth industry has been the private policing industry. There are now more private police than sworn officers in this state. While this government has been focusing on crime and punishment rather than on pro-active and positive policies that deal with community problems, the private security agent industry has been growing. It is very sad that some of the people who have barred themselves inside their secure houses have been burnt to death.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HAMILTON — That is exactly what has happened: four weeks ago it happened to a family in Richmond. The government's real challenge is to look for the cause of the problem and do something about it. The blatantly competitive and individualistic philosophy outlined by the Premier on the radio this morning will not produce cooperative and decent communities that work together. The evidence is all around us. Given the government's selfish approach to life and its dog-eat-dog, kill-or-be-killed attitude, it is little wonder that we have social problems. Because of the government's ideological commitment to privatisation and the so-called profit motive, a whole community in my electorate has been decimated. The social impact is immeasurable, yet the honourable member for Glen Waverley praised the leadership that has produced that result. That is an absolute disgrace!

I also take issue with the irrational way the honourable member quoted statistics. At one stage he referred to a 30 per cent increase in burglaries. It is all very well to talk about a 30 per cent increase, but you must put it in context and refer to the period during which an increase occurred. For example, a second incident in an area in which there had previously been one would produce a 100 per cent increase. Using statistics in that way is absolutely dishonest — and that is not only the preserve of the honourable member for Glen Waverley. Percentage increases such as those are quoted all over the place by government members! It is a dishonest use of numbers. You should be brought to account for it — and increasingly you will be.

I agree with the honourable member for Glen Waverley that media reports have created a great deal of anxiety, certainly among the older members of our community, about law and order. I commend the honourable member on drawing attention to the fact that elderly people account for less than 4 per cent of the victims of violent crime. The other day I told my mother, who is an elderly person, that she is more likely to be run over by a bus after walking out her front door than to be attacked in her home — and the bus does not even run down her street! Chances are that she will not be a victim of a violent crime in her own home — and neither will thousands of others. We on this side of the house want to support and encourage people to feel safe in their own environment. We do not want the sort of violence-based communities that, we so often hear, exist in the United States of America.

I commend the honourable member for Glen Waverley on his remarks on that aspect. They were important, and I think every member of the house would support that type of attitude.

It would be remiss of me to deliver any speech in this house without mentioning what is happening to the electricity industry in the Latrobe Valley. It has come to the stage now where I believe the SECV, that organisation that served the state well for 75 years and produced the lowest electricity prices in Australia, has been destroyed by this government in three years. There is now a shell company called the
SEC. There has been a lot of publicity in the press in recent times and questions on the subject were asked in this place today. The shell is all that is left of the organisation that produced safe, secure and reliable supplies of electricity at the best prices in Australia. This government has destroyed it.

The new structure says that we can all as individuals choose who supplies us with electricity. What will happen should I choose a particular generator and then find that the generator's equipment breaks down, as inevitably it will, because the policies of this government have destroyed the maintenance system and the commitment to ensuring that we have the ability to generate electricity for the next 100 years in this state? It will not be a problem except that there is no group organisation to ensure that I have a reliable supply of electricity. It will not be long before big business wakes up to the foolishness of that approach.

Let it be on the record that the Labor Party when in government will put the organisation back together. The policies of this government are not supported by the community because people know the structure will destroy something that we have taken for granted. Not until it is destroyed will we realise how good an electricity industry we had.

We hear so much from the Treasurer about electricity charges being reduced. He said that electricity charges will be controlled between now and the year 2000, but after that you let the dog have its head and anything can happen. It is a case of 'Trust me' on this! Who would trust this government on the way it thinks about the economy?

Mr HAMILTON — I am pleased that I have stirred some response from the other side because it verifies that government members have a conscience, if nothing else. They do not have any principles, but they have a conscience. The electricity industry was in the process of being restructured before this government came to power. It has been restructured in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. Restructure is a nice word for sacking people. The next step — it is already on the federal coalition table — is to get rid of workers, and those who are left will be paid less. That process is demonstrated each day of the week with privatisation, the motive being profit and the money going into private pockets. It is about time the government thought about other things such as the quality of life rather than money.

However, given that the restructure has taken place, where will the additional efficiency and lower prices come from? If the private sector can do it so much more cheaply —

Dr Napthine — Productivity!

Mr HAMILTON — If one cuts the work force by half eventually there will be 100 per cent productivity: you put them all on the federal government dole and the state government does not have any responsibility! That is what this government did with Workcare: threw them out the back door and the federal government had to pick them up. How unprincipled can you get when dealing with the most vulnerable people in our community?

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Richardson) — Order! It is time for less provocation and less response.

Mr HAMILTON — In an article in the current Electricity Supply Magazine produced by the Electricity Supply Association of Australia, which is a combination of all the states that are interested in establishing a national grid, the chief executive officer of Pacific Power, Ross Bunyon, says that following the restructure of the electricity industry in New South Wales the current generation cost there is 3.75 cents a kilowatt hour. Domestic customers in Victoria are paying about 14 cents, and the year 2000, but after that you let the dog have its head and anything can happen. It is a case of 'Trust me' on this! Who would trust this government on the way it thinks about the economy?

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Mr HAMILTON — I agree. Not many private companies, especially the multinational overseas companies, want to see their profits reduced through lower electricity prices. They will not reduce electricity prices.

Mr Coleman interjected.

Mr HAMILTON — The minister refers to the Mission deal of guaranteed prices for 30 years. Mission has done a deal and obtained a guarantee, but the government cannot now do Mission deals with all the other companies that are coming in.

Let's see what happens to electricity prices. That is the fundamental question and what my constituents are interested in. Prices went up by 21 per cent the day after the government came to power. The fixed charges doubled, so that at the end of the quarter, even if a person did not use electricity, that person's electricity bill had doubled. Pensioners now sit in front of so-called fires with blankets wrapped around them because they cannot afford to turn on electric heaters. Families have their power cut off and then are charged $65 or $105 to have it reconnected — people who could barely afford to have it connected in the first place.

Are government members going to bury their heads in the sand like ostriches and pretend it doesn’t happen? Will they forget about the thousands of people who are suffering under their privatisation policies? They ought to be ashamed of themselves. If a government has any duty at all it is a duty of care to the people who are not able to care for themselves.

When the current government starts to show it has some decency it will earn some respect and we will get away from caring about what happens to the economy under the so-called trickle-down effect the Premier spoke about this morning. The trickle down never happens. We have high-powered, overpaid boards — there are now 10 in the electricity industry — whose executives receive obscene salaries of $300 000 a year. If any honourable member does not think that is obscene he or she should stand up and say it is all right!

We now have $3 million going into the pockets of 10 people. Government members reckon that is all right and then wonder why prices have not gone down!

Dr Naphine — Prices have gone down.

Mr HAMILTON — As a former scientist the honourable member for Portland ought to be ashamed of himself. If you put prices up by 21 per cent and then reduce them by 9 per cent, there is still an 12 per cent gap. Can't the honourable member for Portland do some simple mathematics?

There are many other things I want to speak about apart from the electricity industry. However, it is important to point out that with some of the government's policies, especially those concerned with privatisation, the selling of the silver as it were, more people will suffer than will gain. The few people who gain are pulling the strings on the puppet and saying it is a great thing. Perhaps they are the moguls who own the newspapers and television stations, and that is why the government keeps getting good publicity.

But the pigeons will come home to roost. It took them a while to come home in Queensland, but they did. It did not take so long in New South Wales. They will also come home to roost in Victoria if the government follows the policies of the Thatcher government. The Premier says he does not follow any ideology but he has been following Thatcher's policies. And government members sit meekly and watch their constituents being ripped off.

It is about time government members started understanding that there are more electorates in this state than Burwood and Brighton. People throughout Victoria are hurting. People are suffering increased charges every time they send their children to kindergarten. It is time a few government members stood up for those people instead of kowtowing and curtseying to the Premier every time he walks past. The honourable member for Swan Hill has just entered the chamber. Perhaps he should stand up for the people of Swan Hill.

Mr Steggall interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Richardson) — Order! The honourable member for Swan Hill has just arrived and has immediately become disruptive. I call him to order.

Mr HAMILTON — The honourable member for Swan Hill has obviously not been listening to this erudite speech. He must have been imbibing or doing something else which caused him to be disruptive.

The government has little sensitivity and takes no notice of what has happened in other parts of Australia. If there has been one burning issue in recent state elections in Queensland and New South
Wales it has been toll roads. The Goss government, which scraped back with a majority of one seat, lost votes in areas where people would have had to pay tolls to use roads. Government members may laugh but one of the key factors in the change of government in New South Wales was a promise to get rid of tolls on the M4 and M5 freeways. The Melbourne community — people in Tullamarine, the south-eastern suburbs, Cranbourne, Bendigo, Frankston and everywhere else tolls will apply — hates paying tolls to use roads. Despite all the transponders in the world, when the bill comes in people will maintain their rage.

The honourable member for Swan Hill may laugh but let him take note that Australia is still one country and if the people of Queensland and New South Wales do not like tolls you can bet your life the people of Victoria do not like tolls either. The government can do all the KNF advertising it likes but it will not change people’s minds.

Millions of RACV members have said in a survey they will not pay more than a $1 toll, yet the government proposes a minimum toll of at least $3.60. Do government members think everybody is as stupid as they are? They must be dense to not take notice and learn. The bottom line is that if roads are to be built somebody has to pay for them. There is no such thing as a free lunch.

The government is trying to turn round 150 to 200 years of culture of the community getting together to pay for its roads, railways, schools and kindergartens.

Mr Steggall interjected.

Mr HAMILTON — The honourable member wants to be careful about raising the matter of the state debt. A reading of the budget papers reveals that the state debt has actually increased under the government — it is still the highest taxing and worst government in Australia! Government members who say they are proud of that ought to be ashamed of themselves.

One could not respond to the budget speech without making some mention of the demolition of democracy in local government brought about by this government. Not only did you destroy local democracy, but you stacked the councils with commissioners from your side of politics.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! I have little sympathy for the honourable member for Morwell, who started this, but I insist that the house come to order.

Mr HAMILTON — You have removed the right of people to vote for local council representatives. The Premier is on record as having said, ‘We don’t need councillors, anyway. We can have commissioners there for the whole time’. Why don’t you get rid of this government if you don’t believe in democracy? Just put in a dictator — as if we haven’t got one already! Not only has the government done that, it has instructed those government-appointed commissioners to introduce a complete privatisation process into local government.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr HAMILTON — The first thing government members think of is money! The government has nothing to do with services. When I was in local government we were interested in providing services to people, especially to people in need. Now all you think about is money. You can’t get your mind above your belly belts, that’s your problem. If you put your money up near your hearts, you would understand the relationship between where your heart is and where your money is. But that is not the case with your mob, with your money belts on. We know where that relationship is for you. It is about time this government started to provide returns to people; it is about time it started to get off the take and to get rid of thinking only of the individualistic, dog-eat-dog, competitive approach.

It is about time the government got some cooperation back into things because Victoria deserves better. It deserves better than the confrontation you are bringing about. It deserves better than all the people who are hurting under your policies. It deserves better than selling off our assets. What happens when we have nothing left, when we have nothing to produce income? We will be left like this government — bereft of any principles and bereft of any way of providing a return to Victorians.

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! It is with profound regret that I inform the honourable member that his time has expired. I call the honourable member for Mornington, who I hope will not be provocative.

Mr COOPER (Mornington) — It is a long time since we have heard a speech from a true
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conservative in this house, and it was a delight to hear the honourable member for Morwell deliver that speech on behalf of the true conservatives of Australia. The honourable member was speaking on behalf of the Pledge faction. We will look forward to a speech on behalf of the Australian Labor Party at some stage during the debate.

I was surprised that the honourable member for Morwell did not mention the speech of his leader, which was delivered at a rapid pace before the suspension of the sitting. The Leader of the Opposition galloped through his speech; he read it at a fast rate because, I understand, he had to be on 3AW at 6 o'clock. He made sure he finished before then.

I thought the honourable member for Morwell would have found something good in his leader's speech, something he could compliment his leader on. However, I noticed with some interest that there was not one word of praise for his leader — not one word; not even a mention. The Leader of the Opposition was damned by faint praise by the honourable member for Morwell. It was almost as if they were members of different political parties. Of course we know they are in different parties. The Leader of the Opposition is a member of the Centre Unity faction and the honourable member for Morwell, who apart from being a constant chirper — the canary from the Latrobe Valley — is from what is really a different political party, the Pledge faction. Honourable members know that the Labor Party and the Pledge faction are so far apart you couldn't hit them with a .303!

Unlike the honourable member for Morwell, I shall concentrate on what the Leader of the Opposition said today in his response to the budget. Although I had some important points to make in my contribution, after hearing the speech of the Leader of the Opposition I thought it was proper for honourable members to think about what he said today.

Firstly, the Leader of the Opposition is still working on the Goebbels principle — that is, if you keep repeating a lie over and over again you will eventually convince some unthinking members of the community that it is the truth. Members of the house see the Leader of the Opposition do that every day during question time. They see it every time the Leader of the Opposition gets to his feet. He keeps on repeating the smear. He never provides any facts or any basis for allegations, he just keeps on repeating the lie, the smear. He keeps on sliding and swimming down the gutter, and eventually one or two unthinking members of the community will believe what he is saying is the truth. The Leader of the Opposition is the leader of the Smear faction in the Labor Party. That is all he is. Ever since he took on the job he has smeared and made allegations against members of the house, members of the community and people who are trying to get Victoria on the move again. He has never produced any information, facts or proof, but he continues to smear. The only thing for which you can give him 10 out of 10 is sheer gall and hide, because he is prepared to continue doing that.

He not only smears the people I have mentioned, but when members of his own political party get out of line he is quite prepared to smear and maim them as well. We all know the casualties of the actions that have been either publicly led by the Leader of the Opposition or encouraged by him in an attempt to discipline, if I can use that word loosely, members of his own party.

This afternoon we heard him say that there is a better way for Victoria — then we got an hour of rhetoric. We got no facts. We got nothing else. The honourable member for Glen Waverley said he spoke for 51 minutes. He kept talking about the better way. We never heard about any better way from him. We never heard any facts or anything about what the Labor Party would do. All we got was the rhetoric — the typical, full-of-holes ALP rhetoric from the Leader of the Opposition.

When you examine what the Leader of the Opposition has released over the past few months by way of policy you find only two things. There is what the Leader of the Opposition relied upon today — his famous Melbourne Access 2000 transport policy. He put a lot of store and emphasis on that, and I will get into some detail about that. That is one policy he has released. We all know the Leader of the Opposition has released two policies: the first is Melbourne Access 2000 and the second concerns the legalisation of drugs.

I understand why the Leader of the Opposition would be keen to produce and promote a policy of legalisation of drugs, particularly marijuana. We all understand that the Leader of the Opposition as a past user of that drug would be very keen to see legalisation become the norm for the rest of the community. The fact of the matter is that the responsible people in the community reject that policy and will continue to reject it because they see it as dangerous. Therefore the Labor Party would be
crazy to pursue it, but they appear to be led by somebody who likes to pursue those kinds of lines.

Not only is the Leader of the Opposition talking about legalising marijuana — he has some of his frontbenchers, and indeed a backbencher in the other place, talking about legalisation of other drugs such as amphetamines and heroin. For example, we know that the honourable member for Springvale as one of his frontbenchers is reported in his local paper talking about the legalisation of heroin and amphetamines. We know the Honourable Jean McLean in the other house has been talking about the legalisation of heroin, marijuana and amphetamines. This is the policy on which the Australian Labor Party wants to come back into government. It wants to come back into government sending the community off into some kind of haze so they do not understand what the heck they are doing, if that is what it really all boils down to. The opposition believes, because it does not know what is going on half the time, that the rest of the community should join it and go off on some kind of a dope-crazed marathon in order that they might by mistake cast a vote at some future poll for the Australian Labor Party!

We have two policies: we have the one that I have just spoken about in a little depth, and that is the question of the legalisation of drugs, one which the Leader of the Opposition seems very keen on pursuing and which most of his candidates when challenged do not quite know what to do about — whether to repudiate their leader or go to their communities where they want to represent the Labor Party if they happen to be elected on a policy of dope decriminalisation and legalisation. These candidates are not quite sure so they take the other view — they will just sit tight and hope it will all go away. Well the bad news is that between now and the next election that issue will not go away. We'll be back and I can assure all those Labor MPs and Labor-endorsed candidates that they will have to finally stand up in front of the communities where they will be standing for election and explain their position on the question of legalisation of drugs. Do they support their leader in the call for the legalisation of drugs or do they repudiate him, because there is no middle position on that?

Mr Cole interjected.

Mr COOPER — I have deliberately stayed away from you on this so I would really appreciate not being provoked! But I am quite happy to respond if you wish. There is no middle ground on that issue.

Let me now turn to what I believe is a very interesting point: the emphasis the Leader of the Opposition placed on the opposition's transport policy earlier today. It was almost as if he had nothing else to talk about. Lo and behold I have to tell the house he had nothing else to talk about, which is the reason he spoke about it at such length. We also know the Labor Party has criticised the City Link proposal in all sorts of different ways. They say they have a better way — what they call their Melbourne Access 2000 transport policy.

Let us go back a little bit in time because some of the criticisms by the Australian Labor Party about City Link have concentrated, as indeed the honourable member for Morwell did, on tolls. Of course it is almost as if they have come out of left field. Nobody has ever spoken about road tolls in Victoria; this is something new that has been invented by this government! Let me take you back to 1989 when the Labor Party was in power in this state. The Labor transport minister was a man by the name of Jim Kennan. We all remember good ol' Scratch-tickets Jim who became Leader of the Opposition before the present Leader of the Opposition. On 9 August 1989 Jim Kennan issued a press release headed 'Western Bypass to be Private Sector Road'. He said in that press release:

It (the Western Bypass) will operate as a toll road, using high tech collection methods.

Hey, how about that? Labor discovered what a toll road was and was going to introduce one in 1989. But it is trying to keep it a secret now because it does not want to let on — it thinks this is a Liberal Party plot — that it was actually promoting it back in 1989.

In more modern history, on 22 May 1992 the fellow who was the then Minister for Manufacturing and Industry Development — I think I have his name right: David White. Hey, David White! — issued a press release. It is headed — and we do not want to take this as an ego trip, but it starts with 'White' — 'White Announces First Step for Western and Southern Bypasses' and states:

A range of funding options is possible, including direct or indirect tolls.

I do not say that Mr White and Mr Kennan were absolutely wrong in what they were saying, but I say to the house that people like Mr White in the other place, and the honourable member for Morwell, who tonight criticised the application of
tolls, could be regarded as just a smidgen, hypocritical because there they were — —

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr COOPER — You see I now hear the canary from the Latrobe Valley interjecting. The funny thing about it was that back in 1989 and 1992 I do not remember hearing the honourable member for Morwell saying this was a bad thing. I do not remember him standing here and saying the government has got it wrong.

I remind the member for Morwell of those times when he stood up in this house on occasion after occasion saying that the Cain and Kirner governments had it right! He was out there promoting the Labor governments at that time. He was not saying they had it wrong. Yet tonight he stands up and says when the coalition government says it will be introducing toll roads in the City Link proposal, 'You've got it wrong'. Let me tell the honourable member for Morwell and the members of this house that he speaks with forked tongue. You wanted it one way back in 1989 and 1992 and now you want it another way. You have been found out as being hypocritical and there is no other word that can be used. As the honourable member for Tullamarine says, your approach is two-faced and hypocritical.

Let us now move on to Melbourne Access 2000, the vehicle used by the Leader of the Opposition this afternoon as the answer to all the prayers of Victorians. The Leader of the Opposition said, 'We can do everything the government says it is going to do, but it's not going to cost you a zack. Hey, have I got a deal for you!'. The sad part about it all was that he was just a smidgen out with his mathematics — actually it is a reasonable sort of smidgen but it is a smidgen.

Mr McArthur interjected.

Mr COOPER — The honourable member for Monbulk has got it right: in Labor terms it is just a drop in the bucket but to the rest of us poor taxpayers it is a fair bit of money. The problem for the Labor Party is that it put this Access 2000 policy out. The Minister for Roads and Ports — the awful person that he is — sent it off to the Department of Transport for financial analysis.

That is really where the Labor Party’s problems begin. There was actually a fair dinkum financial analysis of the Access 2000 policy, and I have to tell the house the Labor Party has not come out too well. In fact, it is just about $1 billion out. I know that compared with what Joan Kirner did to this state the loss of $1 billion does not seem much, but in reality it is a fair bit of money.

The promise of Brumby and the Labor Party that they could fulfil this fabulous transport policy using the existing levy of 3 cents a litre for a range of essential road projects is not possible. The reality is that if they carried out what they say, the levy of 3 cents a litre would go up to somewhere between 7 and 9 cents a litre. That is what you would call a pretty hefty kind of increase.

The alternative would be to again do what Labor did during its 10 years in power: maintain the 3 cents a litre levy but just leave a whole range of unfinished projects dotted all over the place, like unfinished freeways and arterials; or leave things that should be freeways as arterial roads and things that should be arterial roads as dirt tracks.

This policy is in fact the good old ALP sham. It is uncosted and will never be carried out but it is offered to Victorians as the panacea.

Let me run through one or two items in the Labor Party’s Access 2000 policy and put its costs against the actual costs as estimated by the Department of Transport. The first thing in Access 2000 is a Docklands link road which it calls Western bypass stage 1. The Labor Party costed it at $190 million but the actual cost is $440 million. It costed improvements to the Tullamarine Freeway at $15 million. It was just a bit out — $75 million is the actual cost. Public transport improvements, which Labor costed at $53 million, actually cost $55 million.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr COOPER — For the first time in this session, Keith, you will actually learn something!

The state government contributions to the rapid transit link are estimated by Labor at $50 million, but the actual figure is $150 million. Then we have the Spencer Street station redevelopment. The Labor Party must be planning to put up a tent because it has costed it at $20 million when in fact the cost is $120 million. Labor has costed the short Domain tunnel at $275 million. It must want to stop it halfway because the real cost is $590 million.

Mr Finn — Perhaps without a roof!
Mr COOPER — That would be right!

Labor’s costing for the Batman Avenue-Spring Street link is $25 million, but the real cost is $60 million. Labor costed the south-east corridor project at $28 million; the real cost is $45 million. The consultation process is costed by Labor at $2 million; the real cost is $10 million.

Labor estimates a contingency provision of 10 per cent to amount to $62 million. It actually got the figure right on its own estimates, but the real price is up to $150 million. So, Labor was actually out by $1000 million.

This is what the Leader of the Opposition put up as the answer. ‘We can fix it,’ he said; ‘Trust us’. I remember John Cain saying, ‘Trust us. It’s not a promise; it’s a pledge’. I remember Joan Kirner saying when she flogged the State Bank, ’There won’t be any jobs lost; she’ll be right’. No jobs were lost, were they? In fact, thousands of jobs were lost and the costs to the state have run into billions of dollars as a result of the incompetence and mismanagement of those people. We now have a new lot of incompetents and mismanagers in this house trying again to put the con job to Victorians, saying, ‘We can do it and it will not cost you a zack’. The reality is that the Labor Party sent this state bankrupt. This government has got the state going again, and it will cost a zack. We would be mugs, incompetents and mismanagers not to tell the people of this state the truth.

Why does the Labor Party refuse to face up to the reality? Why does it refuse to tell the people of Victoria the truth? Why does it believe it can con its way back into government again? It cannot do so. Victorians are awake to the Labor Party and it is about time it started getting some decent policies together and telling people the truth.

In the remaining time available to me I shall mention a few benefits that my electorate of Mornington has received during the three years of good government in this state by the Kennett coalition government. During my time in this place between 1985 and 1992 I had to beg ministers in previous Labor governments just to carry out their promises. I would say, ‘Please, don’t do anything else; just meet the promises you made’. But they walked away from those promises in the most blatant way.

These were people like Joan Kirner who, when she was Minister for Education, promised the people of Somerville a second primary school. It was a high growth area with one primary school. It was literally bursting; relocatables took up much of the school’s playground space. Joan Kirner said she would build a second primary school, but in subsequent years she refused to make available the necessary funding, watching the school continue to burst and grow and provide a lesser education for the pupils who attended it.

This government came to power in 1992. Within two months the Minister for Education, Don Hayward, said the second primary school in Somerville would be built. In February this year I attended the opening of that primary school. This was a promise made over and over again by the previous Labor government but this government was the one that kept it. It provided the funds and built the school.

I refer to the days when Peter Spyker and Jim Kennan were transport ministers and to the uncompleted Mornington Peninsula Freeway. They were going to play hell with the big stick in regard to that freeway! They left it as a scar on the landscape for eight years. When this government came to power the Minister for Roads and Ports, Bill Baxter, had a single line connection between the Moorooduc Highway and the northern end of the Mornington Freeway built, and less than 12 months later had the duplication of it done so that freeway was completed. That was action by a government that cared, knew what it was doing and kept the promises it made.

We have seen major intersection improvements throughout the Mornington electorate. These intersections, where deaths occurred, were ignored by the Labor Party in its 10 years of power. A new primary school has been built at Somerville and existing schools throughout the Mornington electorate have had major upgrading and maintenance work done, which was also ignored by the Labor government.

The $600 million maintenance black hole on government schools throughout this state was a testimony to the incompetence and mismanagement of the Labor Party in government. Joan Kirner was supposedly the saviour of public education in this state but in reality she simply spent the money elsewhere on a burgeoning bureaucracy and giving jobs to her mates like Ann Morrow, who dragged public education down to the pits rather than uplifting it as promised by Joan Kirner.

Joan Kirner was a disgrace as a Minister for Education and as a Premier. It is amazing that she...
still has the gall to write to newspapers and upbraid this government because she should be hanging her head in shame for what she did to this state.

I also direct to the attention of the house the great achievements of the Kennett government during its first 1000 days.

Debate interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER — Order! Under sessional orders the time for the adjournment of the house has arrived.

Police: numbers

Mr HAERMeyer (Yan Yean) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services a massive fraud and deception perpetrated by the coalition parties. I quote briefly from a document entitled A Safer Victoria, a coalition policy document on police and emergency services, which states that a coalition government will increase the number of police officers by more than 1000 to 11 000 officers in its first term of office.

The most recent available report of the Victoria Police states that the strength of the force is 9794 — practically the same number of police officers as there were when the government came to office. The government may say that there is a year to go. I remind honourable members that in the 1995-96 budget provision was not made for the appointment of even a single police officer!

Mr Finn — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I understand the adjournment debate is a time when honourable members ask the government for some action. I have been listening carefully to the honourable member for Yan Yean and as yet he has not said what action he would like the government to take, but instead berates the government —

The SPEAKER — Order! I have heard sufficient on the point of order. The Chair is well aware of the requirements of the adjournment debate and would ask the member at the appropriate time to comply. There is no point of order.

Mr HAERMeyer — I am asking the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to tell the house what happened to the 11 000 police officers that the coalition promised the Victorian electorate in the run-up to the last election.

No provision is made for additional police officers in this budget. What happened to the 11 000 officers? The government lied its way into office; how can we believe any word it says about police officers? Honourable members cannot add up if they think that having 9794 police officers is delivering on a promise. Even if the government were able to deliver the required number of police officers, we have the sad situation of police officers not being properly equipped or resourced. It is a disgrace.

Secondhand dealers and pawnbrokers: stolen goods

Mr Lupton (Knox) — I raise for the attention of the Attorney-General the Secondhand Dealers and Pawnbrokers Act. Some constituents have told me that they had been robbed and had ascertained that their stolen goods were in the hands of a pawnbroker. In one case they visited the pawnbroker but he would not produce for identification the balance of the goods sold by that person on the same day even though he was requested to do so by three separate police units who visited the premises.

The records and purchase books of the pawnbroker were inadequate. It appeared that he had deliberately omitted entering some of the items that he had purchased, and I am informed that on two separate occasions police visited his shop and requested that the books be made available.

At present a person who finds his stolen goods in a second-hand dealer’s shop can ask for the goods to be returned, but has difficulty enforcing their return.

Under section 24 of the act they can go before the Magistrates Court to try to get their goods back, but they must do that during the time the courts are open. Quite rightly, the magistrate will ask, 'What proof do you have that these items are yours?'. The proof may be receipts, Bankcard statements and so forth, but who keeps their receipts? By the time an aggrieved person has gone before the Magistrates Court to get an order to get his or her goods back from the pawnbroker or second-hand dealer they have been flogged off and the person has lost out.

The second-hand dealer can also hold up the investigation by not releasing his books or property guides, and again the aggrieved person will miss out. A stolen motor vehicle can change hands three or four times, and it is the last person to buy the car
who loses when the car is returned to the original owner.

It is apparent that some second-hand dealers and pawnbrokers are not acting in accordance with the letter of the law. The pawnbroker would not produce for identification the balance of the goods still in the shop that she had purchased from the person who had apparently stolen the goods. Her purchases book record-keeping was inadequate. No attempt was made by the pawnbroker to make the books available to the police. It was apparent that the person had doubts about the real owner of the goods, but she made no attempt to assist the police in their investigation. In this case my constituent lost approximately $40,000 worth of goods, but according to the pawnbroker's books only $200 was paid for those goods.

Errol Street Primary School

Mr COLE (Melbourne) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Education the integration aide program for three children at Errol Street Primary School, which currently has 320 students.

One child has a physical disability and lives permanently at the Royal Children's Hospital. The second child has Down syndrome and the third child has cerebral palsy. Each child receives an hour of teacher integration time each week. The school is struggling. It had 280 students in 1987 with 17 teaching staff. It now has 320 students with 15.7 teachers, which makes it impossible for the staff to provide proper education, let alone proper integration.

The child who lives at the Royal Children's Hospital is locked up permanently because of lack of funds for teacher integration aides. The child with Down syndrome and the child with cerebral palsy — who are lovely kids — have much to live for, but they have lost a great deal because the government has not been prepared to provide the proper level of teacher integration aides.

Clearly, 1 hour each of the time of a teacher integration aide each week is not enough for these children. It is an absolute tragedy to see what has happened to them. I refer particularly to the child living at the Royal Children's Hospital.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr COLE — You either accept integration or you do not. If you believe the child should stay at the Royal Children's Hospital all the time, get up and say it! Don't talk nonsense about the provision of facilities at the school. It is about integration. The government embraced the policy and it should provide the necessary resources and not lock up some poor kid at the Royal Children's Hospital!

If you want to go and have a look at it, go and have a look at it, but don't come here and talk to me about integration! I ask the minister to at least consider the plight of these kids and not reject them, like the bureaucrats have done over the past six months. It's an absolute disgrace!

Agriculture: capital works program

Mr BILDSTIEN (Mildura) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Agriculture the fact that over the next three years Agriculture Victoria has a capital works program in the vicinity of $35 million. I am pleased to note that about $29 million of that has been directed to country Victoria.

I notice in the minister's statements that the major aim of the program is to enhance the Department of Agriculture's strategic research capabilities through improvements to its research and development facilities. I guess another outcome of development in country areas is to produce a significant impact on local economies through the employment of local contractors and tradespeople when contracts are let.

The minister will be well aware that along with my colleagues in the upper house I have made strong representations to him regarding the urgent need for upgrading works to be carried out at the Sunraysia Horticultural Centre in Mildura as part of that program. I realise that perhaps because of the costs involved it would have to be done in a staged development, but I cannot emphasise enough to the minister how such an initiative would strengthen the regional support services of the department in Mildura and provide very much needed local growth and employment opportunities.

I am aware that the minister has been examining priorities for the capital works budget, and I wonder if he is in a position tonight to advise me and the house of the likelihood of the Sunraysia Horticultural Centre's being included in that capital works program. I know he is well aware, as he is a frequent visitor to my electorate, that his department has a significant presence in Sunraysia, giving leading-edge technology and advice to both the dried fruit and the wine industries.
I would be very pleased, as would my upper house colleagues, if the minister was able to advise us that some funding could be allocated, perhaps on a staged basis, to progress some upgrading works at those facilities. I can assure the minister that if he is prepared to make those sort of funds available it would be seen locally as very much a further step forward in the government's rural capital works initiative and very welcome indeed. I wonder if he might advise us tonight whether he has taken a position on that matter.

Yarra Ranges: community houses

Mr LONEY (Geelong North) — I direct the attention of the Minister for Community Services to the valuable contribution that has been made over many years by community houses in this state, a community service that operates usually on very limited funds. I direct the minister's attention to recent decisions of the local government commissioners in the new Shire of Yarra Ranges, and specifically refer him to the fact that community houses in the old Shire of Sherbrooke were among the first in Victoria.

The local government commissioners in that area, in their wisdom or otherwise, have determined that they will cut the funding to community houses. Initially in their draft budget they proposed a cut of some 50 per cent, but later, under pressure from the community, they reduced that to a 20 per cent cut. But they have informed people that this will be a once-only contribution. They have said that community houses must become self-sufficient and that community houses must move to full user pays for the use of community facilities. They have taken it a step further and decided that the way community houses in this area are to be funded is through the institution of a community raffle in the area, for which the council will provide the prizes and the tickets, and the community houses and other community groups in that area will be funded according to the number of raffle tickets they sell.

This is at variance to the approach of the neighbouring City of Knox, which has supported community houses and the community development approach. It has even appointed a project worker to investigate the need for additional community houses in the Rowville area.

Mr McArthur — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I understand that the adjournment is for members to raise issues dealing with the administration of a minister's portfolio or the administration and management of the department for which he is responsible. I ask you, Sir, to invite the honourable member to explain to the house how the administration of the Minister for Community Services in any way affects local government grants for whatever purpose those grants are given, given that funding for community houses is not on a dollar-for-dollar basis.

Mr LONEY — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, the Minister for Community Services obviously has a responsibility for community houses throughout the state and for ensuring they are able to operate efficiently and provide the services they were designated to provide. It is his overall responsibility to ensure that policy decisions taken at another level do not affect adversely programs being delivered through his own department affecting community houses.

It is reasonable to question the Minister for Community Services on whether he supports the sort of approach being taken by the Shire of Yarra Ranges or would make representations to those commissioners suggesting that that approach is not in line with his department's policies.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have heard sufficient on the point of order. There is no point of order.

Mr LONEY — I ask the minister whether he agrees that the approach of the Yarra Ranges commissioners is a direct result of the government's gambling-led recovery in Victoria. Further, does the minister agree with the policy that has been introduced by the Shire of Yarra Ranges commissioners or does he agree with the approach of the City of Knox?

Rutherglen Research Institute

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I raise with the Minister for Agriculture the redevelopment of the Rutherglen Research Institute. Many honourable members would be aware that the institute has been operating for more than 100 years. Through its research, results and assistance, it has built a formidable record of service to primary industry and the farming community across country Victoria and indeed across Australia.

The previous government reduced agriculture funding. When he was the Minister for Food and Agriculture the honourable member for Sunshine investigated the research institutes operating across Victoria. This great research facility at Rutherglen
was in grave danger of being closed. At that time the institute employed more than 100 people and, as I have indicated, was producing excellent results and assisting primary industry and the farming community generally.

With the change of government there was a change of attitude to agriculture. Additional funding has assisted primary producers in the desperate financial circumstances many of them find themselves in by helping to put them in a profitable position.

Last year the Minister for Agriculture and I jointly announced the government allocation of $500,000 to upgrade facilities at the research institute. We discovered that the facilities had been wound down to such an extent that they needed to be completely renovated, and that the facilities - in particular, the laboratories and other facilities provided for research into grain crops, stock and lamb production - desperately needed to be upgraded. The changes made included the moving of the north-eastern regional office of the Department of Agriculture, Energy and Minerals to the research institute.

I ask the minister what progress has been made in the funding of redevelopments at the research institute and whether additional funding is to be provided for the regional office and other facilities at the research institute to enable it to continue to provide an excellent service to north-eastern Victoria, creating employment, as has occurred in the past, and continuing to assist the Victorian economy through improvements to its primary industries.

Legal aid: funding

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I direct to the attention of the Attorney-General my concern about the funding of legal aid and the implications on commonwealth-state funding agreements of a recent state government announcement.

Recently community legal centres have been informed that funding to the Legal Aid Commission has been frozen until the end of the 1998-99 financial year, representing a cut of $15.7 million on previous budget estimates. That announcement on the part of a government that espouses the rhetoric of access to justice stands in stark contrast to the announcement by the federal government, in its June justice statement, that it will increase funding to legal aid by some $17 million in the next couple of years.

The funding of legal aid is governed by a joint federal-state funding agreement: 55 per cent of the funds are provided by the federal government and 45 per cent by the state government. Given the federal government’s announcement of an increase and the state government’s announcement of a decrease, it appears logical that difficulties will arise at the negotiating table.

I ask the Attorney-General if she intends to either renegotiate or violate that federal-state funding agreement, to take Victoria outside the standard funding arrangements enjoyed by every other state. Is it intended that the state government will renge on its commitment to improve access to justice?

I would also like to establish what services are proposed to be cut from the legal aid structure? Will funding be cut to community legal centres or areas of Family Court activities and civil law areas, which have been agreed by all parties as being a high priority for increased legal aid funding? This development is extremely worrying for community legal centres and the legal aid sectors of the community. It demonstrates a high level of hypocrisy and is in dramatic contrast to the federal government’s statements. It is a disgrace that in four years the government should actually freeze and then cut a budget — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member’s time has expired.

Greater Shepparton: Tatura community centre

Mr KILGOUR (Shepparton) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Community Services a matter involving Tatura, a town that is really buzzing with excitement at the moment because last Sunday Tatura Football Club won its first grand final after competing in the Goulburn Valley Football League for 42 years.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair has some difficulty in trying to relate the honourable member’s remarks to government administration. Although the Chair will allow the honourable member a small advertisement in passing, he has gone as far as the Chair will allow.

Mr KILGOUR — It is not only because of sport that the town is buzzing; it is buzzing with excitement about the provision of community services. For some time there has been concern that some of the community services, such as the library,
the kindergarten, the day-care centre and some other services, are in a less than desired state. It is important that those types of services are of a standard acceptable to the community.

The current facilities are not good — some don’t even exist! However, with the local government amalgamations the offices of the former Shire of Rodney in Tatura have now become available and the commissioners of the City of Greater Shepparton have made them available to the community for the provision of some of the services I have mentioned.

The Minister for Community Services, who is a caring minister, was in my electorate last week. I appreciated the fact that he took the opportunity of calling into Tatura with Maurie Cowley and Susan Gill to consider the extension of the former shire offices to make certain facilities available. The shire offices are nice and are surrounded by lawns. The shire chamber, the car park, the administration area, the grounds and the lawns are absolutely perfect for use as community service facilities, and the committee provided an excellent diagram and drawing for the minister.

I ask the Minister for Community Services to support the council’s proposal for the $150 000 refurbishment and extension of the shire offices. They are magnificent buildings worth $1.5 million and it would be wonderful to have extra rooms made available for a kindergarten, a library and a day-care centre. I know that the minister was pleased to see that the council had supported the committee in its attempt to get those much-needed services put under the one roof. I am certainly looking forward to its future.

Captain’s Lodge International

Mr HAMILTON (Morwell) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services concerns regarding incidents of alleged racial vilification, discrimination and harassment. I will pass on to the minister a large set of documents supporting those allegations. The allegations are serious and I want them investigated on behalf of a constituent, Captain Frank Staberhoffer, who lives in Sale. It would be best if I explained to the house the cause of his concern by reading the letter he wrote:

I am a retired airline captain, having flown all over the world, my wife was in the diplomatic service. In 1985 we bought the Thompson River Motor Inn which we renamed Captain’s Lodge International.

In 1986 a milk bar, only 300 metres from the motel, burnt down. I could have saved this milk bar but was prevented by the local police from doing so. Instead I was arrested, assaulted, my life endangered and I received a permanent spine injury which can be proven by a doctor’s certificate. The matter was never resolved. It even went to the Ombudsman for police complaints.

Shortly after, a local police sergeant joined the council and in 1987 built a milk bar himself.

In 1987 we discovered accommodation listings and pamphlets by several sporting and other organisations omitting our motel.

The manager of the Central Gippsland Tourist Authority advised everybody not to stay at Captain’s Lodge International Motel.

In 1988 I stood for council and was in return brought before the Magistrates Court by the town clerk, John Low, alleging a breach of the electoral act.

Consequently the harassment increased dramatically and we can prove that for the last five years we have been blacklisted by the City of Sale and its community.

Resulting from the equal opportunity hearing, four former councillors, a mayor and a deputy mayor wrote to the police commissioner alleging the Town Clerk of the City of Sale, John Low, perjured himself, but the matter was suppressed by the local police.

There are documents from the City of Sale dated 6 and 18 September 1988 proving beyond doubt that the city has diverted business away from the motel.

The letter lists a large number of complaints which I believe are quite serious and are deserving of the attention of the minister. I hope the matter can be brought to some sensible conclusion in the interests of justice and in the interests of decent relations. These allegations should be dealt with in the proper manner, and I ask the minister to take them seriously and to deal with the content of this letter and also the other information that has been provided to me.

Responses

Mr JOHN (Minister for Community Services) — The honourable member for Geelong North raised important matters concerning funding for community houses in the Shire of Yarra Ranges, saying that the shire had reduced its contribution to the community house program. I understand that
the state government provides between $4 million and $5 million for community houses, funding 250 or more houses throughout Victoria. We value and pay tribute to the contributions made by the committees that run the community or neighbourhood houses, because they do very good work.

I am not aware of the specific decision of the Shire of Yarra ranges, but I will certainly look into it. I must say that local councils make their own decisions about the contributions. That is their prerogative, given that they represent their local communities. However, it is a matter I am concerned about, so I will look into the situation. If there is anything I can do to assist the community houses — if there are any changes to be made — I will do so.

The honourable member for Shepparton raised the multipurpose children’s service proposed for Tatura. I pay tribute to the honourable member for Shepparton, who last week showed me a number of community service facilities in his electorate. I was impressed by the contributions of the local municipal officers and commissioners of the Shire of Moira and the City of Greater Shepparton. I was particularly impressed by the work done by the local committee that put to my department the proposal regarding the old municipal offices, which I think were the old Shire of Rodney offices.

The community has put up a proposal for government expenditure of $320 000. The City of Greater Shepparton has offered to put in $150 000. The old Shire of Rodney office complex is enormously impressive. Even as it stands it would probably cost $2 million to purchase. This comes under the commonwealth-state child-care agreement, under which a proposal goes to a joint officers group chaired by a commonwealth officer. It is then put to me and to Senator Crowley, the federal Labor Minister for Family Services. That procedure works very well and in my view avoids party political conflict.

The local committee has put up a very valuable proposal, as a result of which we could have one of the finest multipurpose centres in country Victoria for a song. I think the municipality has offered to put in the building as it stands and another $150 000 to boot, and the commonwealth and state governments have been asked to put in $320 000. I will recommend it to my commonwealth colleague.

I assure the house and the honourable member for Shepparton that the proposal for the Hume region has the highest priority for being put to the joint officers group. I hope the sound project gets a guernsey in one of the next funding rounds.

Mr W. D. McGrath (Minister for Agriculture) — The honourable member for Yan Yean directed the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to the number of police officers in this state. I shall direct that to his attention. The honourable member for Morwell raised for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services a matter on behalf of Captain Staberhoifer. The honourable member has given me a large file of documentation. I shall pass on the file to the minister for his response.

The honourable member for Knox referred the attention of the Attorney-General to stolen goods that are in pawnbrokers’ shops and how the recovery of those stolen goods can be effected when they are identified by individuals. My understanding is that it would be a complex question requiring court intervention. I shall direct the matter to the attention of the Attorney-General.

The honourable member for Footscray referred the attention of the Attorney-General to legal aid and what he perceives to be legal aid within budgetary allocations. It is a complex assistance scheme for a number of individuals. One could say it is a bottomless pit that is required for financial aid to people who wish to take legal action. I shall direct his concerns to the attention of the Attorney-General.

The honourable member for Melbourne referred the Minister for Education to the integration requirements for the Errol Street Primary School in North Melbourne. He claims three integration schoolchildren are receiving a total of 1 hour per student per week. I shall raise the matter with the minister who has done an excellent job over the past three years in his role as Minister for Education. The honourable member for Melbourne said there were 320 students at the primary school and some 16 teachers — that is 20 students per teacher. I believe that is a good ratio of students per teacher, considering that in other states the ratio of students per teacher in the primary sector is about 22 or 23 students per teacher.

The honourable member for Mildura raised with me improvements to the Sunraysia Horticulture Centre in Mildura. I am pleased to announce that as of yesterday I signed a tender approval to Ray King, a building contractor from Gol Gol in the Sunraysia district, for an amount in excess of $800 000 for work
to be carried out at that institute. I anticipate the overall cost will be of the order of $1 million by the time the total job is finalised. It will enable the institute to provide a better auditorium and conference centre to respond to community needs and enhance community interaction.

It is not much good having research and development findings coming forward unless that knowledge is transferred to the farming community. The Sunraysia is dominated by horticulture and there is a need for that transfer. Dr Malcolm Campbell does an excellent job as leader of the Sunraysia Horticultural Centre, and the government believes the provision of a good auditorium and conference facilities at the centre will help bring about a much better system of transfer of knowledge to the client base. Improved accommodation for staff and improved laboratory facilities at the centre are also important.

A fortnight ago I visited the Sunraysia with the honourable member for Mildura and one of the honourable members for North Western Province in another place to look at frost damage. It is hoped the damage is not as serious as was first thought. However, I gave a commitment to horticulturalists that if frost is a significant contributing factor in a low yield in the grape harvest the government will consider the possibility of invoking the exceptional circumstance provision.

I have written to Senator Bob Collins, the federal Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, putting him on notice that we may need commonwealth assistance if the crop potential deteriorates to such a degree that the exceptional circumstance provision is necessary. Let’s hope it’s not! I have asked Dr Campbell for regular assessments to give me an idea of the recovery rate of the vines following the initial frost damage.

The honourable member for Murray Valley raised the matter of improvements to the 100-year-old agricultural institute at Rutherglen, which was earmarked for closure under the previous government. I have a great commitment to the agricultural institutes. They play a valuable role in country communities by providing support to farmers. The veterinary laboratories have been privatised and are going on their merry way, much to the disappointment of a couple of Labor Party members in particular, who use it as a political football in Bendigo and thereby do a great disservice to the agricultural sector.

Approximately $1.3 million is being provided to upgrade the Rutherglen Research Institute by extending the conference facilities, laboratories and accommodation to ensure that knowledge is transferred to the farming community in the best possible environment. Many broadacre cropping and prime lamb raising programs and some trial work on feed lotting of cattle are currently being undertaken at the institute.

Over the past three years approximately $29 million has been spent on capital works programs in this area. Such funding was unheard of under the previous government. I will go through the key projects undertaken by the department. Approximately $8 million has been spent on the Institute for Horticultural Development at Knoxfield. The upgraded establishment is to be officially opened by the Premier on 10 November.

The Institute of Sustainable Agriculture at Tatura received $5 million; the Dairy Centre Institute of Sustainable Irrigated Agriculture at Kyabram, $2 million; the Rutherglen Research Institute, $1.3 million; the Sunraysia Horticultural Centre at Mildura, $1 million; the Victorian Institute for Dryland Agriculture at Horsham, $1 million; the Pastoral and Veterinary Institute at Hamilton, a joint venture in wool and rural industry skill training, $3.6 million; the Dairy Research Institute at Ellinbank at Warragul, which, Mr Speaker, you and I visited a couple of weeks ago, received $1.3 million for upgrading work; the relocation of the State Chemistry Laboratory from Treasury Place to Werribee cost $3.5 million; and the administration centre in Bendigo received $1.9 million.

The coalition government can take great pride in the way it has administered agriculture in this state, to the benefit of the farming community.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house stands adjourned until next day.

House adjourned 10.46 p.m.
The SPEAKER (Hon. J. E. Delzoppo) took the chair at 10.04 a.m. and read the prayer.

PETITIONS

The Acting Clerk — I have received the following petitions for presentation to Parliament:

Privatisation

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

Your humble petitioners pray that the state government immediately put in place:
2. An independent public inquiry into the alleged benefits and disadvantages of selling off these utilities.
3. A referendum for all Victorian citizens.

Your humble petitioners, the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria, expresseth great concern about the lack of public participation in the government’s decision-making.

We are concerned that privatisation of these utilities will resulteth in:
- higher costs especially for people on low incomes;
- poorer services;
- environmental damage;
- adverse impact on the state finance;
- foreign ownership.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mr Jenkins (1734 signatures)

Laid on table.

Paintball or skirmish games

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria sheweth their total opposition to any attempt by the government to prevent them from participating in the sport of paintball also known as skirmish, either by banning the sport or not issuing Sunday shooting permits to legitimate paintball operators/clubs.

Your petitioners therefore pray that paintball or skirmish games shall not be banned in Victoria, that legal paintball operators/clubs be allowed to conduct games on Sundays and that holders of a current shooter’s licence should continue to be allowed to own registered paintball markers.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mr Finn (165 signatures)

Laid on table.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Acting Clerk:

Building Control Commission — Report for the year 1994-95


AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — By leave, I move:

That the house do now adjourn for the purpose of discussing a developing matter of urgent public importance — namely the failure of the Minister for Health to keep her promise made in June 1995 to provide a satisfactory level of ambulance services, as evidenced by today’s newspaper reports which reveal (a) that there are insufficient ambulance officers to fill rostered positions; and (b) the recent tragic death of Mr Keith Cheong while waiting too long for a MICA ambulance to arrive.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair has to exercise a certain amount of judgment on whether the motion is admissible. Certain rules are laid down. The Chair relies heavily on precedents of the house and also on extracts from the 17th edition of May. The Leader of the Opposition has complied with the standing orders of the house and I have seen a copy of the proposed adjournment motion and examined it in detail. Over the years, a lot of attention has been given to adjournment motions, and the rules governing adjournment motions are clear.
One of the rules that the Chair must consider is the question of opportunity. Is it the first opportunity the honourable member has had to raise the matter or were there opportunities relatively close to the day when the motion was moved? Speaker Wheeler on 10 October 1973, being of the view that a member could have raised a particular matter on the budget debate on the previous day, held that his proposed motion was out of order.

I direct the attention of the honourable member to the fact that he was the lead speaker on the resumption of the budget debate yesterday and had unlimited time in which to raise the matters. I am of the opinion that the matter in this proposed motion is one that could have been raised in the debate.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The other question the Chair must consider is whether the matter is of recent occurrence and raised without delay. There are rulings of Speaker Christie together with House of Commons precedents which support the contention that the fact that the grievance is a continuing one is not sufficient if it is not of recent occurrence. Further, the fact that new information has been received regarding the matter that has been continuing for some time does not in itself make the matter one of urgency. I direct the attention of the house to page 5 of extracts from the 17th edition of May:

The fact that a grievance is continuing is not sufficient if it is not a recent occurrence. The fact that new information has been received regarding a matter that has been continuing for some time does not in itself make that matter one of urgency.

I draw the attention of the house to the fact that the motion is constructed about the failure of the Minister for Health to keep a promise she made in June 1995. Therefore, I have no other course of action than to rule the proposed motion out of order.

Opposition Members — Disgraceful!

Mr Brumby — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, in relation to the ruling that you have just made, I wish to add information that may enable you to reconsider your ruling.

Honourable members interjecting.
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Mr Brumby - The motion refers to the tragic death reported today in the media of Mr Keith Cheong. This Wednesday morning is an opportunity for a debate about matters that are, firstly, urgent — and I would have thought this was an urgent matter. It is, secondly, a matter of public importance. It may not be a matter of public importance to some in this house, but I would have thought the death of a Victorian while awaiting an ambulance is clearly a matter of public importance which should be debated in this place. This is the first opportunity. The newspapers are full of the story, as is 3AW, but today, Mr Speaker, you are ruling that the Parliament of Victoria cannot discuss this matter. I ask you to reconsider that ruling.

May I make a third point about the issue of urgency, Mr Speaker? The 1920 precedent of the House of Commons to which you have referred and the definition given there of urgency, and the ruling given, was in relation to a matter that occurred 12 months previously. In this case, this death occurred last weekend.

Dr Napthine - Wrong!

Mr Brumby - There has been no previous opportunity for this matter to be raised in Parliament.

Mrs Tehan — When did it occur?

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Brumby — Why don’t you debate the matter? You’re gutless, absolutely gutless!

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Has the Leader of the Opposition finished his point of order?

Mr Brumby — No, Mr Speaker.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair is rapidly running out of patience.

Mr Brumby — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, the standing orders set out requirements that have to be met for a matter to be debated. The first test is whether there is an administrative responsibility of the government — clearly, there is. Secondly, is the matter definite? It is — it relates to the death of a man while awaiting the arrival of an ambulance and the failure of a minister. It is a definite matter.

Thirdly, is it urgent? Is it recent? Yes. Has it been raised without delay? Yes, in fact media reports today refer to this matter. We are raising it at the first possible opportunity. Finally, according to the tests, is this a matter of public importance? Clearly, it is because a Victorian has died while awaiting an ambulance.

Much debate is occurring throughout Victoria — in the newspapers, on the radio — and we cannot debate it in this Parliament because this government is running away from its responsibilities!

I was thrown out of this Parliament a year ago for saying this government can look after its mates, but it cannot look after people awaiting the arrival of ambulances! It is true! Where was the minister this morning? Skulking away, recovering from the $1000 function! People have gone. Why don’t you catch up with your responsibilities?

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition cannot use an opportunity to raise a point of order to debate the question. Has the Leader of the Opposition finished with his point of order?

Mr Brumby — No, Mr Speaker. Obviously before submitting this motion, we considered carefully all the relevant rulings and standing orders.

Mr McArthur interjected.

Mr Brumby — You wouldn’t know! If you have nothing to run away from, bring on the debate.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Brumby — As I have said, this is the first available opportunity for this matter to be raised. My motion refers particularly to the newspaper reports that have been published today. There have been no previous newspaper reports of this matter. Otherwise, we would have raised the matter earlier. These are the first reports.

This event is clearly a recent event; it did not happen 12 months or two years ago. This concerns the death of a person in the last fortnight — a recent event. This is the first parliamentary opportunity to raise the matter. If we cannot debate a matter of public importance — if your ruling is saying that the death of a Victorian because of the incompetence of this minister is not a matter of public importance, if you
are saying that a death that occurred in the past two weeks is not recent and we cannot discuss this matter here — frankly, your rulings bring into disrepute the Parliament because the Leader of the Opposition cannot get his facts right. His claim that this is the first opportunity he has had to raise the issue, that it is something new and unusual, is a mockery!

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Although the Chair is prepared to listen to the point of order, I advise the Leader of the Opposition that reflecting on the Chair in the manner he just has is disorderly. He should confine his remarks on the point of order to the matters at hand. The Leader of the Opposition, completing his point of order.

Mr Brumby — Mr Speaker, there was no reflection on the Chair. I have been making the obvious point that if the public learns that on a day when the newspapers and the other media report the death of a person who had been waiting for an ambulance the Parliament of Victoria is unable to discuss the matter, that will bring Parliament into disrepute. It will make people wonder what Parliament does.

This is an important matter, because a precedent is involved. This concerns a matter of definite public importance for Victorians. The matter is urgent, it is of public importance and it is within the administrative responsibility of the government. I urge you to reconsider your ruling.

Mr Honeywood — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, if the logic of the Leader of the Opposition prevails, every time a citizen of this state unfortunately passes away for whatever reason Parliament will be brought into disrepute. Let’s face it, until the coroner reports on a death, the reasons why are pure speculation. Over the years there have been many examples of citizens of this state unfortunately dying while waiting for ambulances. I repeat: if the logic of the Leader of the Opposition prevails, Parliament will be brought into disrepute every time somebody passes away, because we will have to spend 3 hours debating the reasons why — even before the coroner has looked at the issues involved.

Further on the point of order, Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has alleged that this is the first opportunity he has had to raise the matter. However, he made the point that it had been raised over the weekend. In other words, he could have raised the point of order yesterday. Then we found out the actual date of death was 23 September! The
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members. The 17th edition of May says that the matter must be urgent. For those who do not understand it elaborates on and clarifies the meaning of 'urgent' — and it explains why some governments would seek to use that definition to prevent matters being examined. May says the matter raised must be:

... of recent occurrence and raised without delay.

I will deal with each of those two issues in turn — first, recent occurrence; and second, raised without delay. This matter is of recent occurrence. The incident we are referring to occurred on 23 September this year. In the context of the parameters of urgency debates, that is well within the 12-month time frame.

Back in 1920 a member of the House of Commons sought to raise as a matter of urgency an issue that was considered old: because it had occurred 12 months previously it was ruled out of order. That is the context in which a decision has to be made as to whether a matter is urgent or of recent occurrence.

I put to you, Mr Speaker, that if the incident that we are talking about today had occurred 11 or 12 months ago you would have been in order in ruling the motion out of order — but it did not. The incident we are referring to occurred in recent days — just a few days ago — and meets exactly the criteria set down by the House of Commons back in 1920. The opposition believes that in reconsidering your ruling you should take note of those circumstances.

In addressing the question of urgency you must also take into account the fact that a matter has to be raised without delay. As you know, a member moving an adjournment motion — in this case, the Leader of the Opposition — is required or obliged to raise the matter referred to without delay. A member cannot sit on information, keep it to himself and try to move an adjournment motion when it suits him. He must raise the matter without delay — and that is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition did this morning.

Until a member knows of and has access to information about a matter, or until it is brought to his attention by the media or by some other means, it is logically impossible for him to move a motion concerning that information. The Leader of the Opposition has brought a definite matter of urgent public importance before the house at the first opportunity available to him. He could not have raised it yesterday in his speech on the budget — as you suggested he ought to have done, referring to Speaker Wheeler's ruling. He was not in possession of the information yesterday when he delivered his speech on the budget. So in the context of your ruling that the question of opportunity is paramount, Mr Speaker, I put it to you that the question of opportunity remains absolutely relevant. This is the first available opportunity the Leader of the Opposition has had to bring to the attention of the house matters that are definitely of public importance.

You also raised the issue of this being a continuing matter. We are talking about a very specific incident that occurred a few days ago — the death of a citizen of this state. This is not about a continuing matter; it is about the death of a citizen. The revelation that at that time insufficient ambulance officers were available to provide an ambulance service demonstrates the failure of the minister. If you maintain your ruling that this is a continuing matter, you will be saying implicitly that the minister has continually failed in her duty — because that is the substance of the matter we are debating.

We are not talking about other issues concerning ambulances that may have arisen in the past. We are talking about whether the Minister for Health has or has not failed to do her job and carry out her duties as minister. The opposition believes those two recent matters of urgent public importance demonstrate that the minister has failed, and that has nothing to do with any other matters that may have intruded on your memory when you made your decision.

Although issues concerning ambulances have been around for many months the opposition has not chosen to talk about them in the specific words of the motion. We have not spoken about how in administering her portfolio the Minister for Health has failed the people of Victoria for months and years. We have said that through her administration of the ambulance service the minister has failed the people of Victoria, to the extent that that relates to the death that occurred in recent days and the level of staffing that applied at the time.

Perhaps you did not have that information available to you, Mr Speaker. In those circumstances we ask you to reconsider your ruling and allow the debate to proceed.

Mr Cooper — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, shortly after the commencement of parliamentary business this morning, the Leader of the Opposition
sought leave to move the adjournment of the house to discuss a matter of urgent public importance. He then detailed his motion, after which you, Sir, gave the house your consideration of the matter. You referred to the issues that by virtue of your office you must take into account before ruling whether such a motion is in order.

In your detailed consideration you covered the questions of urgency and opportunity. You gave the house a detailed analysis of the matter and the reasons for your decision that the motion was not in order. Since then, under the subterfuge of a point of order, opposition speakers have flouted your ruling and attempted to debate the issue. There is no doubt in my mind that you have given a clear ruling, as well as the reasons for it. Since then we have witnessed opposition members not only wasting the time of the house but also reflecting on and flouting your ruling.

The time has come for you, Sir, to say that you have already made your ruling and for the business of the house to proceed; otherwise, this place will become nonsense. I do not believe the opposition has said anything new. It has simply attempted to raise the substance of what it hoped would be a debate. That is out of order, as is its proposal to move the urgency motion.

Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition galloped through the reading of his response to the budget because he had to be out of this place by 6.00 p.m. to be interviewed on radio. He had the opportunity to speak for an unlimited time, as you pointed out, and to raise this issue. The fact that he did not read the late edition of yesterday's Herald Sun, did not listen to the radio yesterday or did not know yesterday that something had occurred in September is of no moment. That the Leader of the Opposition gets his ideas only from what is on the radio or from what he reads in newspapers is sad for the opposition, but is of no importance either to this house or to the government.

The Leader of the Opposition has condemned himself out of his own mouth. We now have the spectacle of the Leader of the Opposition trying to use the forms of the house to recover lost ground. You, Sir, have examined his urgency motion and made your ruling. It is now time for the house to get on with its business.

Mr Thomson — I support the point of order raised by the Leader of the Opposition. You, Mr Speaker, ruled the adjournment motion out of order on two counts, the first of which was that it was not the honourable member's first opportunity to raise the matter. I support the Leader of the Opposition and the honourable member for Thomastown in saying that this is the first opportunity the Leader of the Opposition has had to raise the issues that are the substance of the adjournment motion — today's report that there are insufficient ambulance officers to fill rostered positions and the report of the death of Mr Cheong.

I put it to you, Sir, that the question of time runs from the time when a person first becomes aware of an issue. In legal terms the time when a person first becomes aware of an injury done to him or her — in asbestos cases and so on — is that person's first opportunity to raise the matter. That is also the case with the adjournment motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition.

Secondly, you argued that this is a continuing matter. There is no doubt that the question of continuing matters raises difficult issues. The motion refers specifically to both evidence of insufficient ambulance officers being available to fill rostered positions and the death of Mr Cheong. Those matters have not been previously canvassed in the house. On that basis I put it to you that this is not a continuing matter and is an appropriate subject for an adjournment motion.

Mr Thwaites — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, I refer you to the ruling of Speaker McDonald, which is recorded at page 3197 of volume 273 of Hansard of 17 March 1964. It says that even in a case such as this, where the Speaker has indicated that he is extremely doubtful about the admissibility of the motion, it can be allowed in order to maintain the rights of the minority.

The urgency and importance of the issue are key factors that the Speaker must take into account in exercising that discretion. What can be more urgent than the fact that Victorians are now dying because they are waiting too long for ambulances and because the minister has failed to provide adequate resources for the ambulance service? The actions of the minister have led us to the situation where there are not enough ambulance officers to fill rostered positions.

Mrs Tehan interjected.

Mr Thwaites — This is exactly on the point of order. These are the facts the Speaker ought to take into account in exercising his discretion.
This is a different discretion from the one the Speaker was referring to earlier, and the Leader of the Opposition and other speakers have dealt with that matter adequately. I ask you, Mr Speaker, before you make a final ruling to consider very carefully — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Thwaites — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, as I understand it, you have not made any ruling whatsoever. I hope you have not, Sir, because if you have you are clearly biased, and I presume that is not the case.

I raise this point because the Speaker's discretion is very important. In this case the Speaker has the discretion to allow this motion so that the rights of the minority — in this case the opposition and the Victorian public — are protected. If you are not prepared to let this motion be debated, Mr Speaker, an extraordinary situation will arise.

An article appeared in the newspapers only today about a woman who appeared on television last night, just as the Leader of the Opposition was speaking on the budget, complaining about the budget cuts. I cannot raise those issues today, but I will raise them when I speak on the budget because the Leader of the Opposition was not able to. That is the very point: the Leader of the Opposition could not because those issues were reported in the press only last night and this morning.

The clear discretion you have, Mr Speaker, is to protect the rights of the minority and to protect the rights of Victorians. The only way you, Sir, can do that is to allow a proper debate in this Parliament.

Dr Coghill — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, in your ruling you indicated to the house that the Chair was required to make a judgment on the matter because it is a matter which falls within the discretion of the Chair. Indeed, standing order no. 26 confirms that in our minds. Standing order 26(a) states:

A member rising in his place may propose to move 'That the house do now adjourn' for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance (which he shall then state and hand in in writing to Mr Speaker).

(b) The member proposing the motion for adjournment shall not be allowed to address the house on such motion until Mr Speaker shall have ascertained that 12 members rise in their places, as indicating approval of the proposed discussion.

(c) In speaking to such motion debate shall be strictly confined to the subject matter stated, the mover shall not exceed 30 minutes, any other member shall not exceed 15 minutes, and the whole discussion on the subject shall not exceed two hours.

Provided that, with the consent of the majority of the house on a motion to be moved and determined at once without amendment or debate, a member who speaks first for the government, opposition or third party, respectively, may be allowed to continue his speech for a further period not exceeding five minutes.

The point of drawing the attention of the house to that matter is that it emphasises that great discretion is available to the Chair under standing orders. That discretion, as you, Sir, have outlined, is guided by a number of rulings that have been made over many years, and according to the current list of Speaker's rulings dating back to 1927.

The standing orders themselves do not lay down the criteria to which you, Sir, have referred in your ruling and which have been referred to in comments by members on both sides of the house. It would be possible under the standing orders for there to be a completely different application of standing order no. 26 than the way it has been interpreted by you and your predecessors as laid down in Speakers' rulings.

I put to you that this is an opportunity to bring the house's interpretation of standing order 26 into line with what happens in comparable parliaments elsewhere in the Commonwealth of Nations. In the House of Representatives, for example, much wider discretion is exercised by the Chair in the nature of motions allowed for debate on matters of public importance. The House of Commons, as you, Sir, have pointed out, abandoned the rulings on which you and your predecessors as laid down in Speakers' rulings.

This is an opportunity for you, Sir, to refer the matter to the Standing Orders Committee which would report back to this Parliament with a recommendation probably similar to the one included in its March 1992 report. A ruling would
allow a much wider range of matters to be raised on adjournment motions in this house as in the House of Representatives, the House of Commons and in many other parliaments operating under the Westminster system.

The rulings on which you, Mr Speaker, and your predecessors have relied, including your immediate predecessor, are archaic, inappropriate to this day and age and should be urgently reviewed. I urge you to take this opportunity to review them, or, if you feel that is not appropriate at this moment, at least refer the matters to the Standing Orders Committee for an urgent report to this house.

The SPEAKER — Order! In coming to a decision on this matter I examined the exact words of the motion attempted to be moved by the Leader of the Opposition:

The failure of the Minister for Health to keep her promise made in June 1995 to provide a satisfactory level of ambulance services as evidenced by today’s newspaper reports ...

It is evident that the motion is centred around ambulance services. On the question of opportunity I point out to the Leader of the Opposition that he did not mention ambulance services during his speech yesterday, and he had an opportunity so to do.

Although the Chair has a great deal of sympathy with the death of Mr Cheong and the circumstances surrounding that death, it is not of sufficient weight to overcome the fact that the guidelines given to Speakers — extracts from the 17th edition of May, archaic though they may be — are the only guide the Chair currently has. I rely on the fact that May says that new information that has been received regarding a matter that has been continuing for some time does not in itself make the matter one of urgency. Therefore, I stand by my original ruling — the motion is not admissible.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr THWAITES (Albert Park) — I desire to move by leave:

That this house condemns the failure of the Minister for Health to keep her promise made in June 1995 to provide a satisfactory level of ambulance services as evidenced by today’s newspaper reports which reveal:

that there are insufficient ambulance officers to fill rostered positions; and

the recent death of Mr Keith Cheong while waiting too long for a MICA ambulance to arrive.

Leave refused.

Mrs Tehan — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the explanation for leave being refused — —

The SPEAKER — Order! Leave is either granted or denied; an explanation is not needed.

NIGHTRIDER BUS SERVICE

Mr FINN (Tullamarine) — I move:

That this house congratulates the government for its introduction of the Nightrider bus service.

It is with considerable pride that I move this motion today because during the three years that I have been a member of the government we have seen some extraordinary innovations and some remarkable victories for ordinary Victorians, and the introduction of the Nightrider bus service is one of them.

The government and the Minister for Public Transport should be extremely proud of this achievement because the sole purpose of the service is to make Victoria a better place for Victorians. The service has contributed significantly in helping those who use public transport to fully appreciate the innovation this has been and how the public transport system has improved since October 1992.

To fully appreciate this improvement we must compare the public transport system as it is today with what it was before October 1992. There is only one word for the public transport system
pre-October 1992 — hopeless; in fact, absolutely hopeless! It had nothing going for it.

As most honourable members would be aware, I am a regular user of public transport and have been for many years. I well recall that in those days that if a train showed up, not necessarily on time, we thought ourselves rather lucky. If the buses ran close to the timetable we would buy a Tatts ticket because we thought it was our lucky day. The public transport system was in total disarray — an absolute disaster. Who can ever forget the Scratchy Jim tram strikeback in 1989? Who can ever forget coming into the city of Melbourne and seeing the trams lined up in Bourke Street as far as the eye could see?

Mr Traynor interjected.

Mr FINN — The honourable member for Ballarat East says there were 43 trams on the street. We can all remember the trams lined up in Elizabeth, Swanston and Bourke streets. It was an extraordinary example of the way the Labor government had completely lost control of the public transport system. The unions were running the show.

If the unions had been allowed to continue running the show as they had under the former Labor government the Nightrider bus service would never have been introduced because that required imagination — something the former Labor government did not have and something the unions who ran the public transport system until October 1992 did not have.

That tram strike cost Melbourne the 1996 Olympic Games. When we turn on our television sets next year and watch the Olympic Games in Atlanta we can thank Joan Kirner and Jim Kennan because if it had not been for them and the public transport union the Olympic Games would have been in Melbourne. Many thousands of people would have attended the Olympic Games in Melbourne and would have used the Nightrider bus service, but unfortunately that will not occur.

I remind honourable members about the debacle of the Upfield railway line. It is worth mentioning that the Minister for Public Transport and the government have recently given an undertaking, albeit without the cooperation of the federal Labor government, that the Upfield railway line will continue to be used. The former Labor government wanted to close that railway line! Honourable members may remember that the former transport minister Scratchy Jim wanted to close that line. That line services what is known as the heartland of the Labor Party. One should not be surprised about that because we all know how the Labor Party treats its own. One has only to ask the Honourable Theo Theophanous in another place to discover that!

The Upfield railway line is a major adjunct to the public transport system, as indeed is the Nightrider bus service. The government has decided that the Upfield railway line must continue to be used to service the people of the northern suburbs of Melbourne, who must be aware that the coalition government best serves their interests. I am sure they will act upon that view at the next election and I look forward to that time.

During the period leading up to the election of the coalition government we saw major cutbacks in local bus services. I have lived in the Broadmeadows area for many years and I experienced the cutbacks in private bus services. I know from personal experience that a number of bus services were done away with, demonstrating the contempt the then government had for people using public transport.

The introduction of a Nightrider bus service under the former Labor government would have been impossible because of the considerable and constant conflicts the government and the then minister were having. If I were a suspicious type I might think the conflicts had something to do with the left-wing ideology that dominated the government at that time. The former Labor government hated private enterprise and did everything it could to send private enterprise to the wall. The Labor Party does not realise how important individual businesses are to the state and the nation. I suggest they might like to reconsider their view of private enterprise, but the constant conflicts with private companies during the late 1980s and the early 1990s were a direct result of their hatred of private enterprise and the Labor Party's ideological hatred and contempt for business. That hurt Victoria and Victorians. Under the coalition government that will never happen again. I am glad this government looks like it will be in power for many years to come, and I look forward to serving with the honourable member for Ballarat East in the next Parliament.

Under Labor the unions ran the show. The Minister for Public Transport has shown me the very door in his office through which the union leaders entered to speak to either Peter Spyker or Jim Kennan, both former transport ministers. The union leaders entered through their very own door so that the
bureaucrats could not see them visiting the minister. The union leaders would walk in and say to either Peter or Jim, 'No, that is not the way we do it in the trade union movement. This is what you should do'. The minister would then say, 'Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir' and bow his head — which the union leaders would pat as they left his office.

Under Labor, trade union leaders, some of whom were militant and entirely irresponsible, ran the public transport system. They ordered the government of Victoria around, telling it what to do. They told the Labor government where its responsibilities lay and how ministers should run their portfolios. As a direct result of their influence, in the years leading up to the 1992 election Victoria’s public transport system was an unmitigated, 100 per cent disaster. I am pleased to say that that sort of thing no longer happens; and so long as this government is in power it will never happen again.

It has given me great joy to witness the exciting public transport reforms that have been introduced by the Minister for Public Transport and the government since the election of the coalition government on 3 October 1992. It is appropriate that I move this motion today, just one day after the third anniversary of the 1992 election of the coalition. This is a time for celebrations, not just for government members and members of the government parties but for people throughout the state. That day three years ago marked the end of the deadly, dark and miserable decade of Labor government. Once again Victorians were given the chance to hope, to look to the future and to regain pride in their state — and that has been as true of public transport as it has of anything else.

Although it was more than a little chilly at the time, it gave me considerable pleasure to head up to Sunbury, which is in my electorate, on the evening of Friday, 14 May 1992, because on that evening I caught the first Nightrider bus from Sunbury into the city. The bus left at 11.45 p.m. and headed through some of the northern, north-western and western suburbs, through St Albans and down the Tullamarine Freeway into Melbourne. It was a pretty typical May evening. To be blunt it was rather chilly — that is putting it extremely politely — and damp. In fact, it was raining.

Mr Traynor interjected.

Mr FINN — It was just like Ballarat, as the honourable member for Ballarat East reminds me. If I had not known where I was I could easily have believed I was in Ballarat. The only thing missing was Dyer’s steakhouse — although we won’t go into that now! As we arrived in the city, the extraordinary sight before me took my breath away. Bands were playing and people were dancing in the street.

Mr Phillips interjected.

Mr FINN — They must have known I was coming! There were balloons and streamers and television cameras; it was all very exciting. Something big was happening in Melbourne that night: Melburnians were celebrating the introduction of a service they had been waiting for years. For the first time Melburnians could enjoy a 24-hour public transport service that ran on the weekends. That is why people were getting into the spirit of things — and some were getting into it a bit more than they should have.

The buses were all lined up. There were lots of people in the City Square and plenty of television crews, newspaper photographers and journalists. Bands were playing and people were celebrating. It really was a great night in Melbourne’s history, one of the better 1 o’clock celebrations I can recall! As I jumped off the bus I was greeted, much to my surprise, by the honourable member for Essendon, who had also made the trek into the City Square to take part in that exciting event.

As I recall, we first of all drove through Carlton and then down through Brunswick. All the time passengers were getting on or off; they, too, were getting into the spirit of things. They all thought the Nightrider service was a great idea. Never before had they been able to catch a bus at 2 o’clock in the morning. All of them thought it was the best thing to have happened to Melbourne in years. We then drove through Moonee Ponds, Essendon and Strathmore, and then onwards, ever onwards, to Broadmeadows. Melburnians were clearly enjoying the opportunity to use public transport when they needed it.

Over the years the public transport system has been criticised, sometimes even by me, because of its failure to provide convenient services. But when you have buses running at midnight or 3 o’clock, 4 o’clock or 5 o’clock in the morning, you can have no complaints, because the service is there when you need it. That is what public transport under this government has been and will be all about.
Melburnians have taken the Nightrider bus system into their hearts. Young people, old people and even middle-aged people love the system. For the first time young people can get home from the city on a Saturday night without having to huddle under the Flinders Street clocks waiting for the first train on the Sunday morning.

Mr Traynor interjected.

Mr FINN — It is safe and secure, but I will refer to that later on. I do not jest when I say Melburnians have taken the system into their hearts, because the patronage figures show that to be the truth of the matter.

A number of operators run Nightrider buses throughout Melbourne. Although all the services run from the city, that does not mean your destination must be the city. For example, you can catch a bus at Bayswater at 1 o’clock in the morning and be in St Albans by 2.30 — although what you could do in St Albans at 2.30 in the morning I just cannot imagine. One of the joys of the Nightrider system is that it provides a convenient service for the very people who need to use it.

I will mention the services and the bus operators who are currently conducting those Nightrider services. The honourable member for Thomastown may be interested in these, because he is probably not aware of them.

The Bayswater service is conducted by US Bus Lines. The Craigieburn service, which services the bottom part of my electorate through Tullamarine, Westmeadows and Gladstone Park, is conducted by Tullamarine Bus Lines. The Croydon service is conducted by the Mount Dandenong passenger service. The Dandenong service is conducted by Grenda. The Eltham service is conducted by the Reservoir Bus Company. The Epping service is also conducted by the Reservoir Bus Company. They are obviously doing a good job, because they have two services. The Frankston service is conducted by Grenda. The St Albans-Melton service, which also services my electorate travelling out to Sunbury, is conducted by Sitch Bus Lines. The service to Werribee is conducted by the Point Cook-Werribee passenger service.

As can be seen, not only is the Nightrider providing a magnificent service for the people who need and use it, but it is also providing employment for the bus companies and their employees. Now that we are coming out of the dark times of the 1980s and the early 1990s employment has to be the name of the game, and the fact that this service is providing employment is clearly an added bonus.

I shall compare the patronage figures of the first and second years of the Nightrider service. The exercise is educational because it shows that as time has gone on people have taken the service more and more to their hearts. They loved it to start with, but they have just gone over the top. In its first year, the Bayswater service — —

Mr Lupton interjected.

Mr FINN — The honourable member for Knox tells me it goes through his electorate. Near a police station or a fire station?

Mr Lupton interjected.

Mr FINN — They have a police station there, just as I thought. In the first year, the Nightrider bus service to Bayswater carried 7690 passengers, which is a pretty good start; you cannot complain about that. In its second year, the figure went up to 9547 passengers, an increase of 24.1 per cent. Anybody who gets an increase of 24.1 per cent in one year has to regard themselves as being pretty successful.

Mr Jenkins interjected.

Mr FINN — I am sure, as the honourable member for Ballarat West suggests, we will get that at the next election.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr FINN — The honourable member for Morwell likes to chirp on, but he has never been on the Tullamarine Freeway in his life. He doesn’t know the problems involved. The people out there do, and they appreciate what we are doing. Don’t you worry about that!

I apologise, Mr Deputy Speaker; I am diverted from the subject. An increase of 24.1 per cent is a magnificent performance — and that is just on the Bayswater route. In the first year, the Craigieburn route had 3272 passengers, and that figure rose in the second year to 3944, an increase of 20.5 per cent.

I am quick to point out to the house that this service is relatively new, but it has already gained considerable attention and is providing the sort of service that people in the north-western suburbs,
certainly people in my electorate, appreciate enormously. I thank the Minister for Public Transport for giving us, and in particular the people in my electorate, the opportunity to use the service. I have no doubt it will continue to go from strength to strength.

Mr Batchelor interjected.

Mr FINN — I will get to the Dandenong figures in just a moment. They are good, actually. I have no idea why the honourable member for Thomastown has asked that question; he obviously has not seen them!

On the Croydon route in year 1, 8940 people used the service. In year 2, patronage rose to 11 739, an increase of a whopping 31.3 per cent. A minute ago I was raving about an increase of 24.1 per cent, but to get an increase in one year of 31.3 per cent must get you excited. It must be something you would think about for years to come. It is something you would write to your mother about. It is a superb result.

The honourable member for Thomastown was asking about the Dandenong figures. I am very happy to give them to him. In the first year the Dandenong service carried 10 760 people, which is by far the biggest number of users of any service. In the second year, the number grew to 13 454, which is an increase of 25 per cent. That is an increase of almost 3000 passengers on the number in the first year. That is a benefit for ordinary Victorians, people who need the service and clearly and obviously want to use it.

The Eltham service had 8784 passengers in its first year of operation and in the second year the number rose to 8944. Obviously in Eltham they are happy with it; they are continuing to use it.

On the Epping route in the first year the number of passengers was 4418. That went up in year 2 to 4853, which is an increase of 9.9 per cent. I understand the honourable member for Yan Yean lives in Epping somewhere, although I am told not too many people have seen him out there lately. I am told that he alleges that he represents the area.

Mr Haermeyer interjected.

Mr FINN — I suggest that I see far more of his constituents than he does. When they try to see him and cannot do so, they come over the border to see me! So the honourable member for Yan Yean would do me as well as his constituents a huge favour if he looked after them just a little bit better than he does!

Mr Brown interjected.

Mr FINN — Just turning up, as the minister says, would be a giant step in the right direction. In the first year at Frankston the passenger numbers were 9460. This is an extraordinary increase: in the second year in Frankston the number of passengers went up to 13 903. I repeat: first year, 9460 people; and second year, 13 903, which is an increase of 47 per cent. Such increases were unheard of before the Nightrider came along. These figures were such fairyland stuff they are the sort of thing the honourable member for Morwell might come out with in his speech on the budget!

Mr Hamilton — You know all about fairyland!

Mr Brown interjected.

Mr FINN — I inform the minister that Labor's dreams quickly turned to nightmares, not just for Labor but for all Victorians whether or not they used public transport. Under Labor public transport users were kicked to death. They were kicked from pillar to post and the taxpayer had to foot the bill for it. Under this minister and this government, that has changed in a big way. Once again, I congratulate the minister on that change.

The St Albans-Melton bus service, which services the other end of my electorate at Sunbury, is very popular indeed at Sunbury. I will get to the Sunbury bus service in a while because I would like to tell the house of the role the minister played in ensuring that the people of the north-west are properly catered for, in a way they had never been catered for before under the Labor Party. I have said it before and I will say it again: the Labor Party took the north-west for granted for decades and decades. It used and abused them. When it had finished with them, it threw them away. This government will not do that.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr FINN — Anybody with half a brain would support the minister. The honourable member may carry on like a two-bob watch, but I inform the house that the Minister for Public Transport has done more for public transport in Victoria in the past three years than Labor did in 10 miserable, bleak years. He has brought public transport back from the dead. I can only say, good on him!
In the first year of its operation, the St Albans-Melton bus carried 5976 patrons; in the second year that figure increased to 8002 — an increase of 37.2 per cent. Another massive, superb rise! These figures are going up like the unemployment figures when Labor was in office! It is magnificent to see people actually using the service. The private bus companies are providing the service. People want it and people will use it.

The Werribee bus service carried 6008 passengers in its first year; in the second year 7777 used it — an increase of 27.9 per cent. The figures are staggering. In the first year the Nightrider bus service carried 65 378 passengers. People were finding out about the service. In the second year, as people became used to it, the Nightrider bus service carried 82 363 passengers — an increase of 25.9 per cent. It is absolutely extraordinary that in one year a service across Melbourne could increase its patronage by 25.9 per cent.

I will again tell the house about those percentage increases because it is important we are fully aware of them when we consider whether the service has been successful. The Bayswater service increased its patronage by 24.1 per cent while Craigieburn had an increase of 20.5 per cent. The Croydon service had a patronage increase of 31.3 per cent; Dandenong, 25 per cent; Epping, 9.9 per cent; and Frankston, 47 per cent. Who would not give their eye teeth for such a response?

The patronage increase on the St Albans-Melton-Sunbury service was 37.2 per cent; Werribee had an increase of 27.9 per cent in usage. It is extraordinary in anybody’s language; the minister and the government can be justifiably proud. I again take the opportunity to congratulate the minister while he is in the house on the many reforms he has introduced in the public transport system in the past three years.

In the first two years of its operation the government decided the Nightrider service was a going concern, that people wanted it and were showing they would use it. A number of improvements have been made to the service. I talked about the addition of 4.30 a.m. trips on Saturdays and Sundays on all services. If you go out to a nightclub, perhaps to the Richmond Football Club, and have the odd champagne at Richmond, we would suggest — —

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr FINN — You would be able to get this service home instead of lying in a corner on Punt Road! You could get on the bus and go home on a safe, clean and marvellous service.

The service has been improved by four additional bus stops in the city area near major nightclubs. From what I have heard recently of nightclubs, one may appreciate that service because one may need a safe getaway! These stops are near the nightclubs; young people do not have to wander up King Street to get home. We have introduced improved lighting and passenger information at the city bus terminus at the city square. You have to tell people about the service and give them the basic knowledge to allow them to use the service. The government is entirely committed to that. It is extremely important to have improved lighting when groups of people are around after dark.

Lighting at public transport stations has been improved not only at the city square but also right throughout Melbourne. Major funds have been allocated to improve the lighting at railway stations. My local station, Broadmeadows, has been improved out of sight. Once that station was dark, dingy and often dangerous. This government has ensured that is no longer the case because the Broadmeadows railway station is now lit up at night as though it were daytime. You can see everything and everybody; it has security cameras — a real change from the days when the Labor Party said it would look after us! Thank God it did not look after us too much — we may not have survived the experience!

The service has been extended to Craigieburn and Melton. The government is now operating three services via the Crown casino, which has become the major tourism attraction in Melbourne. Anybody who has tried to get a cab there at 3.00 a.m. or 4.00 a.m. will know how difficult that can be — I have almost had to camp out there many times because it has been so difficult to get a cab! People appreciate the innovation, and are using that additional service.

We have also introduced a local $2 fair in the Frankston area, which is of great benefit particularly to local young people who are scratching for a dollar. That has been an enormous boost for them and I hope that assistance extends to other places.

Mr Bildstien — The Liberal government looking after the battlers!
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Mr FINN — Exactly, as the honourable member for Mildura says — it is only the National and Liberal parties who do that. We have an on-demand service to the halls of residence at the La Trobe University — a tremendous boost to young people at university who are not flush with funds.

Mr Bildstien — They can’t buy their own cars.

Mr FINN — They can get the bus home at 3.00, 4.00 or 5.00 a.m. for a minimal fee. They can save the money they would otherwise have spent on taxis.

They can study; they can do anything they want. I would not expect members of the opposition to understand how the system works. If my experience over the past three years is anything to go by, very few opposition members actually use public transport — and they think that trams are nothing more than things that get in their way when they are driving somewhere.

Mr Bildstien — There is only one in the chamber.

Mr FINN — Only one opposition member is in the chamber, which is pretty indicative of how they regard public transport. It is something opposition members use to try to catch votes at election time — but in between elections, who cares? The Labor opposition certainly does not. I do not expect opposition members to understand how the system works. I don’t expect them to understand much at all about public transport!

I will give the house a brief outline of how the system works. Firstly, there is a flat fee of $5. You jump on the bus at a designated safe stop, one that has been picked specifically for its safety features. Those spots are out in the open and may be near police stations or shopping centres.

Mr Bildstien interjected.

Mr FINN — As the honourable member says, safety is absolutely paramount, and that is a wonderful thing. A $2 local fare has now been introduced in the Ringwood and Lilydale area, which shows that the minister is committed to providing lower fares throughout the system. I look forward to the day the minister introduces them in the Broadmeadows area, where I am sure they will also be greatly appreciated. The $5 fee is a flat fee. You pay your $5 and you get off wherever you want.

Mr Bildstien interjected.

Mr FINN — I do not know whether David White, who represents Doutta Galla Province in the other place, has ever used a bus. I doubt that he knows what a bus is. Each bus has a mobile phone — another extraordinary safety feature — on which, for a minimal fee, passengers can ring their wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, next-door neighbours or whomever to ensure that someone is waiting for them when they get off the Nightrider bus. There is no waiting around in dark streets; there is no waiting for taxis or buses. It all happens on the bus: you get on and you are home in bed before you know where you are, which is always something to look forward to.

You can also call a taxi on the mobile phone — another great safety innovation. When you are getting close to your destination you can pick up the phone and order a cab so that it is waiting for you when you get to your stop.

Mr Bildstien — That’s magnificent for female shift workers.

Mr FINN — It is magnificent for female shift workers, because the taxis can be waiting for them at the bus stop. That happened in Mickleham Road, Tullamarine, not so long ago, while I was using the service. A couple of young ladies who had been in town enjoying themselves took the opportunity to go home on the Nightrider bus. They used the phone to ring a taxi, which was waiting for them at the Mickleham Road stop. They were able to get off the bus and jump into the safety of the taxi. I must say that taxis are even safer than they used to be because of the safety reforms introduced by the Minister for Public Transport and the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place, to whom I again extend congratulations.

The phone system has also boosted the safety of public transport in ways we have never before seen. The government is committed to the safety of all public transport patrons, not just those on the Nightrider bus service. One instance of that is the increased police surveillance of our trains. When I am travelling on a train, bus or tram at night it gives me peace of mind to see police patrolling the carriages or cabins, making sure there are no troublemakers. That is very important. It is another safe aspect of the service, something we can be justifiably proud of.

This month has been a red-letter month for the Nightrider bus service, because a 24-hour
7-day-a-week service has been introduced on the Croydon route. It is the 7-Eleven of public transport!

Mr Bildstien — Unbelievable! Do they run on time?

Mr FINN — They run on time, every time, which is something generations of Victorians have been crying out for. Who is providing a service to the people who need it, to the people who cannot afford taxis, to the people who want to use public transport? The Liberal-National government. The Minister for Public Transport has taken the needs of ordinary Victorians into account and is giving them services they need. This would never have happened under a Labor government. Only a coalition government could make it happen!

I hope the people of Croydon will take full advantage of this test service and that we will see Nightrider buses in other areas throughout Melbourne. When the matter is up for discussion I invite the minister to consider extending the service in Broadmeadows, Tullamarine and Sunbury, because I believe the people of my electorate would greatly appreciate it. I would use it myself to get home after a particularly late night in this place. That would be a marvellous way not only of getting home but of keeping in contact with my constituents and with the public transport system, something opposition members would never think of doing. Earlier I mentioned that in order to get the Nightrider bus service to Sunbury —

Mr Bildstien interjected.

Mr FINN — Modesty forbids me from informing the house of the role I played in getting the Nightrider bus service to Sunbury.

An Honourable Member — When did it start?

Mr FINN — It started on 14 May 1993.

Mr Hamilton — Were you the member then?

Mr FINN — I was the member then — and the honourable member might like to know that I will still be the member in 10 years time.

The minister visited my electorate a couple of months before then to open my electorate office, where he spoke to a number of my constituents. Honourable members might be interested to know that he spoke to a sell-out house that night: there was standing room only, and some people had to stand outside on the street. The minister took the opportunity of discussing the needs of the Tullamarine electorate with a number of people. During the office opening he undertook to examine the possibility of introducing a Nightrider bus service to Sunbury. He gave me the task of finding out whether local people wanted that service and whether they would use it.

I produced approximately 4000 or 5000 copies of a survey form and distributed it throughout the Sunbury area. I received an overwhelming response. The people of Sunbury told me in no uncertain terms that they wanted this great new innovation of the government's, the Nightrider bus service, and that they would use it.

I am pleased to say the minister stuck to his word — he is a man of his word and the government keeps its promises — and the Nightrider bus service was introduced some months later. I am also pleased to say the people of Sunbury have taken full advantage of it. It is a raging success. People are getting back to Sunbury in the early hours of the morning, when some people like to be out, much cheaper than was ever possible previously.

The survey was carried out over about a month and a half and the response was amazing. It indicated clearly to me that what the government was introducing in public transport was greatly appreciated by the people of my electorate. I am certain they will show their appreciation at the appropriate time.

It may shock the house to know that the service has been well received even by the Sunday Age. That is quite extraordinary! One of the very few times that useless rag has actually said something kind about the government was on the subject of the Nightrider bus service. I will read some of the comments made in an article published on page 5 of the Sunday Age of 16 May 1993, two days after the first Nightrider bus service hit the streets. The photograph accompanying the article is a cheery one. It shows delighted people who are happy to get home at some ungodly hour of the morning in a way never before possible.

Under the headline 'Nightriders: just the ticket for revellers' the article states:

They call them Nightriders — buses that carry late-night revellers home. But in the bitter cold of Swanston Walk at 1.45 a.m. yesterday —
I can relate to that personally —

the Sunbury bus was a refuge for teenager Sally Finch.

At 16 and unemployed, Sally didn't have the taxi fare home and when she saw the bus with the insignia of her local service pull in, she raced down and asked for a ride.

Driver Alan Hoppner explained he was doing a run to St Albans first and the Sunbury trip would be at 2.30 a.m. Relieved at only a 45-minute wait, Sally and her friend, Paul Maxwell, an 18-year-old year 12 student from Pascoe Vale, said normally they would have to wait, in temperatures below 10 degrees, for the first train at 5.30 a.m.

The pair huddled together, sharing a bucket of chips, until Sally went in search of a friend who owed her the $5 she needed for a 2-hour Nightrider ticket.

Melbourne's midnight-to-dawn crowd had few ways of getting home until yesterday until a new bus service, run by Manchester Unity with Public Transport Corporation support, made its debut. It met with reasonable success and officials believe it will catch on as the public becomes aware of its Swanston Walk terminus, near the city square, and its other designated pick-up points.

The article goes on later:

Collete Belmuda, 18, a waitress from Dandenong and her friend, nurse Katie Sherwell, 20, of Frankston, were the first passengers on the 11.45 p.m. bus from Frankston to the city.

'We've been to the 21st Century (nightclub) in Frankston, remembered the new buses and decided to go to the city,' said Ms Sherwell, who estimated the cost of a cab from Frankston at $45.

It would cost $45 for a couple of young people to travel from Frankston to the city in a cab but with this service they are able to get into town for just $5! That has been an enormous plus for not only the young people of Frankston but for those from the entire metropolitan area. The article continues:

Ms Sherwell said later, on her way home, she was not afraid of catching a bus alone —

that is a turn-up for the books —

but once at her destination she would get a cab to her door.

It goes on to state:

The buses have telephones on board.

Ms Sherwell would have had added peace of mind because when she got to her destination she could have had a taxi waiting for her, been able to jump in, get home and jump into bed before she knew where she was. The article continues:

Nightrider drivers will let people off in between stops but will not pick up from non-designated areas.

So drivers are more than happy to provide people with the convenience of pulling up at their front door if that is the way they want to go. The article concludes:

Driver safety is important. As well as having mobile phones, all buses are connected to an emergency service.

The drivers and passengers are feeling the benefits of the service. As I said earlier, safety is absolutely paramount in this situation. The government wants to get people home safely in one piece. It wants people, old and young, to be able to go into town, have a good night and not have the slightest concern for their safety in getting home. It wants young people to be able to say to their parents before they go out of a Saturday night, 'I will see you in the morning' and be sure they will. Until the advent of this service that was quite often a difficult thing to predict.

A matter that has got up my nose for many years has been the lack of public transport on New Year's Eve and over the new year period. I have been one of many thousands of people who from time to time have gone into the City of Melbourne to celebrate and see the new year in or to celebrate the prospect of a Richmond premiership, only to be faced shortly after midnight with the prospect of attempting to get home. Given the fact that there were many thousands of people roaming the streets looking for exactly the same thing I was, a taxi, they would obviously have had about as much chance as I had of getting one — Buckley's!

In the past we have had the circumstance of many thousands of people left roaming the streets all night without any way of getting home. That was a deplorable situation, yet I saw it happen time after time in the past. Under the former government the unions would not let the minister of the day responsible for public transport use the
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public transport system properly. I considered that to be absolutely scandalous!

Yet last New Year's Eve the Nightrider bus service provided all-night public transport for the first time in many years. That was clearly very much appreciated by people in the city because they used it in large numbers. In fact, last New Year's Eve — just one night — 4100 passengers used the service to get home. That is a pretty impressive figure. I ask the question, and I think it is a very good question: if the Nightrider bus service had not been available where would these people have gone? What would they have done? Would they have had to sleep under a tree? Would they have had to camp out in the City Square or in the Bourke Street mall, or would they just wander around trying to keep out of trouble and avoiding anybody who may look threatening? The Nightrider bus service delivered 4100 people safely home from their new year celebrations. That must bring joy to everybody — public transport users, their parents and relatives alike.

In earlier days when my friends and I were young and went into the city our parents used to worry. Parents are concerned for the safety of their children. They want to know on occasions like New Year's Eve that their children will be able to get home safely. The Nightrider bus service gives that absolute guarantee. You travel safely on the bus and when you arrive at your destination, a taxi or your parents are waiting. On New Year's Eve the most popular routes were Frankston with 600 passengers, Dandenong with 610 passengers, and Bayswater with 600 passengers. The Croydon and Eltham routes had loads of approximately 500 passengers. Those figures are extraordinary.

For the first time in donkey's years Melbourne has a 24-hour public transport service operating after midnight on New Year's Eve, which is something that we can be very proud of. I have said for years that Melbourne is the night-life capital of Australia. I do not care what anybody says! I was in Perth recently and came in rather late. I went down through the main Perth area to see if I could get something to eat. I thought they had rolled up the footpaths! The place was closed at 8 p.m. That does not happen in Melbourne. Clearly they would not need a Nightrider bus service in Perth because everybody is home and in bed by 7 p.m. In Melbourne it is different because Melburnians like to get out, they like to enjoy life and they love their night-life. Anybody who travels through the city can see that just about any day of the week, not just on weekends. Compared with Melbourne, Sydney has no night-life at all. Sydney is a boring place in comparison. Sydney would not need a Nightrider bus service, although I understand it has limited 24-hour bus services that were introduced during the years of the Greiner government. Even the people of New South Wales have been seen to benefit from a Liberal government, although they are going backwards at a rapid rate of knots since the election of that mob of clowns up there now.

It distressed me for years, until the introduction of the service, to see young people who go into town for a good night out having to practically camp out waiting for the first train. Quite often the first train on a Sunday morning is not until 7.00 a.m. or 7.30 a.m. People leaving nightclubs or functions at 3.00 a.m. or 4.00 a.m. are roaming the streets asking, 'What are we going to do for the next 3 or 4 hours? Where are we going to go? Will we make it home?'. A number of times I have seen young people camped in groups in Melbourne's cold, wet, miserable winter weather, huddled on the steps of Flinders Street station waiting for the first train home. With the Nightrider service that situation is no more. They are able to pop down to the City Square and get on the bus, and they are home before they know where they are. It is an extraordinary and revolutionary innovation for Victorians. We will never again see those young people out and about looking for something to do in the early hours of Saturday or Sunday, waiting for that illusive first train when it finally pulls out. They can now jump on this government's Nightrider and be home safe, sound and quickly ready to enjoy life and to come back and do it again next week.

As I said earlier, and it is worth repeating: this service is primarily about safety and about allowing people to get home in one piece after midnight. It is so simple it is extraordinary no-one thought of it before. Opposition members continually tell us that they are the champions of public transport. Labor Party members tell us they are the only ones who care about public transport and public transport users in this state. Compare their record when they were in government — the tram strike, the Upfield rail line debacle, the fact that the unions were running the show — to what this government has done with the Nightrider bus service.

The opposition finds it hard to believe that a government would actually go out and provide a service that people need without consultation, without asking the permission of the trade union bosses down at Trades Hall. But I am standing here
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today telling members of the opposition that that is exactly the case. That is exactly what the government has done. It has found out what people want, what they need and what they will use, and it has provided it. People are appreciating it; they are using the public transport system after dark and in the early hours of the morning on weekends. In the Croydon area the Nightrider is used seven days a week, 24 hours a day. It is a magnificent result for Victorians, allowing young and old alike to get about as they have not been able to before. Safety is the no. 1 priority. People now get home safely without a worry in the world.

It has been said that the government is converting the public transport system from a system to a service. That might sound a little clichéd, but it is not, because it is what the government should be about. These services should be about people. People must always come first. Everything the government has done for the past three years is because of people, for the people, and for the benefit of Victorians. The introduction of the Nightrider bus service is another example of the government putting people first. It has put Victorians no. 1 on its priority list.

The Nightrider bus service will go from strength to strength. I am delighted it has been established. I have used it from time to time as the service stops not far from my home in Westmeadows. I am delighted to see that the service has been established and I am sure that the average Victorian — I do not use that term disparagingly — is delighted as well. Victorians know the government will continue to fight for what is best for them. They know the government introduces schemes that work for them — schemes that are of benefit for them, which makes me extremely proud, firstly to move the motion and secondly to be a member of the government. I can say without fear of contradiction that this government is the best government Victoria has ever seen and it is getting better all the time.

In conclusion the Nightrider bus service is just one issue that has revitalised and re-energised Victoria. It has made Victorians proud to live in Victoria and is something that I am happy about and something that every member of the government is happy about.

The only people who are not happy about the service are members of the opposition because, given the circumstances and the improvements in Victoria during the past three years, it has given them little to whinge about. When the Leader of the Opposition — king of the whingers — has nothing to whinge about he is not a happy man. He would much prefer the roof to be falling in or even the sky to fall in, because that would give him something to whinge about.

The Nightrider bus service is another example of the government continuing to get it right — to do the right thing for every Victorian. Victoria is on the move and will continue to be on the move. It gives me great pleasure to move and support the motion.

Mr BATCHELOR (Thomastown) — The contribution of the honourable member for Tullamarine commenced at 10.50 a.m. and it is now just past midday. It is a sad and tragic occasion to reflect upon what the honourable member has said because it shows how far out of his depth he is. The honourable member does not know the facts; he misunderstands the issues and has no knowledge of history.

The honourable member has been set up and publicly humiliated. When the liberal Party was drawing straws to see who would present this notice of motion the honourable member drew the short straw and in doing so was told only half the truth.

The honourable member raised a number of questions about the genesis of the Nightrider bus service. He wondered why such a good idea had never been thought of. He praised the government for coming up with an idea that clearly benefits Victorians. In fact, the motion congratulates the government for introducing this service, but it should be made clear that for some time the government has tried to perpetrate the misunderstanding that the Nightrider bus service was an initiative of the government. Nothing could be further from the truth. The proposal was developed by the former Labor government and the honourable member was unaware of that. He was not told that during his briefing with the Minister for Public Transport and he was allowed to make a fool of himself. This stinging criticism is forcing the honourable member to leave the chamber. He cannot stand the heat once the facts are brought to the attention of Parliament.

The honourable member asked why this simple idea had not been considered by the former Labor government. He attempted to mislead Parliament into believing it was a proposal developed by this government. I have in my possession a document prepared by a Mr H. McKenzie, Group Manager, Bus and Tram Service Development, Public...
Transport Corporation. He is the manager of the unit within the corporation that is charged with the responsibility for developing new ideas. In a letter dated 5 August 1992 — when the Labor Party was in government — Mr McKenzie wrote to the then Minister for Transport about a proposal to establish a nightrider bus service. Under the heading ‘Issues’ it states:

An all-night bus network has been developed which involves nine (9) bus routes operating to a 60 minute frequency servicing the metropolitan area. The service would operate on Friday, Saturday and Sunday mornings with the first trip departing the Swanston Street Walk terminus at 1.00 a.m., the last at 4.00 a.m.

The services would operate to the following outer termini: Werribee, St Albans, Broadmeadows, Epping, Eltham, Croydon, Bayswater, Dandenong and Frankston.

Bus stops would be every 2 kilometres and where possible these have been located in areas where there is some form of 24-hour activity such as a Food Plus or a service station.

Each bus would be fitted with a mobile phone link with a taxi company to enable passengers to book a cab for their departure point from the bus. The buses will also be fitted with video surveillance equipment to improve passenger security.

Under the heading ‘Current Status’ Mr McKenzie states:

The service will not be self-funding and sponsorship is currently being sought. TAC have indicated that they will not support the service, the PTC is in the process of approaching large organisations such as CUB, Toohey’s, Telecom and Optus in an attempt to fund the service.

It is clear that the genesis of the service was developed by the former Labor government. It is inappropriate for the honourable member for Tullamarine to say this proposal was developed by the government and in doing so seek to accept the political kudos and praise for the establishment of the service.

That idea in its conceptual form was not only initiated under the previous Labor government but was also further developed and expanded. The detail that is the essence of the Nightrider bus service as it operates today was developed by the previous Labor government.

I shall look at the destinations included in the August 1992 proposals, and they are the destinations that the service ended up going to. They are Werribee, St Albans, Broadmeadows, Epping, Eltham, Croydon, Bayswater, Dandenong and Frankston. They were the destinations of the proposals made in 1992 and they are the same destinations of the service that the member for Tullamarine has sought to take credit for today.

He also sought to take great credit for the idea of having mobile phones to enhance safety and security for people using the Nightrider bus service and drivers. That safety feature was not his idea — it was the idea of the previous Labor government.

From the note by Mr H. McKenzie that I read into the transcript today, it is quite clear that the safety and security of both passengers and drivers needed to be addressed by a number of separate measures. They include the installation of a mobile telephone service, enabling people to ring a taxicab before they reach their bus stop late at night and the importance of locating bus stops, as far as possible, at activities away from the city centre that continue in and through the night, such as petrol stations and all-night convenience stores. It is clear that this initiative came from the previous Labor government.

The idea of having the service sponsored by a commercial organisation to help defray the cost of operating it came from the Labor government, but for the past three years the member for Tullamarine has been trumpeting around the countryside and in this house saying that the Nightrider bus service was his government’s idea, trying to heap praise on himself and his government.

We all know the tragedy of the honourable member for Tullamarine talking for an hour on information he knows nothing about. He has obviously been set up by the Minister for Public Transport and asked to proceed with the motion without any knowledge of what is going on. We can see how it happens upstairs in the lunchroom over a ham roll. The Minister for Public Transport says, ‘I’ll help you. You can talk up this matter in the house and make yourself look good’. Well, hasn’t he come a cropper! Hasn’t he ended up with egg all over his face? And it isn’t the first time the member for Tullamarine has done that. We see it on this occasion as we have on other occasions — the preparedness of the member for Tullamarine to rush in and end up tipping the proverbial bucket all over himself. It’s happened once again!
Mr Finn — When was the last time?

Mr BATCHELOR — He wants to know when the last time was that he made a fool of himself. It wasn’t long ago — in fact, it was during his last contribution because he thought it was his own idea. It is a question of plagiarism. He has to be the Helen Demidenko of the Parliament, coming in and claiming credit for things that were clearly not his. The Helen Demidenko of the Victorian Parliament! And there he sits, misrepresenting the people of Tullamarine — he is an absolute disgrace, and it was not the first time that he has made a fool of himself because it has happened on many occasions.

Mr Finn interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Cunningham) — Order! The honourable member for Tullamarine has had his opportunity.

Mr BATCHELOR — He has become agitated because he has been exposed, but I take up his offer to say where else he made mistakes and went wrong in today’s debate. Given that he would have had months to prepare his contribution, you would have thought he would get some of the facts right, particularly relating to his own electorate. But, oh no, he is too interested in hitting the high life in town to worry about the real impact on his own electorate. He raised the extension of the Nightrider service to Sunbury on 14 May 1993 — an initiative taken by this government to extend the service into his own electorate. There is no doubt that the extension of the Sunbury service into the city took place in May this year, and we heard him talk about the big celebrations that took place on 14 May when that occurred. He recalled how he joined the bus at Sunbury and travelled into the city, and thinking: Oh, here’s a blue bus; the route he described, but as most members probably do not realise, he got the route wrong! That is not the route the Sunbury bus takes. He has no idea what a fool he is. He described a bus route on the way to Sunbury that does not exist!

Mr Finn — On a point of order, the honourable member for Thomastown seems a little confused in what he is saying. We are talking about two separate buses, one to Sunbury and one out to Broadmeadows. They are two separate buses.

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order.

Mr BATCHelor — You are right, there is no point to it at all! We must allow Parliament to understand that the bus route to Sunbury is an extension of the St Albans Nightrider bus service. There are two trips back to Sunbury late at night, or early in the morning, at 3.30 a.m. and 4.30 a.m. They are an extension of the St Albans service. You get on the bus somewhere in the city or nearby stops and travel out to Sunbury via the St Albans service. At no time in travelling on that Nightrider bus service out to Sunbury do you go on the route suggested by the honourable member for Tullamarine. He has no idea. One wonders what he was doing in the city to get so confused. He comes in from Sunbury, joins in the celebration and, on his own admission, has a whopping time. The honourable member for Tullamarine said he enjoyed the celebration in the liveliest capital in the world. And he got the wrong bus. He either doesn’t know where he lives or doesn’t know where his electorate is, because he has no idea which Nightrider bus service he was on.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr BATCHELOR — You were lucky you didn’t end up going to Dandenong. Someone said, ‘You get the blue bus somewhere in the city up there in Swanston Walk’. You can see him, late at night —

Mr Finn interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Tullamarine is out of order.

Mr BATCHELOR — You can see him, staggering through the city, and thinking: Oh, here’s a blue bus; I’ll get on this one — and it takes him in the wrong direction!

Mr Leigh — On a point of order, it is clear that the honourable member for Thomastown appears to be following my colleague the honourable member for Tullamarine around on a regular basis, but I would ask you, Mr Acting Speaker, to ask the honourable member to address the Chair as that might discourage my colleague from being involved in the repartee.

Mr BATCHELOR — I thought it was important to read into the record the text of the FTC document that clearly identifies that the Nightrider bus service was a Labor initiative. I think it is important to read that in for the benefit not only of Parliament and the people who read Hansard, but for the honourable member for Tullamarine, so that he knows the route of the Nightrider bus from the city to Sunbury in his
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Mr BATCHelor — If the honourable member for Tullamarine has taken offence, I apologise. I will gladly withdraw anything he has taken offence to. He might like to list them later, and I will withdraw specifically, point by point.

Clearly he got on the bus and does not remember the direction it took. The route I read out earlier goes nowhere near the route he said he took when he described the great journey he took through: Carlton, Brunswick, Essendon, Strathmore and Broadmeadows. That is nowhere near it. He is hopeless! I can only wonder at the reasons why the Minister for Public Transport got the member for Tullamarine to move the motion today. It was an absolute blunder on the part of the honourable member for Tullamarine. It was obviously a great strategic action on the part of the Minister for Public Transport. It is very perplexing that the honourable member for Tullamarine should have fallen for this.

That leads me to ask: what other things in transport has the government tried to take credit for? Perhaps it is not just that the honourable member for Tullamarine is the Helen Demidenko of the Victorian Parliament. It is quite clear that in transport everything good the government does is based on plagiarism, based on taking other people’s good ideas and trying to take credit for them. It is not just on this issue that it has done so. All you have to do is look at how much political kudos this government has tried to take on sprinter trains. Again, sprinter trains were an initiative of the previous Labor government. Sprinter trains have been travelling to regional centres all around Victoria, providing a great service that was an initiative of the previous Labor government. It is interesting to note that not only was it an initiative of the previous Labor government and the government is trying to plagiarise and take credit for it, but it was paid for by the federal government.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr BATCHelor — You didn’t even pay for it! They come into this house and throughout Victoria and try to take credit for things that somebody else thought of and that they didn’t even pay for! What a hypocritical act! It is the height of hypocrisy. It just shows how bereft the government is of real and important reforms despite the reforms it could have undertaken in public transport. It doesn’t end there.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr Hamilton — It’s a long trip.

Mr BATCHelor — It is a long trip and it is a pity the honourable member for Tullamarine took it in such a state that he cannot remember where it actually went!

Mr Finn — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I take offence at the inference the honourable member for Thomastown has directed toward me. I ask him to withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Tullamarine has taken offence and I ask the honourable member for Thomastown to withdraw.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr Hamilton — We must be careful about the things we say in this chamber. The honourable member for Tullamarine was not trying to be unkind. He was just trying to describe the journey he took. We should be careful about the things we say.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr Hamilton — We have heard the honourable member for Tullamarine say that he was going to his electorate, and that is true. He was going to his electorate, but he was not going to his electorate at any time, particularly in the wee hours of the morning! The prospect is frightening and horrifying. Blue buses go to my electorate of Thomastown and the people out there do not want the honourable member for Tullamarine getting off the bus late one morning, staggering around and saying, ‘Here I am; where’s my home?’ It is a frightening and terrifying possibility. If you go to the Met shop, you can pick up timetables and bus routes. The honourable member for Tullamarine ought to go there and ask for a few copies of the timetables.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr Hamilton — I cannot accept what the honourable member for Tullamarine has said. He is being unkind and he is being untruthful. We are here to discuss the bus service and I do not think the honourable member for Tullamarine should have fallen for this.

Mr Finn interjected.

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Mr Finn interjected.
Mr BATCHELOR — I will tell you about the Upfield line in a minute. I want to raise another issue, another act of political plagiarism by this government in public transport. It relates to the extension of the Bundoora tram service to Mill Park, which will be opened next week or the week after. I understand 12 October is the date. They will have the Minister for Public Transport out there. I know he will not have the honourable member for Tullamarine with him, because he would be too embarrassed to have him out there.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr BATCHELOR — If you do, I suggest you catch the Epping Nightrider bus and you can get off and walk all the way down. If he needs to know any better directions, I will be happy to supply him later with a photocopy of the page in the Melways, so he can figure out where he is, where he is coming from and where he is going to — because in here he is going nowhere.

The government is already planning the big celebrations for the extension of the Bundoora tram service to Mill Park. They are actually going to ask Helen Demidenko to come and open it on behalf of the government. They are going to have her as the guest of honour, using words the minister has used all around this state. She is going to sing the praises of this initiative, using and quoting words the Minister for Public Transport has used time and again, praising these as initiatives of the Kennett government. And then she is going to claim them as her own words and initiatives. This typifies the approach of the government on public transport.

The only substantial improvements to public transport which have been of benefit to Victorians and which did not involve reductions in services are initiatives of the former Labor government — paid for either by a commercial sponsor, in the instance of the Nightrider buses, or by the federal government.

The extension to the Bundoora tram service has been paid for by the federal government. The Kennett government could not initially think of the idea and could not pay for it. The extension to the Bundoora tram service will terminate at McKimmies Road near the RMIT campus at Bundoora. The original idea was to extend that service further into Mill Park. This government cancelled that further extension to Childs Road, Mill Park. Simply because residents of that electorate solidly vote for the Labor Party the government took that money and used it for the City Circle tram route. That free City Circle tram route was this government’s one bright idea — yet, the government did not pay for it but took the money away from a Labor electorate to spend it in the central business district.

Today’s performance in this house by the honourable member for Tullamarine was appalling and one that people will read about with amazement. He said the Nightrider bus service was widely acclaimed and was heralded by all; he said there had been no criticisms of it.

It is interesting that today’s Herald Sun carries a report about the violence near the nightclubs in King Street, about the people leaving those nightclubs providing a violent ambience or atmosphere in the city centre. This article quotes a Mr Neely, Vice-President of the Nightclub Owners Association. He has been having discussions with the Minister for Small Business, who now nods his head in agreement — he knows he got on the right bus! Mr Neely had some interesting things to say about public transport in the early hours of the morning. The Herald Sun attributed these statements to him:

... clubs also urged Mr Heffeman to examine ways to boost public transport in the area, to reduce frustration experienced by stranded nightclubbers.

This man, whose livelihood and business revolves around attracting people into the centre of the city to join in celebrations in the various nightclubs in the King Street area, complains that the public transport services provided in the city in the early hours of the morning are inadequate. Today, for more than 1 hour, the honourable member for Tullamarine said the services are adequate. He quoted figures of patronage ad nauseam, albeit on a yearly basis, for the services as they spread from the city centre. He said the services were provided for the people who wanted and used them; those passengers travelled to the city centre late at night. Presumably the services are targeted towards young people attending nightclubs. However, today from the mouth of a person who operates a nightclub we hear that the public transport system to the area is inadequate.

Could there be some basis for Mr Neely’s statement? Where do the Nightrider bus services depart from? A close examination indicates that the main departure terminal for Nightrider bus services is the Swanston Street Walk. The buses that take most of the passengers home do not depart from where the nightclub patrons finish enjoying themselves — perhaps some excessive enjoyment in gathering.
NIGHTRIDER BUS SERVICE

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assembling and loitering, and whatever else people want to do. They are at one end of the city, but the means to get most of those people home are at the other end of the city.

Something needs to be done to improve the access of the Nightrider bus services to the people being targeted to use them. It is a simple and straightforward proposition. Many people want to quickly depart the city in the early hours of the morning after leaving nightclubs. They would be assisted were the buses to depart near to where those people are. Some buses actually go close, but they are heading towards the western suburbs.

If you live in the northern, southern and eastern suburbs, the Nightrider bus service departs from the Swanston Street Walk. Many of the services do not depart from, or go anywhere near the nightclub area. There may be something in this complaint from Mr Neely about the Nightrider service because the service to Craigieburn leaves from Swanston Street and travels down Collins Street only to Elizabeth street, then via Royal Parade to points north.

Those who may want to catch a Nightrider bus through Brunswick, Essendon, Strathmore — familiar-sounding suburbs — Gladstone Park, Broadmeadows, Somerton and Craigieburn find that the bus route through the city is some distance from the centre of the city’s entertainment.

The same is true of the Dandenong Nightrider bus service. Today we heard the honourable member for Tullamarine say that the Dandenong service carries the most number of passengers. It departs from Swanston Walk, goes down St Kilda Road and Commercial Road and then goes through the suburban hinterland — nowhere near the nightclub area in King Street. The Dandenong service passes the South Yarra nightclub area; it does not initiate from an area close to the King Street nightclubs, where there are problems of assembly, violence and people doing the wrong thing.

The same thing can be said about the Croydon Nightrider service. That service starts at Swanston Walk, goes down Flinders Street to Russell Street, Collins Street and Macarthur Street before eventually heading east, as you would expect — but you have to get to Swanston Walk to get that Nightrider service. The Nightrider bus to Bayswater starts at Swanston Walk and goes down Flinders Street before heading east along Wellington Parade all the way to Bayswater. Again, the Eltham

Nightrider bus starts at Swanston Walk and travels along Flinders Street and Russell Street. As you can see, even the services that head essentially north turn away from King Street.

The same is true of the Nightrider bus service to Epping. It departs from Swanston Walk and travels along Flinders Street, turning east before again heading north along Russell Street and up through Lygon Street. Again, very few Nightrider buses directly service the nightclub area. If the government wants to target the people coming out of nightclubs in the heart of the city, it must recognise the need to slightly alter and improve the Nightrider bus routes. I see the Minister responsible for Youth Affairs is nodding in agreement. I hope he will take up the matter with the Minister for Public Transport.

This is a serious matter, one that, if addressed by the government, would not only improve the Nightrider service but also reassure the parents of the young adults who go to nightclubs. They would know their children could catch the Nightrider buses without having to travel too far through the city on foot. Some bus services to the western suburbs have depots at the Rialto, which is a convenient location for people to catch the bus home after attending any of the King Street nightclubs. But most of the other people wanting to catch Nightrider buses have to travel long distances through undulating city streets in the small hours of the morning.

Although there are issues of urgent importance surrounding the Nightrider bus service, the honourable member for Tullamarine did not mention any of them. Instead of ignoring them, he could have played a constructive role, supporting his ministerial colleagues, including the Minister for Public Transport, by making helpful suggestions to improve the Nightrider service, to the benefit of the young people of Melbourne. But not one constructive idea fell from his lips. It is a tragedy that the honourable member for Tullamarine gave a misguided performance, wasting the chance to make constructive suggestions to improve the service.

One would have thought that, given the choice, the honourable member for Tullamarine would have tried to follow suit and keep up to date with an issue the Premier has been promoting. I cannot see why he would not have known about it, because it was referred to in reports in this morning’s Herald Sun. The government has been grappling with it for days, and the Premier himself has taken a policy initiative on it. Instead, the honourable member for Tullamarine continued the plagiarising of public
transport policy that he and the Minister for Public Transport have been prosecuting for the past three years. Not only should they have made constructive suggestions about the Nightrider bus service, but during the past three years they should have used their time and energy to address the fundamental problems in public transport.

This government has squandered three years of opportunities, allowing our public transport system to run down to the extent that it has become a laughing stock when compared with public transport systems throughout Australia. Some Victorians have sung the praises of public transport in places as far away as Toronto. You do not need to visit Toronto to see a good public transport system — even though it has a very good system, with its buses and trains running frequently right throughout the night. Instead, you need only go to Perth, which has excellent public transport. It would benefit Parliament and our community if the minister sent the honourable member for Tullamarine to Perth — preferably on a one-way trip — so he could see what happens in public transport elsewhere in Australia.

This government has chosen to use its three years in office — it is significant that we are having this debate on the third anniversary of the election of the coalition — to destroy public transport in Victoria. During its administration public transport patronage has plummeted. In its first two years some 30 million passenger trips were lost to the system. If the single most important measure of success is whether people continue to use the system, this government’s administration of public transport has been a miserable failure.

On trams alone the government has implemented policies that have caused people to despair. Conductors have been taken off trams at night and at weekends in advance of the installation of automatic ticketing machines. People are reluctant to queue to purchase tickets at night and at weekends because that causes trams to run late.

Tram timetables are a joke. Only recently has the Met had the audacity to put timetables back on tram stops. For years under this government the Met was unable to get trams to run to any sort of schedule, let alone make itself accountable to its customers — who had to stand at tram stops wondering whether trams were due — by posting timetables. If those customers had seen the timetables they would have known the system was an absolute failure and that the blame for destroying Melbourne’s public transport system could be laid at the feet of the Minister for Public Transport and acolytes such as the honourable member for Tullamarine.

The honourable member for Tullamarine was ill prepared. He blundered through his contribution instead of talking about more important issues such as the inability of the government to deliver ambulance services to people when they need them — and before they die! However, trams are not the only public transport facility the government last destroyed. I turn to the train network.

Mr Finn — What about Upfield?

Mr BATCHELOR — I will get to Upfield. I have plenty of time.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have listened to the debate since returning to the chamber. The honourable member appears to be straying from the terms of the motion, which deals with Nightrider bus services. The honourable member should come back to the motion.

Mr BATCHELOR — Mr Speaker, the honourable member for Tullamarine talked for a considerable time before he mentioned the Nightrider bus services. He talked about trains running late, tram timetables, the Upfield railway line and bus services.

The SPEAKER — Order! In that case, the honourable member for Thomastown is entirely correct and may refute what was said by the honourable member for Tullamarine.

Mr BATCHELOR — Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have been seeking to identify the reasons for the public transport debacle the government is responsible for, particularly in relation to trains. Trains have been running very late, which again raises the question of timetabling. Early in 1993, soon after the government came to office, it refused to allow the Public Transport Corporation to return to a fully operational timetable. In effect, the government kept the summer holiday timetable in service, and since then there has not been a return to a full timetable.

Is it any wonder people are confused when the government states it is trying to turn the system into a service? Everyone knows that for much of the time there have been no tram timetables and trains have been running on a summer timetable. The system is providing a service that is well below the level required and well below what was previously
available. People understand that the government is turning the system not into a service but into a sad and tragic joke!

The honourable member for Tullamarine wants to know about the Upfield railway line. The Minister for Public Transport has announced that he will not close the line, but he has not allocated any additional capital works expenditure to upgrade the line. The honourable member for Tullamarine has again fallen for whatever he has been told by the Minister for Public Transport. The government has neglected its responsibility to the people of the northern suburbs — the people of my electorate, which is serviced by the Upfield railway line — because it has done nothing apart from deciding not to close the line. The government has not taken a positive decision on the line.

If the government wanted to make the Upfield railway line secure and have it provide the service that is needed, it would do a number of things. It would allocate capital expenditure to upgrade the signals, the track and the stations, which are essential elements in ensuring the line’s continued operation. A reading of the autumn economic statement and the budget papers reveals that nothing has been allocated. The government is again taking policy initiatives while trying to get the federal government to pay for them. Time and again the government tries to claim political credit for ideas initiated by the former Labor government or for improvements it wants the federal government to pay for. The government is bereft of any creative or helpful ideas for public transport, and it shows no financial commitment whatever to providing public transport services. The government has cut the work force, reduced services, put the system at risk, created a culture of passengers not needing tickets and left people in country areas feeling isolated because of railway line closures, but it has not done any of the creative and responsible things that go to the core of providing decent public transport that meets the needs of the various user groups in the community, especially the elderly in rural Victoria.

Because you come from a rural constituency, Mr Speaker, you would understand the importance of trains in rural Victoria, particularly for elderly people. If people in rural Victoria are given a choice between trains or buses, person after person clearly and unambiguously states a preference for trains. On the six public transport routes on which the government has replaced trains with buses, patronage levels have been an unmitigated disaster.

The honourable member for Tullamarine can talk about increased bus patronage at 3 o’clock in the morning in Melbourne, but patronage levels on buses in rural Victoria are a disaster.

The SPEAKER — Order! As it is 1.00 p.m. it is my duty to interrupt the debate. The honourable member for Thomastown will have the call when the matter is next before the house.

Debate interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Ambulance services: response times

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Premier to the recent tragic death of another Victorian while waiting for an ambulance. Will the government take steps to address the crisis in our ambulance service, or is the Premier more interested in looking after his mates at Crown Casino when Victorians continue to die while waiting for ambulances?

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — While I was away recently I thought the Leader of the Opposition would have taken a leadership role and led the opposition on any issue, one of which may have been health and ambulance services. But for the three weeks until the start of this week the Leader of the Opposition was peculiarly silent. Only two references were made to the Leader of the Opposition in the two weeks that I was away, and not once in three weeks has the Leader of the Opposition or the member for Albert Park raised any issue concerning health or the ambulance service.

Mr Brumby — That is not true.

Mr KENNETT — What is not true? It is only today, as always, in response to a situation — —

Mr Brumby — And you won’t do anything about it. People are dying!

The SPEAKER — Order! Having asked his question the Leader of the Opposition should listen
to the answer in silence. The Premier, on the question.

Mr KENNETT — It is only when an incident occurs that we hear from the Leader of the Opposition — responding rather than leading.

Let me make a number of points about this latest incident. I think I can include members of the opposition when I express our sympathy to the family of the deceased.

Mr Thwaites — What about the next family? How many deaths will it take?

Mr Baker — Fix it up! We don't want your stupid answer. We want some action.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Sunshine will certainly get some action if he keeps on interjecting in that vein. I ask him, and other members of the house, to remain silent. The Premier, in silence.

Mr KENNETT — I have not yet received advice about whether the delay in the ambulance arriving at the household was caused — —

Mr Haermeyer — You had advice about the casino.

Mr KENNETT — I thought this was the opposition's question and that the Leader of the Opposition was genuinely concerned. It is obvious that he is not. I have not received advice yet about whether the delay in the ambulance attending the household was because of demand in the service generally or because of technical or human error.

Mr Thwaites — It was in the newspaper.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the opposition that unless there is silence I will call the next question.

Mr KENNETT — The second point is that each incident like this requires a coroner's report. Most coroners' reports to date have indicated that the delay in the arrival of the ambulance has not in any way contributed to the death of the individual concerned.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr KENNETT — Will you just listen for a moment! This may or may not have been the case in this incident. We will have to wait until the coroner's report comes in. We do know on this occasion that the individual had a history of heart problems.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr KENNETT — I said, wait for the coroner's report.

The third point I make is very pertinent. For a long time the Minister for Health has been trying to have the ambulance service accept the principle that in an ordinary ambulance — forget the MICA, an ordinary ambulance — one or two officers should be trained to MICA standard. It makes a great deal of commonsense.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr KENNETT — Will you shut up!

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the honourable member for Albert Park to remain silent. The Premier, concluding his answer.

Mr KENNETT — For a long time now the Minister for Health, in order to try to provide a better service, has been putting forward a program whereby one of the regular officers in a normal ambulance should be trained to MICA standard.

Mr Brumby — For three years all you have done is talk about it. Why don't you deal with the problem?

Mr KENNETT — One of the reasons we have not fixed this problem is because the union — —

Mr Brumby interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the Leader of the Opposition. Are there any further questions?

Mr KENNETT — Mr Speaker, can I just finish the answer to this one.

The SPEAKER — Order! If the Premier can give his answer in silence, I will hear him; if not I will call the next question.

Mr KENNETT — Mr Speaker, for some years now we have been trying to get the second officer in an ambulance trained to MICA standard. The only two groups standing in our way are the union management and the ALP.
Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr KENNETT — The member for Albert Park would have to be the greatest hypocrite, Mr Speaker: on the one hand he calls for these issues to be resolved but in fact he stands in the way, together with the union, of allowing us to train the second officer to MICA standard. If the Leader of the Opposition is serious — this is the first comment he has made on health in three weeks, when some of us have not even been in the state — I call on him to indicate to this house that he is prepared to have the second officer trained to MICA standard and that he will use whatever resources he has with the trade union management —

Mr Brumby — You're stopping the process.

Mr KENNETT — Mr Speaker, I challenge the Leader of the Opposition to indicate to the house whether he is prepared to allow the second officer to be trained to MICA standard.

Ambulance services: resources

Mr McARTHUR (Monbulk) — Will the Minister for Health advise the house of recent measures which have been taken to increase the resources for the Metropolitan Ambulance Service?

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Health) — In the past nine months we have increased quite markedly the resources available to the Metropolitan Ambulance Service.

In September 1994, just 12 months ago, the coroner brought down his findings on an inquiry into seven matters that had been sent to him. He made findings that the Metropolitan Ambulance Service had no case to answer in six of the cases, which had been put to him predominantly by the opposition. The seventh case is still under consideration. The coroner suggested that MICA officers be put into a situation where they could respond singly, rather than respond as they had done traditionally, in pairs and as a second defence, coming in on a second request.

We have made some significant improvements to enable MICA officers to respond singly. We now have 18 clinical support officers, whereas three years ago there were none, and those clinical support officers are trained to paramedic or MICA strength and to respond in that capacity. In addition, we have 11 MICA ambulances with dual capacity, as compared to eight some three years ago. Since July we have trained an additional 20 qualified ambulance officers and we have put on an additional five vehicles, with another four vehicles coming on next year.

Resources are available to meet the ever-increasing demand for the services of the Metropolitan Ambulance Service. But we cannot control the political opportunism of the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Albert Park. Last year 67 000 emergency cases were treated. There will always be one or two or three cases where there are problems, and the only time the opposition shows the slightest interest in ambulances is when one of those problems occurs.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I will not allow question time to proceed in this disgraceful way. The level of interjections is far, far too high. I ask members of the house to come to order. The minister, concluding her answer.

Mrs TEHAN — The government is always concerned about any incident where people die and where ambulances are called and do not respond. But the level of service that we expect is provided in 98 per cent of cases. For the opposition to use the exceptional cases and the grief of those families for their own purposes is just politically sick.

Hudson Conway: fraud allegations

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Treasurer to comments by the Minister for Gaming yesterday when he stated categorically that a final decision to approve the application by Crown for an expansion of the new casino had not yet been made by the cabinet. Is it not a fact therefore that cabinet will be making this decision after the government has been made aware of serious fraud allegations against Hudson Conway?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — I explained yesterday that some of the matters involved fall within the responsibility of the government and some fall within the responsibility of other agencies, such as the casino authority. The parameters for the decision have been set. As the Premier indicated, they involve an endorsement in principle of certain of the matters sought by the casino. They do not involve approval of all matters. The casino authority is in the process of resolving those matters and no doubt it will indicate its advice to the government in due course.
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Industrial relations: opposition policy

Mr PHILLIPS (Eltham) — Will the Minister for Industry and Employment inform the house of the government's response to statements made yesterday by the Leader of the Opposition regarding the Public Sector Management Act and the Employee Relations Act?

Mr GUDE (Minister for Industry and Employment) — I thank the honourable member for his question because the statements made by the Leader of the Opposition yesterday prove just how alive and well the Guilty Party is and that he, as Leader of the Opposition, is still yesterday's man. The Leader of the Opposition wants to take this state back to the bad old days of Labor, which had a burgeoning public sector that was dramatically overstuffed. The changes that have taken place in Victoria over the past three years have brought Victoria out of the red and back into the black. Massive change has been needed to achieve that.

The Leader of the Opposition would take us back to the ills of the union movement, double dipping and all the sorts of things that were part and parcel of the Labor movement when it ran Victoria. The opposition would take us back to the bad old days when John Halfpenny had a veto over the Victorian cabinet. No doubt Leigh Hubbard would like to see that! Look at what has occurred during the three years of the Kennett administration. The number of strikes fell by 84.3 per cent during the period from 1992 to 1994 — the lowest level of strikes since 1961.

The Leader of the Opposition would abolish the Essential Services Act and the Vital State Industries (Works and Services) Act. If the public is put at risk as a consequence of industrial action he wants to have his hands tied so that he cannot do anything or act in the public interest. Those acts have always been used responsibly by governments whether Liberal or Labor — and neither has been used during the past three years. It is very important that the Victorian public knows where the rabble opposite will take them.

The Leader of the Opposition criticised the Employee Relations Act, which is the fundamental underpinning of the minimum employment standards that the Prime Minister of Australia, the state premiers and the Victorian government believe should be provided. The act provides appropriate wage rates, which until recently were provided by the award system, as well as sick leave, annual leave, long service leave, parental leave and unfair dismissal and redundancy provisions, which are underpinned by federal legislation.

Mr Bracks interjected.

Mr GUDE — The honourable member for Williamstown says that no-one uses it. That is another of the Labor myths. More people are covered by the Employee Relations Act than were covered by the former Industrial Relations Act. If the honourable member were prepared to open his eyes and ears he would know the truth. Victoria has enjoyed tremendous employment growth as a consequence of the changes — a 7.3 per cent growth in employment since October.

Mr Sandon — This is riveting.

Mr GUDE — The honourable member for Carrum likes to hear only the bad news. The opposition wants to take us back to the bad old days; it does not want to know about the 140 000 jobs that have been generated. It does not like to hear that the unemployment rate has fallen from 11.6 per cent to 8.6 per cent, or that unemployment is now at its lowest level since 1991. They are the good news stories that are flowing from the changes in industrial relations. That is why Victoria is not only back on the move but moving ahead constructively.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to the widening of the gender gap and the differences in pay rates. The May figure for average weekly ordinary time earnings for full-time female employees in Australia was $573.30. In Victoria the figure was $575.80, so things are better here. The Leader of the Opposition likes to compare Victoria with Queensland, but the figure for average weekly ordinary time earnings for full-time female employees in that state was $543. The Victorian economy has been growing faster than the national economy. The percentage increase in average weekly ordinary time earnings for full-time female employees in Victoria in 1994 was 4.1 per cent — but the national increase was only 3.3 per cent! In 1995 the Victorian increase was 5 per cent while the national increase was 4.2 per cent.

Opposition members interjecting.

Mr GUDE — I know you do not like to hear the good news stories, but you will hear a little more. In Victoria average weekly full-time female ordinary time earnings were 84.4 per cent of the male rate, but the figure for the rest of Australia was 83.4 per cent.
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No matter which area of the economy one looks at, one sees improvements. The introduction of the Public Sector Management Act, the Employee Relations Act, new workers compensation provisions and the occupational health and safety legislation, together with the raft of changes that have been made to the industrial relations system, has meant that hundreds of thousands of additional Victorians are in employment. They will remain in employment, and the government will do even better in the next four years.

Ambulance services: response times

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Premier to the reported comments in today's press by Ms Liz Tunnecliffe, a spokeswoman for the Metropolitan Ambulance Service, concerning the tragic death of Mr Cheong. Ms Tunnecliffe is reported saying:

... it took 14 minutes for the first ambulance to arrive and 28 minutes for the MICA ambulance to arrive. But there had been three cases requiring a MICA in the same area, and ambulance dispatch officers had been forced to make 'the best use of resources'.

Does that mean someone dying of a heart attack does not entail the 'best use of resources' or does it mean —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — You look after your mates at the casino, yet you cannot fix ambulances.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I advise the government benches that the Leader of the Opposition is entitled to have his question heard in silence.

Mr BRUMBY — Accordingly, does that mean there are not enough resources, ambulances and ambulance officers at the Metropolitan Ambulance Service?

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I direct to your attention the fact that the Leader of the Opposition asked the Premier whether he could verify the truth of an article that appeared in the press. According to a ruling by your predecessor, the honourable member for Werribee, in a memorandum for the information of members, questions should not seek opinions, particularly alleged opinions or ask whether press statements are correct. On that basis I suggest the question is out of order.

The SPEAKER — Order! As I heard the question above the din, I do not believe the point of order raised by the honourable member is correct.

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — Those who witness proceedings in this place on days like this would despair at the way the Leader of the Opposition discharges his duties.

Mr Brumby interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the Leader of the Opposition that I have been very tolerant. His interjections have been most disorderly, and I shall not accept them. He has asked his question, and he should listen to the reply in silence.

Mr KENNETI (Premier) — Those who witness proceedings in this place on days like this would despair at the way the Leader of the Opposition discharges his duties.

The issue facing the ambulance service, as we have indicated before, always has to deal with illness, accident and death — it does not deal with those who are healthy — and in the vast majority of cases it performs a very good service. For every incident, there are literally thousands of times when the ambulance has arrived on time and the right services have been delivered. We are never going to be able to eliminate from this community the possibility that there will be from time to time an accident. Until you actually get the coroner's report, you will not know whether, in this particular case which you want to so misuse, if an ambulance had arrived earlier than 14 minutes after the call that was going to prevent the death of this individual who had a history of heart problems.
The bottom line here is that we have an opposition absolutely bereft of ideas, absolutely bereft of policies and unfortunately absolutely bereft of leadership. You are without a doubt — —

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr KENNETT — The Leader of the Opposition sits there saying, 'Boring, boring, boring'. You are increasingly seen as an irrelevant vulture and the public does not listen to you. The public does not want you or your members, because you do not stand for anything and you do not have one policy. We are not in a position — nor do I suggest any other government will be in a position — to put in place what the Leader of the Opposition is now suggesting, which is that we have an ambulance on every corner. That is absolutely absurd. We will continue to deliver an efficient ambulance service to this community.

Mr Sheehan interjected.

Mr KENNETT — The honourable member for Northcote interjects and says I'm an idiot. The public will judge that but we are going to use you to drive home your performance in the last government and the idiotic behaviour of the last government in a comparison with this one. They didn't call you Shifty for nothing.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier is now exceeding the terms of the question. Has the Premier concluded his answer?

Mr KENNETT — Almost. They didn't call the honourable member for Northcote Shifty for nothing.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier used an unparliamentary expression. I ask him to withdraw.

Mr KENNETT — I withdraw, Mr Speaker. The honourable member for Northcote was not shifty; he was just totally incompetent, as were his colleagues absolutely incompetent and dishonest in the way they administered the state. The one thing the Victorian community knows is that with this government you get an improvement in service and ultimately that continuation of delivery will be there for all to see.

Community Support Fund: Ford Australian Open

Mr TRAYNOR (Ballarat East) — Will the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing inform the house what the Community Support Fund has given to Tennis Australia for the Ford Australian Open?

Mr REYNOLDS (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing) — It is a pleasure to announce that the government today has granted $750 000 a year for the next two years to Tennis Australia as assistance with the conduct of the Ford Australian Open. New arrangements were put in place following meetings of the ATP tour and the grand slams committees. There was a real risk of the Ford Australian Open, which has been held here in Melbourne and, under contract, will be for a number of years, losing its status as a grand slam tournament. With the addition of these Community Support Fund grants over the next two years for 1996 and 1997, which is an appropriate use under the act, we will now equal Wimbledon, the French Open and, of course, the United States Open, for years to come.

It will mean an increase in the grand slam points available for the players competing here. It will be double the points in the next range of those tournaments rated below the grand slam, known as the Super 9. It will enable Victoria to continue to attract almost all of the world's best players to Melbourne in January.

Part of the conditions surrounding the allocation are that Tennis Australia must work with Tourism Victoria to attract more interstate and international tourists to this state. That is particularly difficult during the month of January, when tourists are more inclined to go elsewhere for holidays rather than come to Melbourne.

It would have been irresponsible of the government not to have risen to this occasion and made this allocation because of the huge benefit of the Ford Australian Open to Melbourne. The National Institute of Economic Research suggests that the economic value of this tournament to Melbourne alone is $101 million. When the world is focused on Melbourne Park for two weeks, 620 million television sets around the world in 100 different countries tune in and focus on Melbourne.

Huge numbers of tourists are attracted during that difficult month, as I said earlier. We know Melbourne is the sporting capital of the universe. It is already the home of the spring racing carnival and the AFL grand final week. Next year two more magnificent sporting attractions will be added to those two, when the formula 1 grand prix will be held at Albert Park in March and, of course, the 500 cc motorcycle grand prix in a year or two.
This builds on stage 2 of the National Tennis Centre that is just about to finish and secures the Ford Australian Open as one of the grand slam events here in Melbourne into the 21st century.

Mr Leigh — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, you will recall that yesterday outside the front of Parliament House there were some 3000-odd demonstrators. I direct to your attention a leaflet one of my colleagues gave me. It is about what is called the Public First campaign and contains a list. It concerns the security of members' offices. It says 'Rolling pickets at MPs' offices in marginal seats to oppose the sell-off'. I am aware that this morning some 15 people attended the office of the honourable member for Frankston East and about 10 people were demonstrating in front of the office of the honourable member for Cranbourne.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Leigh — You should be concerned!

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair will decide on the point of order. Will the honourable member for Mordialloc get to the point of his point of order?

Mr Leigh — As you would be aware, Mr Speaker, most of our offices are staffed by one person. I do not have a problem with that. The fact of the matter is these people are there to handle constituents' problems. I am concerned, and seek an assurance from you, that on Monday the office of the honourable member for Prahran — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! While the Chair is prepared to listen to a point of order, it does not allow the member raising the point of order to make a speech. Will you please come to your point of order as quickly as possible?

Mr Leigh — My point is that on Monday afternoon at 1 o'clock, these people organised by Trades Hall Council are going to demonstrate in front of my office.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Leigh — I don’t have a problem. I’ll be there!

I want to ensure that the staff of those offices are protected through adequate security, in case any of the demonstrators smash glass, or those kinds of things.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have heard sufficient. There is no point of order. However, I note what the honourable member is saying. I will refer the matter to the appropriate authorities. There is no point of order.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr THWAITES (Albert Park) — Mr Speaker, in light of the answer by the Minister for Health, I desire to move, by leave:

This house condemns the Minister for Health — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Kennett — Leave refused!

Leave refused.

The SPEAKER — Order! The opportunity for raising such a matter has passed.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member may act at the appropriate time, during the business of the house. This is not the appropriate time.

Mr Thwaites — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the house can give leave at any time.

The SPEAKER — Order! In my view it is not the appropriate time to raise a motion by leave. However, if the house grants leave, I am obliged to accept it.

Mr Thwaites — In order for the house to determine whether leave should be granted, obviously — —

Mr Kennett — Leave refused.

Mr Thwaites — How do you know?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! An objection has been raised to the matter. Therefore, leave is refused.

Honourable members interjecting.
MENTAL HEALTH (AMENDMENT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Health) introduced a bill to amend the Mental Health Act 1986 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE HOUSING AUTHORITY (REPEAL) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) introduced a bill to repeal the Government Employee Housing Authority Act 1981 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

PORT SERVICES BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) introduced a bill to make further provision relating to ports, to amend the Port of Melbourne Authority Act 1958, the Port of Geelong Authority Act 1958, the Port of Portland Authority Act 1958, the Marine Act 1988 and certain other acts and for other purposes.

Read first time.

DANGEROUS GOODS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr PESCOTT (Minister for Industry Services) introduced a bill to amend the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 and the Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY (FURTHER AMENDMENT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr S. J. PLOWMAN (Minister for Energy and Minerals) introduced a bill to make further amendments to the Electricity Industry Act 1993 and the State Electricity Commission Act 1958, to amend certain other acts and for other purposes.

Read first time.
Mr COLEMAN (Minister for Natural Resources) introduced a bill to amend the Water Act 1989 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

ROAD TRANSPORT (DANGEROUS GOODS) BILL

Mr BROWN (Minister for Public Transport) introduced a bill to make provision for safety in the transport of dangerous goods by road as part of the system of nationally consistent road transport laws and for other purposes.

Read first time.

APPROPRIATION (1995-96, No. 1) BILL

Debate resumed from 3 October, motion of Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer)

Mr COOPER (Mornington) — When the debate was interrupted pursuant to sessional orders last night I had just concluded exposing two of the policies of the Australian Labor Party that have been put before the people of Victoria.

Honourable members who were present will recall that the first of those major-plank policies is the legalisation of drugs; and the second is the *Melbourne Access 2000* policy, which the Leader of the Opposition paid a lot of attention to in his reply yesterday afternoon to the budget speech. The only thing he hung his hat on was a promise to Victorians that *Melbourne Access 2000* was the answer to their transport problems, and that a Labor government would be able to achieve everything the coalition government is in the process of achieving through the City Link project without any extra taxes.

I exposed that pledge, using a transport department analysis, as a typical Labor sham. The Labor Party pledge contains a $1 billion black hole, which again shows the Leader of the Opposition to be an emperor without clothes. He is an empty suit, and he has no policies. He just spouts rhetoric whenever he can, hoping that, like his predecessors in the years between 1982 and 1992, he can con the people of Victoria into putting Labor back into government.

The sad news for members of the Victorian ALP is that the electorate is far more sophisticated and intelligent than they give them credit for. Labor will not get back into power until it has policies that are accepted by the people as being credible, reasonable and in their best interests — and uttered by people they regard as credible and honest. The Labor Party has failed on all those counts; the people uttering its policies lack any credibility.

In the short time I have remaining I will outline some of the major initiatives of the Kennett government during its three years in power. They are worth putting on the record because people must understand — I believe they do understand — that this has been a government of reform and achievement. The government has not made empty promises, sitting on its hands and doing nothing; it has got out there and done the work that needed doing.

I will refer to the initiatives in headline form. The state's unemployment rate has fallen from 12.8 to 8.6 per cent, the lowest level in four years; and each day approximately $4 million has been put into new investments. Since 1992, 12 new small businesses have been established for every day of every week; and there has been a $3 million increase in the daily turnover of Victorian stores. Some 160 additional Victorians per day are being treated in our public hospitals, people who would otherwise not have received treatment. Victorians are saving $441 000 per day on public transport costs; and businesses are paying $416 000 less per day in workers compensation levies compared with what they paid in 1991. Some $500 000 has been spent each day on the construction and maintenance of schools. My electorate has certainly been a major beneficiary of that expenditure, through the hard work of the Minister for Education, a man who kept the promises that Labor made and never kept. For the rest of his days he will be recognised as the man who did a marvellous job for education in Victoria.

Spending on mental health facilities has increased by $60 million; and $600 000 more per day has been spent on road construction and maintenance than was spent in 1992 — and again, the Mornington electorate has been a major beneficiary of that work of the Kennett government. Some $2 million per day has been spent on the provision and maintenance of public housing — that has had a good impact in my electorate — and the spending per day on public
libraries has increased by 24 per cent to $74,800. That is a big change from the days when the Labor government cut public library funding and municipalities and ratepayers had to try to make up the shortfall. The government has turned around the appalling performance of the Labor Party during its 10 years in power. Last, but certainly not least, spending commitments for disadvantaged young Victorians have increased by $35 million.

One of the criticisms we hear again and again from Labor Party members is that this is an uncaring and dictatorial government. The record proves otherwise. This is a caring government, one which has delivered during its first three years and which will continue to deliver in the years ahead. This is a budget of a responsible and caring government that is also a good manager and deserves to be supported by Parliament. The government that presented this budget is supported by the Victorian community. I commend the budget to the house.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Dandenong) — I was looking forward to the half-hour contribution I intended to make in support of the detailed and analytical speech on the appropriation bill given yesterday by the Leader of the Opposition. He looked through the budget facade constructed by the government and focussed on the real story. Although the budget means continued pain for Victorians, it also contains perks for the Kennett government. It is a budget of secrets, because it does not tell the truth — and that is the aspect I will concentrate on during my contribution.

Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition made various references to the ways in which this government spends money on itself while arguing that there is very little money for the rest of the community. He referred to budget savings that could be made if it were not for the Kennett government's overwhelming desire for perks. An article in yesterday's Herald Sun reports the Premier as gloating about the performance of his government. In the article the Premier mentions that the government spends $500,000 a day on education capital works. Yet every day it is in office the coalition wastes $1 million on public relations, mismanagement, perks and government excesses.

Back in July I launched the Wastewatch Monitor, which details how the Kennett government has wasted $1000 million in its first thousand days in office — a million dollars a day. The analysis I have provided is detailed, and as yet the government has not even tried to refute it. When we look at the budgets of this government, past and present, and when we take into account the waste, the mismanagement and the perks of office, two things become very clear. First, the government's priorities are clearly wrong. Very little money is being spent on reducing class sizes, and very little money is being spent on overcoming the problems in the health system — although heaps of money is being given to consultants, advertising firms and public relations companies.

The budgets also tell us a second thing that is just as important as the first. All the advertising and all the money that is spent on consultants, public relations and the perks of office are designed to promote an image of the government as a responsible financial manager. But in effect it disguises and glosses over the government's wastefulness and the many problems it has created. Those problems are numerous. For example, today we have again heard about the problems in our ambulance system.

I want to add to the Leader of the Opposition's comments by saying more about the fact that although this government knows how to cut services it does not know how to manage when it comes to spending money on itself. The government has wasted absolute millions on consultancies — some $200 million the Auditor-General tells us — and on public relations, political advertising and contracts for mates. This government cuts money for vital services such as education and health and spends it on itself.

This is a public relations government. In my contribution to last year's appropriation debate I pointed out that the government is run by an advertising man — the Premier. The Premier has moved away from using private money, but he is now playing the Victorian public for suckers. They are the ones who are footing the bills for these expensive public relations and advertising campaigns.

The government has spent more on public relations and advertising than any other government in Victoria's history. Why does the government need to buy advertising and public relations? Why can't it get its message across through the normal media channels?

In an election year the budget increases the perks of office that are designed to con and mislead Victorians and to gloss over the problems in health, education, community services and transport.
Rather than spending money on fixing the problems of the government, the budget is designed to spend money to advertise them away. When you take away the public relations facade the facts tell a different story. I will now detail some of the excesses of the government. The budget reveals an increase in advertising this financial year from $30 million to $35 million — a massive increase in an election year!

A leaked cabinet document on the strategy for the government's privatisation campaign refers to how the government should use advertising to get its message across — not to tell the facts to Victorians or give them the details but to get the government's message across. That document states that its advertising and public relations strategy should be about 'massaging' the public, 'inoculating' Victorians and 'infiltrating' opinion leaders to get them to support the government's position.

The strategy of the government is not a strategy of telling the truth but a strategy of misleading and glossing over the problems. It is not intended to fix the problems but to advertise them away.

Examples of government advertising appeared in the Waste Watch Monitor of July. It gives a conservative total advertising bill from details obtained from the government. It is conservative because the government is secretive and reluctant to provide information under FOI or questions on notice. Those figures indicate total spending on political advertising to July at a conservative figure of $22.5 million.

Since July advertising campaigns totalling at least $4 million have taken place in a number of areas: a $270 000 advertising campaign for Linking Victoria designed theoretically to consult rural Victorians about their road funding needs. The last annual report of Vicroads tells us that although the government raised $147.6 million from the Better Roads levy, it spent only $43.1 million. The government spends money consulting rural Victorians about their road needs but has underspent its own Better Roads program by $100 million. That confirms the government is on about glossing over and trying to give the impression that things are running okay.

The $50 000 Bright Futures campaign of the Minister for Education for gifted students included the provision of a telephone hotline. Massive full-page advertisements as part of a $500 000 campaign for City Link appeared in the daily and suburban newspapers stating that no public money would be used in the project. Yet when the project was announced it was revealed that public money would be used and those 'heart bypass' advertisements were immediately dropped. The government spent $500 000 misleading Victorians!

The Health and Safety Organisation initiated a $500 000 campaign on the introduction of new regulations covering plant. Those regulations have outraged building workers. The government, when confronted with the political problem that building workers were concerned about the deregulation of plant safety standards, set up a hotline and undertook a $500 000 advertising campaign. Rather than dealing with the problems in that area the government decided to try to gloss over the problems with an advertising campaign using public money.

Following the campaign a month went by before a mail-out to employers who had rung seeking information about the new regulations was undertaken — a backlog of 3000 mail items! That demonstrates the haste with which the campaign was undertaken.

The Minister for Education has initiated the Keys to Life and learning assessment program campaigns. The government's Open House Victoria campaign this coming weekend has been preceded by a massive campaign of advertisements in daily and suburban newspapers talking about open government in Victoria. We know there is very little open government in the state. The government is again glossing over the problems.

Soon a third anniversary brochure will be placed in 1.5 million Victorian letterboxes. Over the past few weeks we have seen the work and families brochures from the Department of Business and Employment, which were designed to mislead Victorian families about parental leave entitlements. Soon a letter from the Premier will go out with all municipal rate notices because the government-appointed local government commissioners have been told to do that. The letter will supposedly explain how wonderful the government is! In a period of only two months an extra $4 million was found to present a facade of good government, but it is really about glossing over the real problems.

I turn to the amount of money being spent on ministerial staff and public relations units for government ministers. Information I have obtained from answers to questions on notice reveals there
are 146.4 staff working in ministerial offices at a total salary cost of $8.78 million. On average that is about $60,000 per person. Public relations and communications units in various ministries employ 113.4 staff at an operating cost of $10.4 million or an average of $91,700 per person. That is total of 259.8 staff on the public payroll at a cost of $19.18 million to Victorians promoting the government day in and day out and glossing over the problems.

There is no doubt that when the problems with the ambulance service were revealed last night the public relations machine — the biggest ever on the public payroll in Victoria’s history — was churning out lines for the Premier and Minister for Health. That is the way the government operates: all these public servants churn out lines for government ministers. Those ministers cannot handle it on their own, they need people to help them sell their message.

Honourable members would be interested to know that although there are 259.8 staff working directly on the government’s image, only 14 staff are working for the opposition, only 3 of whom are media people. So, there are 3 media people competing against 113.4 media people on the public payroll funded out of the budget.

It seems no restraint has been exercised on the number of people employed to promote the government, yet there has been restraint everywhere else in the public sector. We have large school class sizes because the government does not want extra teachers. People are waiting on trolleys in hospitals because wards have been closed. There have been cutbacks in other areas but no restraint exercised in areas involving the government’s massive PR machine.

The sad thing is that nearly $20 million of taxpayers’ money is being used to do that. As I said before, the government is spending more in this area of government administration than has any other government in Victoria’s history.

This $20 million does not include the advertising campaigns that I have referred to, the cost of publications and their distribution, the on-costs of administration of officers, and the public relations consultants and advisers who are part of the consultancy agreements. This is the minimum amount of public money being spent to promote this government. Which minister is spending more on improving the image of his ministry than any other? — the Minister for Education. At a cost to the public of $2.9 million, 27 people are out there doing PR in schools. Why? The government knows it has a huge problem with school communities and that parents do not like what it is doing, but it can employ 27 people at $2.9 million to try to get a message across to gloss over the problems of large class sizes and not enough funds or school support for children with learning difficulties.

The Minister for Industry and Employment has 10 people working in his communications area at a cost of more than $1 million. The Minister for Community Services along with the Minister for Health have 13 people working in this area at a cost of $1.05 million. And the list goes on. The Premier has 39 people working for him in his offices. Interestingly, the Premier is the only minister who has refused to answer questions about the details of the public relations media unit in his own office. Once again, this is a minimum figure.

What does the government do with all these public relations people — the 113 people in public relations units and media offices? It digs into the taxpayer bickie tin and spends a lot of money on political opinion polling. In July that figure was $1.5 million, and more has been spent since.

The government finds out what the public is thinking and constructs its public relations message according to the opinion polls. What sort of opinion polling has been done? AMR Quantum is undertaking, at a cost to the taxpayer of $500,000, a regular survey in marginal seats that is being funded out of the Premier’s office. The government is using that information so local members in marginal seats know what the issues are in their areas — and they can gloss over the issues — but it is also designed to fit in with the advertising campaign.

I will detail some of this opinion polling. The Treasurer spends $16,000 a year on consultants to monitor newspapers, radio and TV. When people write to the Age or the Herald Sun and criticise the Treasurer, we often see a letter the next day with the Treasurer’s name underneath it refuting what was said the day before. It is these consultants at $16,000 who are doing this for the minister. One asks why would the government have to employ consultants to work in this area, to assist in the writing of letters for newspapers for the Treasurer? The Minister for Industry Services spends $25,000 on opinion polling; the Minister for Natural Resources spends $209,000; the Minister for Roads and Ports, $125,000; the Minister for the Arts, $125,000; the Minister for Gaming, $56,000; the Minister for Tertiary Education
and Training, $99,000; and the Minister responsible for Workcover, $176,000—all designed to fit in with the public relations and massive advertising campaigns of this government.

Yesterday the Leader of the Opposition said the advertising campaigns we have monitored so far have cost taxpayers $50 million.

The Auditor-General in his last report to Parliament told us that this government in its first two years has spent $200 million on consultants and they reveal only $175 million on consultancies by this government. So $25 million is missing somewhere in these reports that the Auditor-General has been critical of, saying it is hidden in the government process and not referred to as consultancies. When we look through the annual reports to see how government departments manage themselves we find that of this $175 million, $91 million is not listed anywhere. For example, Melbourne Water tells us that all it has done is spend $13.8 million on consultants in 1993-94, but it does not tell us who they were and for what.

Workcover has spent $2.36 million. What for? They are not telling us. Is it opinion polling, media, public relations or advertising? What is it for? The Urban Land Authority spent $4.995 million; Roads Corporation, $3.75 million; Public Transport Corporation, $2.35 million; Transport Accident Commission, $2.4 million—and the list goes on. So $91 million worth of consultancies are not listed in annual reports.

When we ask the government where that information is it says a lot of it is commercially confidential. It is prepared to tell us about where the $80 million-odd goes but it is not prepared to tell us about the $91 million.

This analysis of the 1992-93 and 1993-94 annual reports relating to consultancies shows us that there is a $116 million black hole with no detail in the annual reports. We are not being told by this secretive government where that money is being spent. Why not? Doesn't the Victorian public have the right to know where $116 million of $200 million is being spent? Why hide behind spurious arguments of commercial confidentiality? Why is it commercially confidential for one part of government but not another? Why is it that in some parts of government information about public relations advertising campaigns may be considered commercially confidential and not released?

Given that the Auditor-General refers to $200 million being spent by this government on consultants, it is interesting to remember that in May 1993 the Deputy Premier in this house tried to criticise the Labor Party for a so-called waste of $224 million on consultancies over ten and a half years of government. Yet this government has spent $200 million in two years, and at the same time it has reduced the work force by 50,000 public servants. It has been dishing out massive consultancies to all its friends to make the government look good while it has been reducing services to the public. Yet this government says there is very little money for the things that Victorians need.

Let us look at a breakdown of the information we have. Where does that money go? The analysis that I have completed from the first two years of this government—from the annual reports—indicates that 26 per cent of all consultancies are going to legal firms. In other words, it looks like $52 million of the $200 million could be going to legal work. This government loves wasting money on legal work. It has wasted $10 million trying to oppose a State Public Services Federation move to federal awards. In two years $52 million is likely to have gone on legal challenges by this government against the community. The minister at the table, the Attorney-General, hounded the Director of Public Prosecutions because his legal costs were supposedly too high, yet this government has no hesitation in spending 26 per cent on consultants for legal work.

Approximately 43 per cent of all consultancies—some $86 million—has gone to financial advisers to government, such as Price Waterhouse and KPMG. Opinion polling covers 3.5 per cent of the consultancies, but that is a figure of about $7 million in two years. Opinion polling for what?—to get this government re-elected, to link in with the advertising campaign run by this huge PR machine of 250-odd people who are working for the government. That is the sort of money the government has spent. Clearly its priorities are all wrong.

Some $51,000 has been spent by the Premier's department on consultants to advise on the selection of ministerial advisers. Were the ministers not good enough to interview their own staff? That $51,000 could have been used to employ another ministerial adviser, instead of wasting it on consultants. An amount of $9000 has been spent to advise the Leader of the National Party, not the Deputy Premier. The Premier's department has spent $50,000 on
marking, media and communications strategy advice from yet more public relations consultants.

The Department of Transport spent $168,000 on an executive search for three senior positions. Four people could have been employed at train stations for that money. What is wrong with the senior bureaucrats in the Department of Transport interviewing staff in the department? Why do they have to go to an executive search company and spend $168,000 to do that task? The Department of Transport spent $42,500 to get advice on an automatic fare ticketing strategy. That was very frugal! Not to be outdone, Treasury spent $345,000 doing exactly the same thing. So the Treasurer does not want to be outdone by the pretend Premier, the Minister for Public Transport.

How much money has been spent by Treasury on the privatisation program, a program that does not need to take place? The government, in its first two years in office, spent $5.2 million that we know of on consultants in relation to the sale of the State Electricity Commission. We do not know where $116 million of the $200 million spent on consultants has gone because the government refuses to tell us. But we know $152,000 has been spent in relation to the sale of the Grain Elevator Board, $264,000 has been spent on consultants to flog off our ports, $2.69 million has been spent to flog off the TAB, $775,000 has been spent on an attempted sale of the Transport Accident Commission which never eventuated and $429,000 has been spent to sell off our water industry. The list goes on.

Since the government was elected it has spent $1 million a day on the perks of office, on consultants, on mismanagement, on excess, on political advertising and on polling. That $1 million a day is a very conservative figure, yet the government tells us there is not much money to do the things that Victorians need.

The government has a massive public relations machine behind it, with 250 staff, compared with 14 staff in the opposition's public relations area. Very equitable! The government wants to gloss over the problems it has created in education, public transport and health and community services. This is the highest taxing government in Victoria's history, yet if we got rid of the $1 million a day waste, every Victorian householder would have $670 extra in his or her pocket from reduced taxes or $670 per household worth of improved services.

This budget could be cut if the government decided to get its snout out of the trough and do the right thing by Victoria, to deal with the problems, rather than trying to improve its image, to make itself look better and to advertise its way out of problems. The government should deal with the real problems it confronts. The real analysis of the budget includes the details of mismanagement, not the facade the Treasurer speaks to us about.

Mr TREASURE (Gippsland East) — It is my pleasure to support the appropriation bill. The government is to be congratulated for the way it has brought about the first surplus in 34 years in this state. It is a rare and unusual set of circumstances and the Treasurer must be recognised for that.

We have seen in the past 12 months the demise of the state deficit levy, which has immediately put back some $170 million into the pockets of Victorians. When people get their rates notices this year and in many cases last year they will see significant cuts to the rates, which will be a great help not only to small and large businesses but to households generally. In my electorate, the businesses in the main street of Bairnsdale can expect a cut of 30 per cent in their municipal rates. As we all know, the past 10 years have been difficult for small business and the reduction will certainly not go astray.

The government is a can-do government. Its track record stands very well behind it and it will look even better in years to come, as it has more time to implement its program. The government’s attitude is inspiring businesses, which are now going out and investing. A record number of small businesses are starting up every week, which will mean greatly increased employment and greatly increased economic development.

The government’s assistance to business is both direct and indirect. The reconstruction of local government has been a direct help to business as it has cut down the amount of red tape. It has streamlined the system when people apply for various permits for expansion and the like. Planning is now becoming much simpler because there are fewer areas where a developer requires permits. This has been a great benefit to small business in Victoria, especially in my electorate.

Three years ago Pacific Dunlop closed down the then Gardenland factory in Bairnsdale and 80 jobs were lost. That was an enormous blow to the local economy which was felt not only immediately but
for months and years afterwards because of the loss of income to the region, not only that of the 80 people who had been directly employed but the 30 or more growers who were affected and all the tradespeople who serviced the industries — the machinery suppliers, the small businesses in the town, even the grocers and the like.

It was greatly welcomed when it was announced that a new industry would be starting up in Bairnsdale called Vegco, using brand new technology and new methods of processing and packaging vegetables. That company currently employs some 60 people and contracts about 25 growers for about 70 per cent of its produce. Everyone in East Gippsland is very optimistic that the company will continue to grow and expand. In fact, the company’s projections indicate that within the next three or four years the figure of 60 jobs will grow by approximately 160 jobs, which will be very significant and will bring it to a point where it is a much larger industry than the one it replaced.

The technology at the factory is very advanced, something honourable members may have read about in reports in the Herald Sun and the Weekly Times.

The standard of hygiene is extremely high, and I have not seen such standards of hygiene anywhere else. The factory is sealed off from the outside atmosphere. When the vegetables are picked they are chilled to 4 degrees and are processed at the plant within the hour. Once they are carted in from the farm they are no longer exposed to the atmosphere. The people working in the plant are dressed as though they were in an operating theatre. They wear long white coats, gloves, boots, surgical masks and caps. The processing area is sealed so that even management cannot just walk in. A footpath leads to the processing area, and the people involved have to key in a code to enter. People may walk to an inspection area that is like an elevated tunnel with windows. It enables visitors to walk through and see the processing but stops any contamination falling from them or their clothes. It is a highlight of the development going on in East Gippsland.

Patties Bakery has recently expanded its operation to enable it to take on another 50 employees, which means it will employ 150 people. It exports its products interstate and to various countries overseas. A large part of its success is due to its innovative product development. It recently produced a range of Mexican food — principally burritos, which are relatively new to Australia but which are very popular with young people as snack food. I believe they will become a household name during the next few years, because they are a delightful culinary product.

Another exciting venture is the extension of the natural gas pipeline from the gas processing plant at Longford through East Gippsland, along the coast and then to Canberra and Sydney. It will link the major towns in East Gippsland to a natural gas reticulation process. As well as being convenient for householders it will offer industry cheap heating and encourage the development of industries that may not otherwise locate themselves in East Gippsland. The pipeline is being constructed by a Canadian firm, Westcoast Energy, as part of a joint venture with BHP. During the construction phase hundreds of local jobs will be created. Once the project is completed it will employ about 60 permanent staff and will prove of great benefit to the area.

The timber industry is very important to East Gippsland. Governments of all persuasions must continue to recognise and support the industry. Some 80 per cent of my electorate is covered by native forest, so it is only natural that it has a substantial timber industry. The 30 or so sawmills in East Gippsland directly and indirectly employ a large work force that forms a significant part of the local economy. Neville Smith Pty Ltd is one of those companies and has plants at Swift’s Creek and Heyfield. It employs a number of people and is currently embarking on an expansion program that will result in another 45 people being employed at Heyfield. It has a contract with a Japanese consortium to deliver $35 million worth of value-added timber product to Japan over the next three years.

Both new investment and the expansion of existing firms are occurring in a number of areas. There is hardly a mill in East Gippsland that is not embarking on some form of expansion to try to develop value-added products and create more employment for the local economy. Bonang Timbers in Heyfield, S. M. Collins at Bairnsdale, Hallmark Oaks at Caru River and T. J. Andrews at Newmerella are just some of the companies that are expanding. Hallmark Oaks and T. J. Andrews have had to put in their own electricity generating plants because the local electricity supply is not sufficient for the heavy machinery the two companies require. They use the heavy equipment to cut D-class logs, a relatively inferior product with a low recovery rate.
In many cases the sawn product recovery rate is only 25 to 30 per cent because the rest is either gumvein, rotten or unsuitable and is used for woodchipping. The industry would not be viable if that timber were wasted.

It is important that the sale of woodchips from waste wood continue. It is too easy to say that trees are being cut down for woodchipping, but that is not the case. In East Gippsland no trees are cut down for woodchipping; but they are being cut down for sawn timber production, and the waste from those trees is used for woodchipping. There is still a quantity of waste East Gippsland timber that is left on the forest floor. During the next few years we hope that much of that will be used in some form of value-adding product, preferably in East Gippsland — but only time will tell.

Somewhat to my amazement, in the past week the Leader of the Opposition came out with some of his timber policies and made it well known far and wide what he wanted to do with the hardwood timber industry. Some 50 per cent of Victorian and Australian timber still comes from hardwood production. The Leader of the Opposition was inferring that we could switch over to plantation timber, that is, in East Gippsland, but for the economy of the whole of Australia.

It is very important that we keep our timber industries going, simply because we have the best-managed forests in the world, and we will continue to do so. We can cut hardwoods at the present rate in perpetuity. We have sustainable yields, which simply means we never cut more than the quantity that is regrowing. So we can continue to produce and cut hardwood at the current rate and not run out of supply. That is vitally important. If we look north to some of our neighbours, we realise that some of their management practices leave a lot to be desired. In fact timber in some areas of South-East Asia is being poached to such a degree that the local governments do not have on record how much is actually going out. It is known beyond doubt that in a few short years — that is, in the next 5 to 15 years — there will be a dramatic reduction in the timber exported from places like Malaysia, Indonesia and South-East Asia in general because of the rate of cutting in their forests and because of the absence of reafforestation that should follow that cutting.

Fortunately in Australia and in Victoria we are backing up, resowing and re-establishing forests at the same rate as we are cutting, so we do not have that problem. The point is we must look after our local industry and the forests and we must maintain that industry, along with a vital plantation-led softwood industry. They are both important and it is important that we continue at least our existing planting rate in softwood forests. I would prefer to see that considerably increased because projections beyond the year 2005 show that plantation timber coming on tap from that time will be significantly reduced.

The Leader of the Opposition’s policy is flawed because he has based it on the Clark report. Judy Clark has put out a report which was commissioned by Environment Victoria, formerly the Conservation Council of Victoria. That report is vitally flawed. It does not look beyond the year 2005 which, in terms of timber, is tomorrow. It does not look interstate and it does not look globally. It does not recognise the fact that we have a $2 billion deficit in timber exports and it does not recognise the fact that there is a vast difference between hardwoods and softwoods.

It is of grave concern to me that such reports could become the basis of the opposition’s policy when they come to deciding what they want to do with the
timber industry over the next few years. It is very short-sighted to fail to look beyond 2005. If they did, they would see that by the year 2015 or thereabouts the amount of softwood available in this country will start to taper off again, simply because in the 1960s we planted adequate amounts of softwood forests but those plantings dropped off during the 1970s and 1980s and even into the 1990s. They have not kept pace with the growth projections and therefore in a few years we will find again that softwood timbers — that is, our plantation timbers — will be a scarce product.

Further to the Leader of the Opposition’s policy, I quote from a media release of Mr Michael O’Connor, the assistant national secretary of the CFMEU. He talks about the disaster that is the Leader of the Opposition’s policy. The media release contains the following comments:

... his attempts to shaft ALP forest policy was a cynical attempt to shaft workers for green votes. The union also predicted that Brumby’s desperate and unprincipled action would backfire.

‘Brumby is acting like a loser and if he keeps this up he will be a loser’.

Mr O’Connor is quoted further as saying:

Brumby’s approach has been arrogant as well as inept. If his actions were not so dangerous in threatening jobs of Victorian workers he would be a joke.

Fortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, we have a system of sustainable harvesting of hardwood timbers in Victoria, but we have to be aware as time goes by of the world demand, which is rapidly outstripping supply. We also need to be aware that Australia has about 1 per cent of world production. There is an enormous opportunity in the future, if we care to take it up, to look after our timber industries as the government is doing and to continue to ensure that adequate softwoods are planted. If we do so, farther down the track we will have adequate supplies not only for our own use but for the essential export market. When necessary we can import specialty timbers we do not have and replace them in dollars with exports from our own production.

It is very important when speaking on the appropriation bill to touch on some of the capital works programs the government has set in place and successfully taken up in the past two or three years because it is a feature of the government’s program that such works have been undertaken. I can vividly remember soon after being elected in 1992 visiting a couple of my local schools and seeing rotten weatherboards, collapsed spouts, rusted downpipes and the like. There was simply a lack of maintenance through capital works spending. It was estimated at that time, if I remember correctly, that there was a shortfall of some $600 million in Victoria’s schools maintenance. I am very happy to say that over the past two or three years a lot of that has been set right and certainly there has been a program of capital works expenditure to improve the facilities, the buildings, the surrounds and the working conditions of teachers in our schools.

Some that come to mind in my electorate include Bairnsdale West, which has had more than $1 million spent on it over the past 12 months or so. That is a significant expansion program for the biggest school in my electorate, which has some 620 students. They certainly could do with the extra amenities that have been provided by that capital works program.

Significant works have been carried out at Briagolong Primary School. The school did not have a staff room or a meeting room where teachers could interview parents and it had a difficult working climate. Now a large amenities room has been built, and a different working atmosphere has been created for staff and parents. They are delighted with the work done there.

Cann River and Mallacoota are both prep-12 colleges. Without going into detail, works programs have also been carried out at those schools as work has also been done on a large number of schools in my electorate, but they are too numerous to list now. I recognise that the Minister for Education has done well in having many of those buildings refurbished to their proper standard.

The allocation of road funding, particularly in rural areas, has been a feature of this government’s activities. As in all rural areas, it is vital for my constituents to have safe roads on which to cart their produce to market; they depend on the roads. The Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place has done an excellent job.

Members who travel along the Princes Highway through East Gippsland may notice that in the past couple of years a lot of work has been done on that road, and that work is continuing. Construction of the Swan Reach bridge is about to be concluded. The construction of the Rosedale bridge, which is
important for all residents east of that location, is 50 per cent completed. The road has been improved with numerous passing lanes. I shall not itemise them all, but the highway from Stratford to Bairnsdale has long been recognised as a black spot area where many fatalities have occurred. Much roadwork has been carried out to rectify those problems. Several passing lanes have been constructed and improvements have been made to the surface of the highway.

Work has been carried out on the Omeo Highway. The citizens of Omeo rely on that highway for their access to the remainder of Victoria. Significant works are being carried out south of the Tambo crossing.

East Gippsland has three major hospitals, all of which have enjoyed major building works. The Orbost hospital is in the middle of a $1.3 million expansion program; the main medical part of that hospital will be replaced with a new building. The old section will be refurbished and become the administration centre. All medical facilities — including aged care facilities, ambulances, and health and community services — will be moved onto the one campus; then, the people of Orbost and far East Gippsland will have a one-stop shop with improved facilities. A major refurbishment of the Bairnsdale hospital is under way; the building of three new wards will dramatically improve the services at that hospital, and will give the district a country hospital second to none in any comparable area.

The addition of a new dementia ward, rehabilitation ward and a psycho-geriatric ward will add to the facilities already built in recent years at Bairnsdale; the extra work will give that hospital a much-needed boost in facilities. The residents of that area are fortunate that Bairnsdale has a hospital large enough to attract the services of skilled specialists from the Latrobe Valley, Melbourne and beyond, which is very important for country hospitals today. Instead of small hospitals being scattered throughout the district, it has an efficient regional hospital where people can receive the standard of service that is expected by urban Victorians.

I congratulate the Treasurer for the budget. It sets a record in that it records the first surplus in Victoria for 34 years. I hope more will follow.

Mr THOMSON (Pascoe Vale) — The matters about which I direct my remarks in this debate can be found on Budget Paper No. 3 at page 178 — that is, the allocation for the Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs. The office has had its budget cut by $1.7 million from 1994-95 to 1995-96 — a 10 per cent reduction. As a proportion of total outlays in the Department of Justice, its funding has moved from a modest 1.5 per cent to an even more modest 1.4 per cent.

The budget shows that the office has had its funding cut from $19.4 million to $17.6 million. It will now have only $17.6 million to protect people from rip-off merchants and charlatans. That reduction in funding reflects the fact that the government is not interested in keeping business honest, but is more concerned with its cosy deals.

I want to indicate why the Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs needs a greater allocation to cope with charlatans and rip-off merchants. I draw the attention of honourable members to two companies — Ear Care Pty Ltd and Better Care Pty Ltd — that are engaged in testing for hearing loss.

In the past couple of months I have received many complaints from people who have received unsolicited telephone calls from these two companies, inviting people to have ‘free’ hearing tests to determine whether they have claims against former employers.

After the people attend the tests, they are told they have substantial hearing loss and that they should pay $250 to the companies to enable them to receive substantial sums of compensation; figures of between $7000 and $15 000 have been mentioned. Having each paid the $250, they are sent for further hearing tests. They are then told that the hearing loss does not meet the threshold of 7 per cent, introduced by this government, required for successful litigation, or that the hearing loss has not been caused by activity in an industrial environment.

Ear Care is set up in a variety of locations, which may be of interest to a number of members and Victorians generally. It has offices in Station Street, Box Hill; Sydney Road, Coburg; Holmes Road, Moonee Ponds; Swan Street, Richmond; and Main Road, West St Albans. I understand it also has connections with a place in Sydney Road, Brunswick, with the Bulleen Central Clinic, and at 227 Bell Street, Preston.

As well as being contacted by victims of this scam, I have acquired information from the inside through being contacted by two telemarketers who worked at various times for Ear Care. The first, a
Mrs Lorraine Crupi, worked at the Sydney Road, Coburg office for some weeks several months ago. She told me all the telemarketers were instructed to ring people and to offer them free hearing tests for anybody who had worked in a noisy environment in the past five years.

The people were told, 'If you suffer a hearing loss due to work force participation, even as little as 1 per cent, you are entitled to some form of compensation'. For better or worse, legislation was passed in this place which set a 7 per cent threshold. Clearly, the statement made by the telemarketers to the people they contacted was untrue.

The telemarketers were told not to mention any costs or money. If queried about scams, the people contacted were told, 'You do have to pay $250, but if the claim is not proceeded with, you will get a $100 refund'. There was no mention of any further costs for solicitors and the like.

Lorraine Crupi took the company at its word. She organised for her mother to come in and have a test. Her mother was told by the consultant that she had a strong case for compensation and that she should pay over the $250 so that they could proceed. Subsequently, on 26 July she received a letter from the Ear Care solicitors seeking a further $150, which she sent off on 4 August. On 24 August she received a report back from the solicitors saying that it would be unwise to proceed because her hearing loss was not substantial enough and that they had therefore closed their file. There was no mention of any refund. The medical report they referred to is dated 26 July, so the solicitors must have had the report in their possession when they sent the letter saying that she had a good case for compensation. When she sought a refund she received a further letter that put her on an absurd treadmill, which I will later refer to.

At various times the telemarketers were told by their supervisors that they did not come over strongly enough and that if they did not get in more people the telemarketing operation would close up. They were told that it was better to start off with people with ethnic names, from ethnic backgrounds. They were told that 'Australians knew better'. I was also contacted by another telemarketer, who has remained anonymous. She also told me that each Ear Care telemarketer was instructed to bring in for a free test anyone who had worked in either a factory or a noisy environment at any time during the past 15 years. If the telemarketers were queried about hearing loss scams, they were told to say, 'That involves other companies. We are a branch of Workcover', a statement the telemarketers actually thought was true. They were also told to say, 'This is an accredited part of Workcover', or 'We are authorised by the government to conduct these tests'. They were told to say anything that brought in customers. They were told that people would be legally entitled to lump sums of compensation which could vary from $7000 to $15 000. Again, this telemarketer was told to ring people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Their supervisors said, 'Concentrate on ethnic names. Australians will not claim. They know how the system works'. And indeed our system has no need of Ear Care or Better Care.

Anyone can get a hearing test at his or her doctors or at a community health centre without having to pay for it. If the test suggests there is a problem, the person will be referred to a specialist. People can get proper advice through Medicare without having to make any of these sorts of payments.

Once you come in for an Ear Care test you are seen by a consultant who is paid by commission — for example, $120 for every claim that goes through. The consultants do not have any qualifications — you or I could become consultants for Ear Care — and the commission basis of payment means there is simply no incentive for them to be honest, even if they really do have the capacity to measure hearing loss. These consultants told people that compensation would be automatic and that any problems were only due to a 'government backlog'. They were also told to tell people then in the work force, some of whom were worried about making claims on their present employers, that their employers would not ever find out about their claims. That was just nonsense; nevertheless, they were told to tell that to prospective customers.

The Ear Care company has been paying people in cash, without tax deductions, up until the last couple of months when it set up a shelf company to try to regularise its affairs. It has focused on non-English speaking groups, and I have some of the material it has put out in different languages. The Turkish translation says:

If you have lost your hearing, even if a little, you should be paid for it.

The Italian translation says:

Currently, 1 per cent of cases where deafness has been caused at work warrant $600, with the average claim being somewhere in the vicinity of $5000.
The Greek translation, like the Turkish one, asks:

Are you unemployed, are you currently employed or a pensioner?

It goes on to say:

You may be entitled to a once-off compensation payment —

in the case of the Greek translation —

up to $5000.

The company is targeting unemployed people and pensioners, but Ear Care is not alone in these operations. There is also the Better Care company, which in the past has operated from Sydney Road, Moreland — and I will refer to two or three examples of people's experiences with Better Care.

A Mr and Mrs Cavaleri of Hope Street, Brunswick, explained to Better Care that both their employers were no longer trading and that they had no documents to prove that they had ever been employed there. But Mr Peter Adamopoulos, who is certainly a charlatan, assured both of them that they had cause to seek damages. He stressed that the fact that their employers were no longer trading and that they could not prove they had worked there did not matter. But once they had paid over the $500, they were told by Better Care's solicitors, Behan and Speed, that if they could not provide any proof of their employment and if their employers were no longer trading, they would not be able to make a successful claim.

A Mr Calvano of Denys Street, Fawkner, was told that he had a 58 per cent hearing loss and that he would be able to claim compensation for sure. Once he paid over his $250, however, he was referred to a specialist, who told him that his hearing loss was not work related but due to the aging process. A Mr Furnari of Glenfern Parade, Glenroy, received a home visit from Better Care. He was told he would be able to claim compensation and subsequently paid over $150; but he was later told that solicitors:

... believe that it is in your best interests not to proceed with the claim. As a result we are closing your file.

A Mrs Ludwika Rad of St Albans paid over $250 to Better Care at St Albans after being told that she had a substantial hearing loss and would be eligible for $2500 in compensation from her former employer. She raised the issue of proof of employment and was told by the consultant that given her level of hearing loss she would have no problem whatsoever in securing compensation. Recently Mrs Rad and her son visited the Better Care solicitors, Behan and Speed, but were told there was no point in pursuing her case because she had not kept any records showing that she had been employed at the relevant time. Of course, as the relevant time was many years ago, it is not surprising that Mrs Rad did not keep any records. Despite that, Better Care and its solicitors have refused to refund her $250. That is the kind of company Better Care is.

I again refer to Ear Care and to a couple of examples of the way it has treated the people who have had the misfortune to become involved with it. Mr Giovanni Mattiazzi of Grandview Avenue, Pascoe Vale, was told he would be able to claim up to $6000. He paid over his $250 and received a letter from Anthony Raso and Associates, the solicitors acting for Ear Care. At least Better Care is content with ripping you off for $250! But $250 was not enough for Ear Care; it wanted another $150 for the solicitors. Mr Mattiazzi was told by Anthony Raso and Associates that he had a strong case and would very likely make a successful claim — and he was asked to pay over $150. Once he did that he was referred to further specialists. He then received a letter from CIC Insurance rejecting his claim. He was given no advice whatsoever from Anthony Raso. Where are they when help is needed and your claim is rejected? At that stage you are on your own.

A Mr El Abbas of Jackson Parade, Coburg, paid over money to Ear Care and to the solicitors, Anthony Raso, and he also spent quite a lot of money on taxi fares. On 18 April he was told that he would very likely have a successful claim and that the company had examined the medical evidence, and so on. He paid over his money. He was later told that in the opinion of the doctor his current hearing loss was not compensatable. The solicitors, without further medical evidence, changed their minds about whether he had a valid claim after he paid over his money. In April Mrs Concetta Rocco asked Ear Care to discontinue her claim and refund her money, but it kept going anyway. It refused to listen when Mr Rocco and his wife took action to discontinue the claim. That is characteristic of its method of operation. It is not only the hearing test companies that have behaved outrageously; the same is true of the solicitors acting for and in concert with them. Two firms of solicitors act for Ear Care, one of which is Anthony Raso and Associates.
Mr Lindus of Coghlan Street, Niddrie, paid $250 after attending Ear Care for one of its free hearing-loss tests. He was advised by the company's consultant that he had a substantial hearing loss and would be able to make a claim against his former employer. After paying the money he was contacted on 13 June by Anthony Raso and Associates, who sought a further $150. The letter sent to Mr Lindus, which this firm of solicitors has sent to many others, states:

The evidence to date suggests you have a very strong case, and very likely a successful claim.

After forwarding a letter to Anthony Raso and Associates, Mr Lindus received a letter in June saying that his claim would be unsuccessful, suggesting that he no longer pursue it and pointing out that the company was closing its file. Mr Lindus has advised me that he was not tested for hearing loss between 13 June and 28 June.

One wonders on what basis the solicitors changed their assessment from likely eligibility to ineligibility. When Mr Lindus contacted Anthony Raso and Associates seeking a refund of the money he had handed over on a no-win, no-fee basis — these companies characteristically advise customers that if there is no win there will be no fee — he received further correspondence from Ear Care dated 7 August stating that the claim would be the subject of a further recommendation about whether to proceed! Now either Mr Lindus is not eligible for compensation, in which case the refund should be paid over forthwith, or he is eligible for compensation, in which case it was outrageous of Anthony Raso and Associates to close its file.

Similarly, a Mrs Gagliano of Military Road, Avondale Heights, was advised by Ear Care at Coburg that she had a good case for claiming compensation. After paying $250 to the company she was referred to Anthony Raso and Associates on 10 July. She received a letter from them stating:

We have examined your claim, work history and medical history and are ready to proceed. The evidence to date suggests you have a very strong case, and very likely a successful claim.

She paid $150 and on 7 September received a letter from Ear Care stating:

Your hearing loss is not compensable.

Yet the audiological assessment that was sent to her, dated 16 June — so it would have been in the hands of the solicitors when the first letter was sent — states that there is no claim and that she has only a 2.5 per cent hearing loss. These solicitors are defrauding their clients. Their conduct in this case and in others ought to be investigated by the Law Institute — and they should be struck off.

A Mr Collia of Loch Street, Coburg, paid $250 to Ear Care. The ground on which his claim was subsequently rejected involved a previous compensation settlement. When he wrote back seeking a refund he received the same bulldust response that was received by everybody else who requested a refund — he would be referred to yet another specialist for yet another medical opinion. That opinion could have no bearing on his previous compensation settlement, the reason given for rejecting the claim. The lawyers involved are not meeting basic ethical requirements.

Anthony Raso and Associates have claimed that thousands of people have received settlements. They have claimed that they have secured $181 million in compensation claims for clients. I invite them to produce the evidence of that success. Those who have spoken to me certainly have no evidence of it.

Ear Care also uses Vernons, another firm of solicitors. Vernons also act unethically. Mr Frank Sciulli and Mrs Lauri Sciulli of Barunah Street, Glenroy, between them paid $350 to Ear Care. Mrs Sciulli also paid $120 to Vernons under the no-win, no-fee arrangement that the money would be refunded if the claim was not successful. On 28 July, Vernons wrote to Mrs Sciulli stating:

... it is the opinion of the doctor that your current loss of hearing is not compensable... We thank you for your instructions in this matter and now close our file.

Not surprisingly, in view of the no-win, no-fee policy, Mrs Sciulli wrote to Vernons asking for a refund. Vernons replied on 29 August setting out an elaborate claims processing procedure, which they do when refunds are requested.

The procedure is that, first, the potential claimant must visit a specialist ear, nose and throat surgeon to have diagnosed the exact compensation or the percentage loss in line with the provisions of the Accident Compensation Act 1985. The specialist report is forwarded to Vernons, whose solicitors examine the contents and recommend whether or not to proceed with the claim based on the medical
evidence supplied. They then forward the recommendation to Ear Care, which either refers the claimant to another specialist or deems the claim to be under the threshold for compensation and so discontinues it. Clients are asked to be patient and to allow 60 days for decisions on refunds.

That is an extraordinary response. Either Mrs Sciulli has a valid claim, in which case by closing her file, which they purported to do on 28 July, the solicitors were clearly in breach of their ethical duty to represent their client to the best of their professional ability, or she does not have a claim, in which case they should not be stuffing her around with this absurd rigmarole — and they should refund her money!

This is a matter not only for the Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs but for the Law Institute. There are other cases of Vemons acting in ways similar to those I have described. The individuals concerned cannot be identified because the letters carry only initials and no signatures. Solicitors acting in that way should be struck off.

I refer to the case of Mr John Synan of Lascelles Street, West Coburg, who has made four visits to a specialist in the city on referral from Ear Care. However, Vemons solicitors will not let him see his medical reports and are insisting that he pay another $150. If the report indicates a valid claim why will Vemons not show the report to him without asking for further payment? What legal right do they have to withhold the records?

Finally, the case of Mr Galetta of Grevillia Road, Oak Park, takes the cake. Mr Galetta paid $150 and was referred to Dr Boman Irani on 30 June. Dr Irani advised him that there was nothing wrong with his hearing and that he simply had wax in his ears. On 25 July Mr Galetta received a letter from Vemons stating that he had a strong case and, very likely, a successful claim. It attached a bill for $150. On 11 September, Vemens sent him another bill for $150, stating:

You do have a claim of 10.3 per cent hearing loss which, based on the 1995 Table of Maims, equates to cash compensation of $6415 should you have proceeded.

Yet his doctor told him he simply had wax in his ears. This matter should also be the subject of an investigation by the Law Institute. Any firm that is prepared to act in this way should not be practising law.

It is a shame that people are being ripped off in this fashion. People can get free hearing tests at any time from general practitioners or community health centres; and they can be referred to specialists and be entitled to claim under Medicare. If people really have cases for compensation, reputable law firms who look after workers, such as Maurice Blackburn, Slater and Gordon and Holding Redlich, will try to help.

People have been coming to my office by the dozen with these sorts of experiences. I have taken the matters up with both Ear Care and Better Care, and I have been able to obtain a number of refunds from both companies. I am, however, sick and tired of negotiating with crooks who come up with every excuse under the sun to avoid refunding people their money. I spent 3 hours one day with a Mr Trevor McTaggart from Ear Care and secured a couple of $400 refunds. He is certainly one of the biggest con men I have ever met. He says he is an ex-builder's labourer and that he is on the worker's side. That is a lot of garbage. Exploiting retired people of Italian, Greek, Lebanese and Arabic-speaking backgrounds has nothing whatsoever to do with being on the side of workers. It is a shabby and shameful way to earn a living. If I want to spend hours listening to charlatans all I need to do is to come here!

What is needed is for the Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs to conduct a full investigation into the practices of Ear Care and Better Care and their solicitors. I have nothing in principle against contingency fees, but if we are going to have that sort of system it ought to be fair dinkum where solicitors do not claim money up-front in the way these companies are doing, and only seek to recover a proportion of the claim in the event that the companies are successful in actually securing money for people who have suffered from hearing loss.

I move to another matter relating to the extent of the resources available to the Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs. Some months ago I wrote to the office asking it to investigate whether a Mr Neil Thomas who operates a church under the name Neil Thomas Ministries was in breach of the Fundraising Appeals Act. That act requires that you have the approval of the Attorney-General if you are going to conduct fundraising unless you fall within certain categories of exception. It is my belief that Mr Thomas and his so-called church does not fall within any of those recognised categories. A person from the Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs contacted me a while ago to tell me he or she was
the contact person and would be in touch. That person has not been in touch, which suggests to me, as do my own dealings with the office, that it is under-resourced. It needs more resources to be able to tackle the problems in our community caused by companies being able to rip off people and, in the case of Neil Thomas, being able to rip off other companies and not be brought to book.

I am particularly concerned that funding for the Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs has been cut by $1.7 million. Hundreds of people throughout the northern suburbs — and there may well be thousands of people in other parts of Victoria — have been conned out of these amounts of money. One of the people who came to my office said the hearing test companies remind him of the Mafia. At least they leave you with your life intact — they just want your money! It is regrettable that this can go on apparently without concerted action on the part of government to redress it.

I have spoken to the Minister responsible for Workcover, who is interested in the matter. He has expressed some concern to me about the activities of these companies, but the Office of Fair Trading and Business Affairs must endeavour to secure refunds for people who have paid over this money in good faith, having been told that they would be eligible for compensation from their former employers, only to be referred for further tests and told to go away. It is a fraud on the workers themselves, and it is a fraud on those employers who get caught up in all these small claims. It is also a fraud on Medicare, which has to foot the bill for an awful lot of unnecessary tests. It is something that needs concerted action from the government and from the Minister for Fair Trading.

Mr KILGOUR (Shepparton) — It is with great pride that I support the Treasurer in the appropriation debate, particularly when I think back on what this government has done for Victoria over the past three years after the incredible mismanagement throughout the 1980s and the 10 years of Labor government.

When I was first elected to this house four years ago and saw that decaying, decrepit government that was leading Victoria down the path to a future that nobody could wish to think about, a future that was leaving our children in one of the worst financial positions that any children could ever be in, people simply laughed and asked, 'Well, where is Victoria heading? Nowhere'. Victoria is now really on the move. Over the past three years we have had a magnificent turnaround of our current account. We now have a sustainable current account surplus, which speaks volumes for the people who have been prepared to put their backs to the wall to ensure that Victorians have the prospect of a successful state in which to raise their children.

The debt level of the state is still too high, but it is not easy to bring a state back from the financial disaster of the Labor government in a few short years. It will be some time yet before we get the job done. It will be after the turn of the century before we see the full benefit of the magnificent work that is being carried out in Victoria. Taxes are still too high and must be reduced if we are to remain internationally competitive. It is in that area that we see the problems businesses in my electorate face trying to trade overseas.

To ensure that we are internationally competitive we must reduce input costs so that our businesses can export, particularly to take advantage of the South-East Asian market that many of our food businesses are moving into. This government is hell bent on leaving our children a legacy of prosperity, not debt, as we have seen in the past. The Premier, the Treasurer and the other people in cabinet must be heartily congratulated on what they have done. It has not been easy; it has not been without people being concerned about change. It is the sort of change that people do not adapt to easily. When one walks around the streets and talks to the people in country Victoria, particularly in my electorate, they say, 'We know it was not easy but it had to be done. We are now seeing the benefit and we will see continued benefits in the future'. As a government we must continue to show strong leadership and provide responsible management. We are still suffering from the irresponsible government of the Labor years and will for many years to come. It is because of that irresponsibility that we have had to turn around and ensure people that they have something to look forward to in the future. We must ensure that we move into the 21st century as the no. 1 state in Australia. That is certainly on the cards because of what the Treasurer has been able to do in supporting our state by way of this excellent budget.

It is interesting to travel around Australia. I was at a very enjoyable conference in Darwin a few weeks ago. People from New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia came up to the Victorians and commented that they should take a leaf out of our book. They said the Premier of Victoria is to be congratulated on doing what he has done in Victoria, for being strong and showing leadership.
Yet a few short years ago when I attended a similar conference we had to hang our heads in shame. People asked, 'What are you doing in Victoria? You have to do something because you are in a disastrous position'. Now we can walk around with our heads held high, knowing we are on the move, that we are looking towards prosperity in the future for our children and grandchildren. We are setting an example for other states. It is a great pleasure that people from other states talk about what we have done. They want to take a leaf out of our book, to ensure that the changes that have been made to the public service and the culture in the work force are made in their states.

No longer do people talk about the financial catastrophes that we had, which do not need mentioning again because they are too numerous to mention. Those financial catastrophes are now a thing of the past and we are looking to the future to ensure that they do not happen again.

Unemployment has fallen from 12.6 per cent to 8.6 per cent. As the Premier said earlier this week, the myth that moving people from the public sector would greatly increase unemployment has been exploded. It is interesting to see what has happened in the light of the opposition's lies and innuendoes about the sacking of public servants. It has been interesting to see how many public servants come into my office saying, 'We want a package because we want to go into our own business. We can see that we can pay off our house and borrow money to go into small business'.

Starting up a business, whether it is a corner store or a computer business, has opened up a completely new area for the former teachers, hospital workers and public servants, who now realise there is something better in life than being simply paid by the government and worrying about whether funding would continue in the future. They now have the opportunity to go into the private sector and work harder than they ever have before but reap the benefits of being in business. Small business is helping to turn the state around.

Some people in Shepparton have said it is a pity we do not still have the abattoir. Some 450 people were employed there in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but that abattoir was completely ruined by Wally Curran and his mates in the Meat Workers Union. They said, 'We are not prepared to have people work in this fashion; we want to see the owners go broke.' Yes, it went broke and some 450 people in Shepparton were put out of work immediately. It took some time for the private sector to take up those jobs.

We do not need an abattoir employing 450 people to be at the whim of the Wally Currans of this world. We need 200 businesses employing two people each, giving people a wider range of skills, allowing them to choose what business they want to go into, and giving them the opportunity to be trained. We have put together incentives for small businesses giving them the opportunity to train people to get greater benefits in the future. It has been interesting to see public servants move into the private sector, to take on businesses and to be employed in other areas. They are working harder but they are receiving greater benefits from it. We need to congratulate the government on what it has done in the past three years.

On a television program the other day I heard somebody talking about the magnificent Treasurer in Victoria. I wholly support that comment because the Treasurer has been the driving force. He has come to electorates such as mine and faced the people who said, 'Why do we need that change?'. At Shepparton all the kindergarten teachers were concerned about funding, and the Treasurer was prepared to talk to those people and explain why we needed to do what we were doing. The Treasurer has had to bear the brunt of the concerns of people, so rightly it should be the Treasurer who is now called the magnificent Treasurer of Victoria.

The Treasurer's predecessors did not have very big shoes to fill, but who would have wanted to be in the position of the Treasurer? He could see the state going down the drain, and he has had on his shoulders the responsibility of righting that situation, knowing that he had the union management against him and that the opposition was not prepared to listen to what he was putting forward. But, as with the old-fashioned football teams, through guts and determination this state has now been turned around, and the Treasurer must take a lot of responsibility for that. He will be hailed for many years to come by future generations as the person who turned Victoria around. He will be seen as the greatest Treasurer ever in the state of Victoria.

A sustainable current account surplus has been achieved one year before the target. Probably even the Treasurer, when he started on this incredible job, did not expect that that would happen. But he has put his shoulder to the wheel, with the whole government behind him. The government has never been more closely knit. The coalition between the
National Party and the Liberal Party, between the country and the city, has worked magnificently. Country Victoria is getting the development it needs, and the tram tracks no longer finish at Coburg or Dandenong, as they did for so many years under the Labor government. Country people are reaping the benefits from having people in government who understand the needs of country Victoria.

Victoria had $4 billion in unfunded liabilities, which the Labor government did not care about. That is now being addressed. Business investment, not only in country Victoria but across the state, is up by 45 per cent. Is that from a state that thinks it is going down the drain? No, it is from a state that people have some confidence in. They look at Victoria and say Victoria is the place to be, Victoria is the place where we need to invest. Why not invest in Victoria instead of going interstate?

Nowhere is that confidence better exemplified than in the country areas of my electorate in the food bowl of Australia, the great Goulburn Valley. The food industry is leading the way in investment in this state. The best example of that is that on Friday — and I am sure the honourable member for Murray Valley will be there — the Premier will open the $80 million extension of the Kraft food factory. Kraft can see that investment in Victoria will do great things for the company and great things for Strathmerton and the Murray Valley. Kraft is prepared to invest where good clean food is grown, food that we can export right across the world. There is no Chernobyl here. We have good clean food that is able to be packaged on site, within a few kilometres of the dairy farms, and exported across the world. An $80 million expansion will do a tremendous amount of good for Strathmerton, for Kraft and for the Murray Valley area.

The town of Tatura is really buzzing at the moment with the added investment in Tatura Milk Industries by the Rosella company. Earlier this year the Premier opened a new extension by the Rosella company, built at a cost of more than $20 million, to enable the company to process food close to where it is grown. That is what we need to do in the Goulburn Valley. The state was prepared to provide incentives to Rosella and to support the extension to its business, bringing the manufacturing and the packaging of the product closer to where the food is grown.

We do it well in the Goulburn Valley. We have a magnificent irrigation system that has turned the dry and dusty wheat and sheep area of the 1930s and 1940s into the food bowl of Australia that we have today. Those benefits must be built on. The benefits of irrigation mean we have the best farmers in the world producing the best quality milk and food products in the world. Those products are processed in the Goulburn Valley by companies such as Rosella and Tatura Milk Industries.

Tatura is also buzzing from winning the premiership in the Goulburn Valley league last week, when it won its first grand final for 42 years.

Mr Heffernan — How much did they win by?

Mr KILGOUR — Seventy-six points. It was a magnificent performance against Echuca. That will really help the town along when those people go back to work in the food processing areas after the celebrations. Just out of Tatura is the Institute of Sustainable Irrigated Agriculture, where the government has spent $5 million to give the scientists the opportunity to solve the problems caused by salinity and come up with what is necessary to grow the foods to send to South-East Asia and the markets that are expanding on the other side of the world.

The government is showing the way by allocating $5 million for Tatura and $2 million for Kyabram, which I visited the other day to open the extension of the dairy institute. The institute is developing magnificent farming practices and is working with the local farming community to ensure that Victoria stays competitive with the rest of the world. That would not be happening if the state were going down the drain. It is happening in a state that is looking to the future. Companies such as Simplott in Echuca and Nestlé and Fleury Michon, which makes chilled meals, are investing millions of dollars in advanced technology because they know the government is prepared to support them and help make Australia a provider of food for the rest of the world.

I was at Tatura Milk Industries with the Premier when the general manager, Neil Lowe, said the company was spending $18 million to expand the plant because of the government's support in allowing it to go to its staff to develop programs and workplace agreements. He said they would have never done it under the old system because they could not have afforded to; but these things can occur under a system that allows managers to work with their staff to develop workplace agreements that benefit the industry, the community and the
employees. The developments at Tatura Milk Industries will ensure that the company continues to be competitive in its own niche market and remains one of Australia’s leading dairy companies. It knows it can do so with confidence because of the government’s support.

The industry incentive program, which has been allocated funding of $5.8 million, has done wonders for companies such as Rosella, Kraft, Simplott, Nestlé, Fleury Michon, Bonlac and Murray Goulburn. In Mooroopna Ardmona Foods Ltd is producing fruit more efficiently to ensure that it remains competitive with companies in California and Brazil. Ardmona has spent money on developing a fruit imaging process so it does not need long lines of workers looking at pieces of fruit to see whether they are the wrong colour, size or shape. It now has video cameras that focus on the pear or peach halves. As they pass by video images are taken that detect whether they are the wrong colour or shape. If they are, a finger from the machine pushes the pieces into a reject bin, and they are used to produce diced peaches and pears.

Although it means that fewer people are used on the production line, the employees are used more productively and the company can produce a product that is more competitive with the fruit produced by companies in the United States of America and Brazil. If Victorian companies are to enter world markets they must have the technology that helps them get ahead. The government’s incentive programs will help to ensure that they remain competitive world wide.

The government has allocated $88.9 million to improve educational facilities. When I was first elected to Parliament I visited the schools in my electorate that were dilapidated, with leaking toilet systems and few facilities for staff. I stood on front verandas in the freezing cold to have a cup of coffee with staff because they had nowhere to go to have a cup of tea or coffee or sit and talk about the improvements that were needed. I now see newly painted schools as well as schools with new roofs, such as the Mooroopna High School. That school should have had a new roof years ago but nothing was done because the former Labor government would not spend the money.

The Tatura East Primary School now has a global budget. That enables the school council to save money because some of its members are trades people who can do the work at a reduced price. That can be compared with the centralised processing of tenders under the Labor administration. Tenders are still called, but local people are able to obtain the work and do it at reduced rates. Because of the savings the school has made through global budgeting it has been able to landscape the perimeter of the school, paint the buildings and install new spouting. Global budgeting enables schools to do what is best for them. It provides incentives for school councils to save money on buildings or spend money on new football ovals, if that is what is required.

In many cases the maintenance of schools was 12 to 14 years behind schedule. Unfortunately the maintenance program is now costing a lot more than it would have if the work had been done when it was required. In some cases floorboards that should have been replaced have been damaged by white ants to such an extent that whole floors have had to be laid down. The two-for-one grants enable schools to decide which projects they want and how they will proceed. I have visited schools that have joined classrooms and put perspex in roofs to let more light in.

Recently I visited the Toolamba Primary School, which was celebrating the anniversary of its move from outside to within the town. The school has made provision for larger classrooms to conduct joint classes by removing walls. What a great school it is, with the 90 to 100 children getting a magnificent education. Recently I was at the school when the children were sitting down and watching the programs that were coming through satellite television. One great thing this government has done is to give children in small primary schools in country Victoria the opportunity to learn languages they once could not learn because we did not have enough teachers to go around. Now programs are beamed right into those schools by satellite and supported by the teachers, and we are doing a tremendous job in supporting those country schools. A science and technology centre will be built in my electorate at Shepparton south. What a magnificent centre that will be to support science and technology not only at the school but in the city of Shepparton and the Goulburn Valley.

We will be supporting the performing arts centre at Mooroopna. Each school is now finding new directions in different areas. The Department of Education and the arts ministry are prepared to support the local school with their fundraising and to support the local council. We will see a magnificent performing arts centre built at Mooroopna because those self-managed schools are
now accountable and we are seeing magnificent benefits for the whole of Victoria.

At all times country members of Parliament must ensure that their people are well represented. However, when we look to the city we see the magnificent City Link project, which will greatly benefit country Victorians. They do not have to pay for the roads if they do not use them, but if they want to go from my electorate of Shepparton through to Gippsland East for a holiday, they can drive down the Hume Highway, move off it at the Western Ring Road, go around past Essendon airport, straight through the City Link, and out along the freeway to East Gippsland without going through a traffic light. It might cost $3.60 to use the whole lot, but it will probably save going through 100 traffic lights. It will save 40 minutes sitting at traffic lights and will benefit the people of country Victoria as well as the city people who use it daily.

On Monday afternoon I was reminded of the work we are doing on the magnificent heritage buildings. I was in Melbourne and attended the Old Treasury building, having a look at the exhibition of architecture through the ages. It is a very interesting exhibition which people in Melbourne should see. I stood there and looked at the magnificence of the Old Treasury building, which is being supported by the $9 million that is being put into the heritage buildings program.

The budget has no tax increases and removes the state deficit levy, a levy the government did not want to introduce but was forced to introduce because of the situation in which it found the state. The government must continue to deliver high quality government services at the least cost. It is interesting to see that the number of people migrating to other states is falling rapidly. They now know Victoria is a place where they have a future.

The government is supporting the salinity and drainage program through the Department of Agriculture, Energy and Minerals and Goulburn-Murray Water. We have seen the reform of the water industry. Goulburn-Murray Water and Goulburn Valley Water are taking up those reforms and doing the work that should have been done in the past by the small water boards. That is now able to be done because of the expertise in organisations like Goulburn Valley Water.

Health-related infrastructure is also being supported by the government. I refer to acute-care support and the psychiatric centre that will be built to replace the terrible conditions associated with psychiatric care in Shepparton. Building is under way at the Goulburn Valley Base Hospital to support psychiatric care in the Goulburn Valley.

Local government amalgamation has been a great thing for country Victoria. In my electorate we have seen an average across-the-board drop in rates of 22 per cent. There is not one person in a business or household who will not say that has been a great achievement by this government, and the services have not changed. We have been able to amalgamate and get much better operations in country Victoria because we have been able to change the culture and the way people think. A fair day's work for a fair day's pay is what people get now. We will see that applied in the SEC — the old slow, easy and comfortable. Things had to change because people realised they have to do a fair day's work and not bludge on the rest of Victoria.

Country Victoria has greatly benefited under this government with drought assistance and the agricultural initiative of $22 million to boost export performance. My electorate is greatly benefiting from that. The Grain Elevators Board was sold to the industry and will control the industry for the betterment of country people and Australia as a whole. The rural economy is recovering strongly, particularly the dairy industry. Now that we have seen the end of the drought, things are looking really good for country Victoria.

Mr SANDON (Carrum) — Following a few observations of the appropriation debate I will concentrate my comments on education. It is appropriate to consider how this government sees education and what moneys have been appropriated to support the state's most important resource — its young people. I shall consider the government's record to date in education. By comparing the 1992-93 budget estimates with the current estimates, one sees that the total cut in recurrent education expenditure is now $440 million. That is not what Mal Sandon is saying; the budget papers indicate the precise cut the government has now made in education spending.

In Victoria expenditure on education is going down, down, down. When you look at total budget outlays, you realise that Victorian education expenditure has been reduced from 26 per cent in 1992-93 to the current 23 per cent of the total budget outlays. Victoria now spends less per capita on education than any other state in Australia. We are now at the bottom in expenditure on education on a per capita
basis. That is something I do not think we can be proud of. Certainly it is something that does not show this state in a good light.

South Australia spends $769 per person, New South Wales $740, Queensland $735 and the national per capita average spent on education is $758. The Victorian figure is $730. We are at the bottom by miles.

We do not see education as an investment. This government sees education as a cost. And therein lies the government’s philosophy on education: it is a cost. Education is something to be reduced; it is something to be subtracted from and cut back. Rather than seeing education as an investment in the state’s future and making an investment in the nation’s future, this government sees education as a cost.

By seeing it as a cost and reducing it to the percentage of the total budget that it has, the government is ensuring that we will all bear the fruits of that policy in the years to come. We will have to have more police, more prisons and heavier sentencing as a result of reduced expenditure on education. The reason is that in the schools I go to day after day I see the increased class sizes and hear about the programs that have been cut and the curriculums and support that are no longer available. The result is that more young people are dropping out and school is not a place that has some relevance to them and their future. No wonder the youth crime rate is increasing, because the two are very much related. They have to be seen as a relationship. This is not being said just by Mal Sandon. The president of the post-primary principals association has in recent public comments drawn attention to the obvious fact that school is not relevant for many young people, and there are no remedial, literacy and numeracy programs.

I remind the house that one of the first acts of this government was to wipe out 2500 special-needs teachers. What has been the downstream impact? It has meant that young people have been going through their primary years, those formative years, not being literate and numerate. That has meant many young people have gone to secondary schools ill-prepared. When those schools have cut programs, particularly in the humanities subjects, and when students cannot get help in or out of the classrooms, the frustration and alienation for many has meant massive truancy problems, which must be regarded as a direct result of cuts in those programs.

Recently I had a 10-day trip through rural Victoria; I visited schools at Ballarat, Bendigo, Maryborough, Ararat, Mildura and Swan Hill. The principals and teachers of the schools I visited put to me that every school is facing major truancy problems. Every community is seeking alternative settings and programs for the young who do not fit in with society.

This budget does nothing for those people, nor does it set aside appropriation for the young in need. The government does not recognise the problem because now the minister does not accept a systems-wide analysis and systems-wide accountability.

We have major problems in our education facilities. Such problems in our communities are not being faced because the government refuses to recognise them. The government says, 'We have given you a global budget; now it is your responsibility'. The minister washes his hands of those major problems. It is not good enough to suggest that it is the responsibility of the schools. This government is not facing up to its responsibilities to prepare our young people at a time when the importance of schooling has never been more significant.

Recent studies have demonstrated that a person who does not finish 12 years of schooling is four times as likely to be unemployed. An education does not guarantee one a job, but without it one is behind the eight ball.

It is imperative that young people be kept at school. The Victorian statistics released prior to this year show a fall in retention rates. A significant problem is demonstrated through that fall. In rural Victoria the retention rate is down to 70 per cent, which means 3 of every 10 young people in areas like Barwon are not finishing 12 years of schooling. No wonder this year’s census figures have not been released!

For the first time in 15 years the minister is sitting on the census material. Those figures will demonstrate the poor participation rates in government schools. Do honourable members think they would show good news? Of course not — and that is why the minister refuses to release the information. It is a disgrace that a statistical analysis or indicator of how well or badly the system is progressing is being denied Victorians. The minister refuses to allow those important statistics to be analysed for all to see.

This Minister for Education is the minister who said that outcomes were a load of rubbish! That must
have been the most ignorant comment ever made by a minister in a Westminster Parliament. His comment was reported on the front page of the Age of 3 September 1993, in case honourable members wish to check my source. That comment demonstrates why such important statistical information has not been released for public consumption.

The 1995-96 budget shows that current expenditure will yet again fall, this time by 1.5 per cent. I remind honourable members that the April economic statement committed the government to further cuts from the education budget during the next three years. Those cuts, depending on whether one includes commonwealth outlays or restricts oneself to state outlays, will mean further cuts in education of some $150 million to $180 million in the next three years.

The government is committed to further cuts in education; the cuts have not finished. The house will recall the Minister for Education saying after the first round of cuts, 'No more big hits in the education budget'. Then followed another massive cut, then a third one. Then he said, 'Trust me, no more cuts'. However, now we have a further commitment from the government to more cuts in the next three years. The budget papers demonstrate that spending will fall by 1.5 per cent in real terms. State government expenditure per student will fall, in real terms, from $4049 in 1994-95 to $4030 in 1995-96.

One must also take account of the further drop in enrolments. The Treasurer anticipates a further reduction in enrolments, yet the allocated expense per student remains constant. That gives an indication of the intentions of the government because even though enrolments continue to fall, the government has reduced the grants per student.

The budget papers demonstrate that about 300 schools have now closed, with another 95 named for closure. The budget papers again indicate that the days of school closures are not over; they show that a further 32 schools will be closed this year. Honourable members should understand that the diminishing expenditure being allocated to the education portfolio and to certain programs means that much is being paid for by schools being forced to make the ultimate sacrifice: the schools must close. That is a disgrace and demonstrates the government's lack of will and commitment in the state's most important resource — that is, its young. It is not interested in investing in the future of young people and in ensuring that young people, whether they live in Doncaster or Dimboola, have access to the same levels of education.

The extent to which the government asks parents to make a financial contribution demonstrates yet another example of the government's attitude. I refer to a recent newsletter I received from Black Hill Primary School, Ballarat. It sets out the budget allocations for that school, and sets out the income of the school on a chart. It appears that 81 per cent of the school income is for salaries, 11.5 per cent is allocated for operating costs and 7.5 per cent is raised locally. The government now expects that 7.5 per cent of the income of Black Hill Primary School will continue to be raised by the parents of its students.

This government is not contributing in any real way to the cost of delivering education and to ensuring funding is equitable across the state. That 7.5 per cent is an enormous amount to be raised yearly; 7.5 per cent of the total outlays in government expenditure amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars that parents in Victoria must now contribute to the education of their sons and daughters. No wonder that in this publication the principal states:

We need locally raised funds to run our existing programs.

To expand our facilities and equipment, purchase more reading materials, maths equipment, computer hardware and software, musical instruments, playground and sports equipment we must raise these funds ourselves.

Mr Jenkins — What is new about that?

Mr SANDON — They have to raise $24 000 to provide computer equipment and provide a reading recovery program.

The honourable member asks, 'What is new?'. The parents will be forced to pay for a reading recovery program, which is what it sounds like: a program for young boys and girls who cannot read properly. The government has decided it is the responsibility of parents to pay for the teaching of such programs. That is an unmutilated disgrace. Your side should hang its head in shame for allowing that to happen.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr SANDON — We provided remedial programs and ensured that special-needs programs were made available. I constantly talk to school
representatives, including those at the school I recently visited in the Knox electorate. Whenever I ask what is happening at the school and what programs the school lacks, one of the first answers I am hit with is, 'We need special needs programs' — not only for those children who are struggling but also for gifted children, which is something dear to your heart, Mr Acting Speaker. When we talk about special needs we need to address both ends of the spectrum.

The schools say they cannot provide those programs because they have to choose between increased class sizes and specialist programs. Your government has forced them to make those decisions. As a result our children are receiving education of a lower standard than they deserve — and the government stands condemned for that. That is what is different about the range of available programs. In school after school members of the opposition discover that those programs have been dismantled.

The budget papers show that there will be a further reduction in enrolments. The budget papers also show that the positions of 8200 teachers and 500 support staff have been abolished. What does 'support staff' mean? It refers to staff who provide support to schools. The honourable member for Bendigo West knows that there are only two psychology and guidance officers for his entire electorate. Is that satisfactory? I do not believe anyone would think so.

That is the extent of the cuts in the education field. It means that those specialist programs that were formerly a part of every school support centre are now no longer available. Hearing, speech and psychology and guidance specialists are an integral part of any state education system, but the philosophy of this government goes against providing those programs. Parents are expected to make their own financial contributions. That is not good enough, particularly in rural Victoria, where those specialists are just not available. Even if schools were given the funds to gain access to them, they could not get them. They are not available in Ararat, Stawell and Swan Hill. They are not available throughout most of rural Victoria. That is an example of the government just not caring.

We now have a second-swing mentality in our schools, and larger class sizes are a good example. Some 62 per cent of primary grades have classes of more than 25 — not 10 or 20 or 30 per cent but 62 per cent, the overwhelming majority. That does not produce an environment in which students and teachers can develop the fundamentals — literacy and numeracy. If you do not gain those skills early on you can suffer the consequences for the rest of your life. Unfortunately, that is yet another indictment of the massive cuts in the teaching staff, the consequences of which have led to a reduction in the number of programs and less help for students in and outside the classroom.

When I visit secondary schools one of the things I see that concerns me is the decimation of student welfare programs. As a result of its education cuts the government will have to build more prisons and put on more police. Teachers were once made available to help students who were not faring well and who were having difficulties in their school, home and personal lives. However, those facilities are no longer available. At some stage in our education every one of us had difficulties. I certainly did, and I required help outside the classroom. I repeat: student welfare programs have been decimated. That is another indictment of this government's approach to education.

The government is continually making comparisons with other states such as New South Wales and Queensland. I have already pointed out that Victoria has the lowest per capita level of education funding. It is interesting to see what the other states are doing with their education expenditure. Because they realise the importance of education, the New South Wales and Queensland governments have added significantly to their education budgets and are putting on more teachers.

I point out to the Minister for Small Business the absolute necessity of seeing education as the engine driver of economic growth. We have to see the classroom as the place where economic growth starts. It is essential that we have well-trained and qualified workers and that we do all we can to ensure our young people are adequately trained when they leave school.

It is likely that at some stage those of us in work will have to be trained and retrained, especially when you consider the number of people on pensions and sickness benefits in this country. It is essential that we treat education not only as an investment in the future of our young people and our nation but as a necessity. If we are to have economic growth we must have a well-trained work force. That means treating education not as a cost, which this government does, but as an investment in the future. This government stands condemned because it
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refuses to treat education as an investment in the state's future.

Given what is contained in the budget papers — expenditure on education will be reduced by more than $440 million — education in Victoria will continue to decline. The trend that has been established over the past three years will be maintained. We have seen teacher positions go, schools close and class sizes increase. We have seen a massive reduction in subject choice and a lack of access to remedial programs, counselling and welfare. Schools now place a greater reliance on fees and levies for financial support; and for the first time sanctions are being applied to those students whose parents cannot afford the increased fees and levies. That is another disgrace. The government should be condemned for not allowing students to have access to the facilities and services they need.

Schools now have to chase sponsorships. The Grange Secondary College, which is in the electorate of the honourable member for Werribee, has written to all the businesses in its community seeking sponsorship. Some of the businesses include fast food outlets and the local hotel! That is the extent to which schools must seek funding because the government no longer provides the necessary resources.

Many schools do not have remedial or specialist programs. The honourable member for Knox visits schools in his electorate, for which I give him credit. Teachers at those schools would have told him about the many specialist programs they can no longer provide because of the education cuts. I do not believe the restrictions on curricula are appropriate, nor do I believe that schools should have to seek the sponsorships they now have to seek. It is totally inappropriate that schools have to beg for money from local hotels. The minister has washed his hands of any system-wide accountability. He has not even issued guidelines to school communities on what is appropriate sponsorship and what is not.

The Minister for Education does not even know the extent of the truancy problem. In a recent briefing with the Director of School Education I inquired about the extent of the truancy, a major problem in this state. When I asked what the government was doing about it I was told, 'Oh, I do not know. We had better seek information from DEET about that'. They do not know how many young people are not turning up for school! They do not know how many young people have dropped out!

The government has not put any strategies in train for dealing with these issues because it does not know — —

Mr Turner — Did you?

Mr SANDON — In the past information on levels of truancy was provided to the minister of the day. I take up the interjection of the honourable member for Bendigo West and state that in the past truancy officers dealt with the issues, as well they should. It is a disgrace that there are 100 people of school age in his electorate who are not attending school. There is an absolute need there for an alternative program and he should hang his head in shame. What is the honourable member for Bendigo West doing to stand up to the Minister for Education and to ask for the provision of alternative settings for young people who need them?

Victoria should have an education system for all and not just for some. I am amused when going about my parliamentary duties to find government members who do not stand up to ministers and demand that those ministers take some action on what is appropriate in their areas. There is a desperate need in Bendigo now for alternative education settings, and I look forward to the honourable member for Bendigo West asking the Minister for Education to do something about it.

Mr McArthur interjected.

Mr SANDON — The honourable member for Monbulk is now in the chamber. I was in his electorate recently, and he is another member who neglects his duties and responsibilities. It is about time he realised the extent of the problems in his area and began to stand up for his constituents.

The budget does nothing about the fall in retention rates in government schools. The budget does nothing about the levels of fees being paid by parents to compensate for the budget cuts. The budget does nothing on special programs that have been cut. The budget does nothing about the number of unqualified and untrained teachers.

Mr Jeff Northfield, an academic at Monash University, was contacted by a number of school principals who asked whether he had any language teachers they could get access to because they were unable to find any and there was a shortage. When Mr Northfield made public observations about the extent of unqualified and untrained teachers, the Minister for Education
In my own electorate Kent Park Primary School had not had a lick spent on it since it was built — it sat for 20 years without any money being spent on it. The government is slowly but gradually restoring schools. Kent Park Primary School had the primer coat of paint showing through the top gloss coat — it was almost down to bare boards because the Labor government spent nothing on it.

Fern tree Gully Secondary College has had more than $500 000 spent on it, yet the effects are barely visible. That school also sat for 10 years without anything being done to it. The drains were blocked, the roofs were leaking, the spouting was rotten through and it was heated using oil, which costs an arm and a leg. To bring the school up to scratch would take probably another $400 000.

Mountain Gate Primary School also had no money spent on it in the past. At one stage it was possible to put your fingers between the bricks where an end wall of the school had fallen away. In fact some money had been spent there because large bolts had been put through the wall to hold it up. Another $400 000 is being spent on that small primary school.

The Wattle View Primary School also sat neglected during the decade of Labor government. The government will need to spend more than $600 000 to bring that school up to a level that will allow children to be safe in the playground and to use the toilets without experiencing an atrocious smell from residues absorbed over time by the porous concrete floor. The honourable member for Carrum talked about going around the state. That is probably the reason why his electorate office is never open!

I was concerned about the lead contribution of the Leader of the Opposition. I thought his contribution would have been well researched and prepared. However, because he had an appointment to talk on radio he rushed through his speech in 51 minutes or so. His contribution lacked truth and used innuendo.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke with a great flourish about local government and how compulsory competitive tendering had become a bugbear for it. However, on 9 November 1994 the opposition spokesperson on local government matters, the Honourable Pat Power in another place, spoke about compulsory competitive tendering and stated:

I turn now to compulsory competitive tendering. Again I take the opportunity to say that the opposition absolutely supports efficiencies in local government,
acknowledges that competitive tendering has an important role in gaining those efficiencies.

That is what Labor's spokesman on local government said about competitive tendering, yet the Leader of the Opposition stated today that it was one of the worst things that could have happened and that it was causing a great furore.

The Leader of the Opposition made some great comments. I quote from yesterday's media statement:

In his formal response to the Kennett government's recent budget Mr Brumby welcomed the fact that the budget was back in the black and reaffirmed Labor's commitment to keep it in the black through its financial management plan.

The Leader of the Opposition, Mr Brumby, also argued that the real budget deficit could be as high as $1 billion. At one stage he is saying we are in the black, yet in the very same press release he is saying we could have a deficit of in excess of $1 billion. What is he talking about? He then goes on with innuendos, half-truths and scare tactics in his press release:

... many families would spend $50 000 on tolls — the equivalent of almost half the cost of a family home ...

That is amazing. He also says:

Victorians do not want to be paying tolls every time they use their car.

That is another of this gentleman's examples. He puts a scare into everybody, suggesting to the people of Victoria that there will be compulsory tolls on every road. The member for Mornington showed him up when he referred to what the then Minister for Transport, Scratchy Jim Kennan, said in August 1989 about the Western Ring Road — that it would operate as a toll road using high-tech collection methods. He admitted that when the Labor government was in office back in 1989 it was looking to introduce tolls on various roads. A little later, on 22 May 1992, the illustrious Mr White in his statement about new concepts on roads said that a range of funding options was possible, including direct or indirect tolls.

Two former ministers of transport have clearly indicated that they were prepared to introduce tolls on some roads in Victoria. Yet when this government looks to producing the largest works in Victoria since the Snowy Mountains scheme the Leader of the Opposition says families will be spending $50 000 on tolls. He did not mention one family or 1 million families, but many families. He also said that Victorians do not want to be paying tolls every time they use their cars. At no time has this government said that every time people use their cars they will be paying tolls. The government has clearly indicated which roads will be upgraded and which roads will require a toll. It has also said that if it wanted to copy the Labor Party — and I do not believe it does, because it is far more realistic — it would use high-tech collection methods to collect the tolls.

The toll roads will be the roads that will be improved; they will carry more traffic and will speed the throughput of traffic into the City of Melbourne across from the eastern suburbs to Tullamarine and from the western suburbs back to the eastern suburbs.

I have a great deal of respect for the member for Morwell, but he got stuck into local government. He came out quite strongly and accused the government of removing democracy. He said the amalgamation of councils was wrong and indicated the whole structure was totally inept and inappropriate.

Again I quote some very well-known Labor Party people. In his speech at La Trobe University on 17 February 1994 Mr Brian Howe, the Deputy Prime Minister, said:

I strongly support the efforts of the current Victorian government to restructure local government and move towards larger councils. I don't think the interests of the region are serviced by fragmentation in terms of local government. The reform is very much welcome.

Mr Howe, again on 17 February — he must have had a good day that day — said:

Larger units of local government are essential if we're going to get more efficient local government. It needs to occur in other places — over 900 units of local government (across Australia) is far too many.

On 9 November 1994 Mr Pat Power, the opposition spokesman for local government, said:

The Labor Party's view is that, like any other industry, public or private, the local government industry ought to be made more efficient, ought to be upskilled, ought to be better resourced and ought to be supported in
meeting the increasing challenges asked of it into the year 2000 and beyond.

The illustrious member for Morwell, who is just walking through the chamber, indicated that the local government reforms introduced by this government were inappropriate and wrong. Mr Power has done a great job here; he talks about commissioners. The member for Morwell indicated commissioners were wrong and that they were moving in on the democratic rights of ratepayers. In a press release dated 24 April 1994 Mr Power is reported as having said:

The opposition agrees that commissioners are necessary to provide the management during the vital transition period.

In the parliamentary debate on 9 November 1994 the same gentleman, the opposition spokesman for local government, said:

On a number of occasions the opposition has made it plain that it acknowledges there is a role for commissioners in the log jam that is created when one or two municipalities are brought together and that role of an independent person is desirable.

The Leader of the Opposition is totally opposed to what the spokesman for local government has indicated and the member for Morwell is at variance with him. I wonder who is right. I would have thought the spokesman for local government would have been giving a true and honest account of what the Labor Party stands for, yet it is quite apparent that the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Morwell are at variance with those particular policies, which I believe are the same sorts of policies any other government would make.

The honourable member for Morwell also started talking about the SEC and how it had been demolished, crucified and murdered. I look at the time when I worked for the SEC. I go back to 1989 when the then Labor government introduced its voluntary departure packages. From 1989 until 1991 it reduced SEC staffing levels from 23 000 to 14 000. The Labor government shed 9000 SEC jobs. Similar percentages are reflected in the Melbourne Water and Gas and Fuel figures. The Labor Party went down the path of shedding those numbers, trying to remove people because it realised that the SEC and the Gas and Fuel were overstaffed and inefficient. If you look at the situation — —

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr LUPTON — Thank you for the interjection. I look at the stage we are at now: the lights are still burning, the water is still coming through, and the gas is still working. When I was working with the SEC I believed it was efficient. When I came into Parliament I found out it had debts of $9.7 billion and I could not believe it — a 40 per cent over-generation capacity. That is appalling. It is costing just on $1 billion to repay the interest on that $9.7 billion, which is then reflected in our overseas credit rating.

When I was a contract analyst we were looking at quoting for a pumping station. While it was only a small pumping station, it was valued at $4 million. The engineers took me out to inspect it after it had been completed and I asked how often it would be used. The answer was once every three months because they did not really need it. They were using it as an exercise model to train engineers. It goes on and on!

The Morwell briquette power station was built on the wrong site because the coal that came out of the hole next door to it could not be used for briquettes. They had to turn around and truck the coal from Yallourn to Morwell, stick it in the factory and take the coal from Morwell to Yallourn to burn — very efficient!

I really and truly believed the organisation I worked for was efficient, until I became a member of Parliament. Then I was told the truth and it was very interesting and very disappointing to me because I wear with a great deal of pride the watch on my wrist that I was given when I left the SEC.

I look at some of the good things that have occurred since the coalition came to power. The reduction and then complete removal of the Cain-Kimer tax has benefited the people in my electorate and the people of Victoria generally. There is no doubt that the insidious tax was terribly unpopular. It was a wrong tax but it had to be imposed because the state was bankrupt. It was bankrupt when the coalition took over from the Labor Party, after it was thrown out of office in disgrace. If the government had been a private company, they would have locked the doors, sold the assets and probably put the directors in gaol. Instead of that we gave the directors big superannuation payouts and sent them off. The press is still quoting the ex-Premier on various matters; whether it is economic reform or anything under the sun, she is used as a sounding board. I find it rather amazing that the press can fall for that particular gambit.
When the Labor Party was in power the then Treasurer, Mr Jolly, indicated how safe the Pyramid Building Society was: 'You can trust it, put your money there. There is not a problem'. Lo and behold, a short time later the Pyramid Building Society went down the drain. It closed the doors. The government introduced a 2-cent levy on every litre of petrol bought in the state. I do not know where the 2 cents went; it certainly never improved anything I used. It must have gone into consolidated revenue to pay the debt of the Labor Party. There is nothing on a balance sheet to show where it has been used. Yet the Labor Party criticised the government for imposing a 3-cent levy to improve the roads, of which 2 cents is spent on the metropolitan roads and the remaining 1 cent is spent on country roads.

In the City of Knox at present $14 million of roadworks is being carried out, which is far more than was spent in the City of Knox over the last decade by the previous government. Very little was spent then. In 1990, when I met the then chairman of VicRoads because I was trying to get a couple of new roads, I was told, 'Listen, Hurle, we will be lucky to maintain our existing assets, let alone build any new roads'. That is because the previous government was stone motherless broke and it was not putting money into new roads. In my electorate it is costing $1.5 million to construct a new road because no money has been spent on it for years.

The High Street Road extension, which runs from Stud Road to Burwood Highway, was built using federal government money. It got to within about a drop kick of joining up with Burwood Highway and there was no money left. It sat there, a road completed to all intents and purposes, probably seven-eights of the total distance, and this last link to Burwood Highway could not be completed.

But the Labor Party got out of it well. It went to BP Australia, the petrol company, because it had a site on the corner where the road was going to finish. It borrowed the money from BP to fund the road and then the government was to pay it back. That is how well the Labor government did things. The opposition talks about subsidising things; fancy having BP subsidise the roads!

Mr Hamilton — Get on to the good stuff.

Mr LUPTON — I will get to the good stuff now. I will get on to some of the positive things that have come out since the Kennett government came to power and how we have benefited from the budget. Some $3.25 million is being expended on the Lysterfield Primary School. That is a very small country school which is bursting at its seams.

Mr Hamilton — You are not marginal, are you?

Mr LUPTON — Not much. Go and tell John Brumby.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! There is a certain lack of discipline. I request that the honourable members for Morwell and Knox observe the conventions of the house.

Mr LUPTON — Lysterfield is a very small country school. The number of students at the school in 1997 would be far too many for the site, so after talking to the minister $3.25 million was allocated to relocate the school to a new area. This will benefit the people of Rowville, who will not lose the school or the name of Lysterfield and the qualities the school preserves.

At Rowville Secondary College $4.7 million is being spent, and stage 2 will receive another $3 million. Stage 1 is due to be opened in January 1996 and stage 2 has already started. This school can act as a second campus to the existing Rowville Secondary College.

Mr Hamilton — Two of the schools in my area were closed.

Mr LUPTON — I do not think any of the people from Morwell came down to Knox. The previous government closed three police stations in the City of Knox: the Ferntree Gully, Bayswater and Boronia police stations. Then at an enormous cost of some $670 000 a year the government leased a building in the geographical centre of the City of Knox. The City of Knox covers an area of 110 square kilometres and has a population of about 135 000 people. They built one building and removed the three other police stations. Despite pleas from the public that they would not be safe and also pleas from the lower ranks of the police force that they required more than one police station in the City of Knox, the then Labor government closed the Boronia police station. What a black day it was for Boronia.

I am pleased to say that only about a week ago they poured the foundations for the new Boronia police station which will be built at a cost of some $2.6 million. This will allow the service that was stripped by the previous government to be reintroduced into Boronia and areas of The Basin,
Bayswater and Femtree Gully, which will benefit from the police station.

The budget introduced by the Treasurer is a good solid budget that puts Victoria back into the black. It will remove many charges, and I refer again to the Cain-Kirner tax. Because of the Queensland government's actions, the tax on stock market transactions was reduced. It is a positive, sound budget. I congratulate the Treasurer on introducing a sensible budget that puts Victoria back into the black and will help to make Victoria the engine room of the country.

Mr SERCOMBE (Niddrie) — Mr Acting Speaker, — —

Mr Leigh — I thought you had left for the federal Parliament.

Mr SERCOMBE — Shortly. The honourable member for Mordialloc is such an endearing company it is hard to drag myself away! As in so many areas of administration the government, with respect to the budget, is strong on rhetoric and hyperbole but pretty weak when it comes to an analysis of the real performance. The Treasurer's speech contained a summary of Victoria's continuing economic recovery.

There is no doubt that a number of key economic indicators in Australia, Victoria included, have shown substantial improvement. One analysis shows that in the context of the economy the state budget is at best incidental to the improvement to the Australian economy. It can be argued on a number of fronts that the government is a significant impediment to the full recovery of the Victorian economy.

The Treasurer's statement makes the point that the Victorian economy has grown by 4.75 per cent, exports have grown rapidly, increasing by 12 per cent, and the money spent on research and development has increased by $1.1 billion. Australia's economic growth rate for the same period was 4.5 per cent. According to the indicators growth will drop off this year, but investment is expected to increase by 14.5 per cent. Under the federal Labor government Australia has achieved an historically unusual set of economic circumstances — low inflation, rapid growth, the lowest interest rates for 30 years, and compared with comparable economies, a low tax rate of less than 23 per cent of gross national product. That can be contrasted with Victoria, where taxes have increased by approximately $2 billion since 1992.

The Australian economy has generally demonstrated sustained economic growth. We have a number of strategic advantages over comparable countries, such as low energy costs and an outstandingly skilled labour force, which is a consequence of our long-term investment in our human capital. There is strong investment in a range of important industries that sustain our living standards and growth. Industries of the future such as those centred on communications and information technology are important to Australia. We have the second largest market in the Asia-Pacific region for information technology, seven times as large as Hong Kong and Singapore. Australia benefits substantially from research and development. The September 1995 publication of the Strategic Industry Research Foundation, with which the state government has an association, says that, compared with Australia, research and development activities are two and a half times more expensive to undertake in Japan, twice as expensive in France, Germany and Hong Kong and between 25 per cent and 50 per cent more expensive in Singapore.

The Australian economy, including Victoria, has a range of significant advantages; but to suggest that the state government is anything other than incidental to those fundamentals is nonsense. The most remarkable changes in the Australian economy over the past decade have occurred in the country's export performance. For the first time Australian manufacturers last year outperformed agriculture in contributing to our export income. Over the next few years our manufacturers — Victoria is the heartland of the country's manufacturing industries — expect to outperform the mining industry. That will have structural implications for the economy, particularly for the relative importance of the Victorian economy to the Australian economy. Because our currency has been historically too dependent on commodity rates, the economic viability of Australia will be significantly improved by an increased reliance on manufactures as a source of external economic relationships. That may enable us to achieve higher and sustainable real rates of growth, with all that means in addressing unemployment.

What is the relevance of the state budget when judged against those important issues and structural changes that are affecting our living standards and our economic base? All the Treasurer says about industry policy is that an additional $5.8 million will
be allocated for the government’s successful industry incentive program. That is a disgrace for a government that represents a state that is the heartland of Australian manufacturing, especially given the shifts that are occurring. Over the past decade the Australian and Victorian manufacturing industries have been transformed.

I refer those members who have an interest in the subject to an excellent publication entitled The Rebirth of Australian Industry, produced by the Victoria University of Technology. The establishment in the west of Melbourne of the Victoria University of Technology was one of the best achievements of the former Labor government and the current federal government. The university’s Centre for Economic Studies produced the book, which demonstrates that in the context of the rapid expansion in the world-wide trade in manufactured goods — particularly in what are described as elaborately transformed manufactures, which I shall define in a moment — Australia has still managed to increase its market share. That applies not just to the Asia-Pacific region but also to the range of manufactured products with which Australian companies are successfully penetrating markets in Europe and North America.

That is essential to the future of our country, given that the heartland of manufacturing rests in Victoria. Yet, like a pimple on a monkey’s back, the state government has played no part in promoting Victoria’s manufacturing industry as a growth area on which we can build our economic future. I refer specifically to pharmaceuticals, computing equipment, telecommunications equipment and other transport equipment — particularly in the aerospace and shipbuilding industries — as well as the textile, clothing and footwear industry, which will surprise many of those who remember the industry policy debates of a decade ago. Those industry sectors have benefited from the specific sector policies emanating from the federal government. They are industries towards which the federal government has adopted an interventionist and collaborative approach to enhance their export potential.

Under the industry scheme developed by the former federal minister John Button, which is known as the Factor (I) scheme, participating pharmaceutical companies have generated $416 million in the export of value-added products and $419 million in domestic value-added products and import replacement activities, as well as expending $152 million in research and development. That is the effect the collaborative approach developed by the federal Labor government has had in ensuring industries are world competitive and provide benefits for the Australian community.

Under the partnership arrangement the information technology industry has generated annual exports of $1.7 billion and annual research development expenditure of $342 million. Approximately 10 years ago the car industry was on its knees. The Victorian car industry is another example of the collaborative approach, particularly given the huge investment by Toyota at Altona.

Honourable members have seen the huge impact that is having on the manufacturing base of the state. Those changes have occurred only because of the commitment of the federal government as evidenced by the Button car plan to ensure development in advanced industries such as aerospace industries. Once again, the federal government has actively ensured that an industry is sustained in Australia.

In the western suburbs of Melbourne that you, Mr Acting Speaker, and I have a close association with, in the shipbuilding area there has been the Anzac frigate project at Williamstown. A New Zealand frigate was recently launched at Williamstown, followed immediately by the placing of the keel of a third ship on the berth.

I referred earlier to the textile, clothing and footwear sectors. Companies such as Country Road have made a substantial contribution to our export earnings. It is a viable, strong industry. Most productive companies in Victoria such as Davenport are contributing to the transformation of the Victorian and Australian economies.

The federal government is at the forefront of the development of even more advanced industries, for example, the multimedia industry, which has arisen from the convergence of telephony, the computer and the television. Those industries need to be at the centre of the Victorian economy, yet the budget coverage of such industries fundamental to the prosperity of all Victorians is pretty irrelevant. When I could not find anything of great interest in the budget papers dealing with the important area of manufacturing, I thought that may be because the government is run by a second-rate advertising man and that perhaps there would be a more substantial coverage of the small business sector. I thought that the government would surely do something in the small business sector.
All honourable members would be aware that small business represents around 97 per cent of business operations in the private, non-agricultural sector of the economy. Around 56 per cent of private sector workers are employed by small business. One would have hoped that the budget would deal with the ways in which adequate support for small business could be provided at a state level. Once again, the Premier offers the pea and thimble tricks, the public relations exercises and the con jobs we are increasingly used to.

During question time yesterday the government sought to grandstand on Westpac and Yellow Pages Australia making available to small business $100 million in capital. All honourable members would agree that access to capital is one of the most important if not the most important issue confronting small business. For the Premier to suggest that the state government had contributed in some way illustrates the point I am trying to make: the government is strong on rhetoric. Westpac and Yellow Pages have provided the support; the state government has provided no access to capital for small business.

The state government's contribution contrasts with that of the federal government. The Commonwealth Development Bank earlier this year expanded its lending to small business by some $300 million — a 30 per cent increase in the capital available to small business. That was made possible by the commonwealth government's expanding its portfolio in the Commonwealth Development Bank by some $30 million. It provided a subsidy of $20 million to the bank for that lending program. That is a real commitment to assisting small business in accessing the much-needed finance we all talk about. That Westpac is quite rightly expanding its lending program to small business is great; we all applaud that. But for the Premier to imply that in some way the government has contributed to that is a lot of nonsense.

The federal government is involved in a number of other programs designed to assist small business in accessing capital. For example, that well-known socialist organisation, the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, is now participating with the federal government in a program called the business finance support program. VECCI is building a database of small business investment opportunities and potential investors. That is a significant step towards providing much-needed capital for small business in this state and elsewhere in Australia.

The commonwealth government has provided significant encouragement to pooled development funds, setting up advantageous taxation arrangements such as a concessional tax treatment of the profit of those funds at a rate of 15 per cent. Such programs help small companies — particularly multimedia, microelectronic and mining industries — access much-needed capital to carry out the important task of providing more jobs for Victorians and Australians.

The federal government's role in providing access to capital contrasts dramatically with the strong-on-words, weak-on-substance performance of the state government. The commonwealth government is showing the way in a range of small business areas while this government only pays lip service to small businesses and is simply failing them.

Recently the federal Minister for Small Business, Customs and Construction announced amendments to those sections of the Trade Practices Act that deal with unconscionable conduct, conduct that unreasonably exploits a commercial relationship between a powerful firm and a less powerful small business. Many honourable members who look after the small business constituency in their electorates would be aware that there is a problem. A government that on paper and in rhetoric is committed to private enterprise has done nothing to protect that important section of our community.

Taxation rules is another area in which the federal government is achieving its ends and getting on with the job while all we hear from the Premier is rhetoric. Amendments have been made to taxation provisions to assist small business. For example, recent changes to the substantiation rules simplify the commercial circumstances for small business and reduce onerous requirements in that respect. That is an example of the federal government being fair dinkum about doing a few things rather than engaging in rhetoric.

However, the state government has done one or two things that, being a generous spirited sort of bloke, I would have to acknowledge have been the right thing. For example, it has joined the Ausindustry partnership with the commonwealth government and all the other states. Ausindustry is an exciting initiative that will provide a single entry point to a whole array of government programs in managerial, technical, financial and marketing areas for businesses. Something in the order of $100 million is available to assist the economic development of
small business and larger industry. I am particularly pleased to see that the Victorian government has not adopted a pig-in-a-poke attitude on that.

An example of the sort of approach I would have been concerned about was a matter I raised with the Minister for Industry and Employment, when the Department of Business and Employment decided to open up an office in Moonee Ponds, which is out on the right side of town. Despite a number of us urging the minister to do the contrary, the department decided not to develop the opportunity for co-location with a number of local business support groups and other organisations, including Austrade, which would have created some real synergies and real chances for integration and the opportunity to establish a one-stop shop for people seeking business advice. The department in a pretty silly, bureaucratic way decided to go its own way and set up its own shop front rather than take up the advantage of the opportunities that were being presented by cooperative action.

I am pleased that the Victorian government is involving itself in the Ausindustry partnership with the commonwealth. Let us hope that program significantly assists the processes I have referred to a number of times in this speech, and ensures that industry gets the support it needs, whether it is larger scale industry or small business, in providing jobs for Australians generally and Victorians in particular.

When you look at other areas where the government ought to be performing better in the interests of economic activity, you find the list can well and truly be developed. Other speakers have already mentioned in this debate, and I am sure others will follow, the shemozzle the government has created in the electricity industry in the state. As I said at the outset, one of the huge advantages this country has is its abundant and cheap energy supplies. Yet the government is in the process of absolutely undermining the strength of that industry in Victoria by its appalling management processes. That is terribly alarming and all the indications are that they are going to do the same with water. In the interests of the economic competitiveness and strength of this state and this country they are matters we all ought to be alarmed about.

Fortunately Minister Gude's experiment in industrial relations has failed. The federal government has created an industrial relations environment that enables improvements in the flexibility of the labour market and enables firms and people to become more productive. The federal government does not tear at the rights and living standards of Australian working people. We have the appropriate blending of flexibility and protection that are consistent with an advanced industrial society. We cannot afford to let this mob in Victoria or their mates at the national level undermine the social and political stability of our country and our society by allowing them to fiddle with that.

We also have to address the failure of this government to ensure that there is an adequate investment in what I referred to before as human capital. What really drives the strength of this country and this state in research and development are the brain power and skills of our people. Yet the retention rates in schools are falling, class sizes are increasing, and the level of investment that is needed to sustain our strength in those areas is being dissipated.

Even in areas that are perhaps closer to the government's heart, the government is missing opportunities. I read with a bit of interest an article in the Bulletin of 12 September that says:

It is early days yet, but it seems that the Sydney futures exchange is about to be born again as a trading post for commodity futures. Behind the prospect are developments such as a mounting demand for risk management in the increasingly deregulated commodities markets, growing awareness of Asia's enormous demand for minerals and energy products, and the opportunities provided by technologies that seamlessly link trading around the world.

There is some discussion in that article about links between the Sydney exchange and the New York exchange. I would have thought that Melbourne, as the place that has over recent times lost its commercial pre-eminence to Sydney but is nonetheless the city that is still home to the great majority of resource companies' corporate headquarters, ought to be looking at every opportunity it can to capitalise on and reassert its strengths as a commercial hub by ensuring that Melbourne becomes the centre for the sort of financial transactions that occur in the resources sector. If this community lets Sydney steal the march on it in commercial life, it is crazy. The government supposingly, at least in its rhetoric, prides itself on its capacity to get out and try to sell the state. If we had a Premier who was more interested in substance than fairy floss and flummery and a quick grab in the press, we might have a government that was doing something about ensuring that Sydney was
not stealing another march on Victoria in that important area of the commercial world. Melbourne really ought to be the home of commodities trading, yet it appears, if the Bulletin is to be believed, that Sydney is well in advance of us in that respect, despite the huge competitive strength Melbourne has as the home of most of the resources companies.

I come back to where I started: the very simple proposition that there are real opportunities in partnership with the commonwealth government for this government to play a role in supporting exercises that essentially have to be driven by the commonwealth to ensure that Australia, and Victoria in particular because of its history as the heartland of Australian manufacturing, goes forward into a prosperous future. This budget does nothing of any substance in that respect and is disappointing in that area. It is strong on rhetoric and fairy floss but as for anything substantive it frankly causes more worry than creating areas where one can be confident. The government has failed to build a budget that assists in capitalising on our very considerable strengths.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr W. D. McGRA TH (Minister for Agriculture).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

Sitting suspended 6.18 p.m. until 8.05 p.m.

PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 7 September; motion of Mr W. D. McGRA TH (Minister for Agriculture).

Ms MARPLE (Altona) — Those who have read their local papers today will know that it is St Francis of Assisi day — that is, the day for animals — so it is most appropriate that we should be speaking about this bill today. It was of great interest to me to look over history to see how we have treated animals. Over the past century there has been a great change in how we view the treatment of animals, particularly over the past 20 years. Today when debating the bill to amend the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act we will reflect on how society should manage the law concerning cruelty to animals.

The minister’s second-reading speech indicated that the honourable member for Rodney had been requested to review the act, and I am looking forward to the honourable member’s sharing some of his findings. The minister asked him to review the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 with a view to determining whether the act was a practical and relevant legislative basis for the support of animal welfare in Victoria well into the future. I am pleased the honourable member’s review confirmed that the purpose of the 1986 act is still pertinent today. However, it was determined that certain changes were needed to bring the act up to date, and that is what we are looking at today.

I was interested to read what was said about the 1986 act by some honourable members at the time it was debated, so looked at Hansard from that time. Although I will not go into all of it, it was interesting to note some of changes included in this bill that were put forward at that time. Members of the time and those of us who were interested in the legislation will remember the wide debate that went on in the community.

At page 1955 of the Hansard of 8 May, 1986 the then Treasurer states in his second-reading speech that the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Bill:

... is a complete re-enactment and updating of the Protection of Animals Act 1966, which has been amended a number of times over the past 20 years.

The changes are so extensive that the government decided to change the title of the legislation. The new title better reflects the intention of the legislation ...

It is interesting to note the then Treasurer’s comment, especially in the light of what the honourable member for Rodney reported to the minister, which has been reflected in today’s bill.

It is important that we explore our relationship with animals. Like many members, my experience of animals has been wide and varied — from domestic pets to working dogs, using animals in farming for profit, breeding and preparing animals for showing, and using animals for pleasure, particularly horse riding. I cannot recall any time when animals have not been part of my day-to-day life, as they still are, but it takes radicals like Peter Singer to raise questions about our relationship with and treatment of animals.

It is interesting to look at how we generally, as a society, have changed and perhaps how we will change in the future in our attitude to the treatment of animals. The argument in his book that animal
luberation is really human liberation is compelling; I share the sentiments expressed on the cover of this book:

Animal liberation presents a radically new approach to our way of seeing ourselves in relation to animals. It offers a systematic and rigorously argued ethical position in opposition to the traditional attitude, which gives man dominion over other animals.

While reading this book again yesterday and last night, I noted with interest how much the philosophy put forward 20 years ago by Peter Singer changed the rules governing such things as experimentation on animals. It is surprising to remember how casually we regarded experimentation on animals and some of our farming methods.

One is also reminded that, despite our laws and all the discussion over the past 20 years, for all our so-called sophistication no better ways of farming have been found in poultry farming and feedlots. I question how we will find a way through that. I remind members that it is not difficult to get thousands of people to sign petitions against the way we farm poultry, yet as a society we eat large quantities of chicken meat farmed in a like manner. We have some way to go yet, but I believe this bill, while it does not actually deal with that aspect, is an important step — although it is limited, as Peter Singer and others would believe. The opposition supports this bill.

Codes of practice developed in 1986 and the establishment of ethics committees have assisted us in better understanding animals and the way we use, work with and enjoy them.

As we are the dominant members of the animal community, it is incumbent on us to reflect on our use of animals and our concerns for their wellbeing. I had the privilege of serving on an ethics committee at the Benalla veterinary laboratories. I and other members of my family found that experience educational.

Such committees are part of the educational process, and the balance of society attempts to make achievements through its laws and regulations. I am sure the work done by the honourable member for Rodney and others will be informative and will benefit many animals. Although not covering all the changes some may desire, this bill addresses some of those issues that animal carers have been asking be tackled since the proclamation of the 1986 act.

It is a shame that cruelty to animals is still part of life. The parliamentary library contains a complete section of newspaper cuttings dealing with cruelty to animals. People are still being prosecuted for conducting pit bull terrier fights. That is amazing in this day and age, but we need to be vigilant about such things. We still read letters in newspapers expressing concerns about experimentation on animals. The Department of Agriculture, Energy and Minerals does not have the resources to enforce laws as they should be enforced. The opposition tells the government that while it supports the bill, it is important that the government ensures enough resources are made available to enforce the laws, which reflect the needs as they are properly regarded by those in our country.

The parliamentary library file contains letters of concern about the export of puppies to other countries. Although all aspects of this practice are covered by Australian law, we are exporting young dogs to countries where the laws are perhaps not as we would wish them to be. Perhaps we should examine that concern on a wider scale.

We are always facing the dilemma surrounding farm production and animals. At the moment a parliamentary committee is examining the effects of galahs —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms MARPLE — They are a lovely bird.

The SPEAKER — Order! Is the honourable member for Altona using an unparliamentary expression?

Ms MARPLE — I would never do that on this issue, Mr Speaker. I have resisted all the jokes including all the New Zealand jokes; that should all be put aside! A parliamentary committee is examining the dilemma of the effects of galahs, long-billed corellas and sulphur-crested cockatoos and other birds on grain crops and fruit crops. We should remember how important it is to protect our crops, at the same time looking after our native birds. In 1986 many people were concerned about outlawing the use of steel-jawed traps. Some members of this house and the other place were adamant that should not be the case, but although steel-jawed traps were allowed in certain areas because of wild dogs, most people now think that is an inappropriate reason to use such traps, especially given the harm that is done to our wildlife by steel-jawed traps. I am concerned that some
members of society still believe animals are only for their enjoyment; they like to see animals fighting.

I am appalled by that, but I am pleased the laws are there. Although it has been difficult to put them into action, I hope the bill will prove effective, particularly the clause that proposes to increase the fines, which I am sure many people will welcome. Before I go any further I thank those public servants, including Peter Penson and Peter Jackson among others, for working so diligently to prepare the bill, which I know is dear to their hearts, and for the time they spent in briefing me.

Some changes have been made, which I will briefly discuss. In his second-reading speech the minister said the review identified some amendments which, if implemented, would ensure that the act protected animals well into the next century. We all hope that that is the case. What does the bill add to the act? As those members who have read the second-reading speech will know, it adds fish and crustaceans to the definition of ‘animal’, which for the first time in Victoria will enable us to address the cruelty and neglect of those species.

Some members will recall that in the 1980s the government of the day discussed cruelty to fish. Those people who were amazed that a government would consider doing such a thing caused a great deal of difficulty. I am pleased to see that that issue is again before us.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms MARPLE — It is all right when you have the numbers in both houses and you do not make political play of it.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms MARPLE — Anyway, we are in agreement. As the minister has pointed out, the legislation is not intended to intrude on existing commercial and recreational practices in the fishing industry but is designed to enable the development of codes of practice in preparing fish for the table. That is all part of community education; and it will apply to displaying crayfish before they are eaten, for instance. As the minister and others have pointed out, the bill will hasten the development of codes of practice for the use of fish and crustaceans, something I am looking forward to.

People are also interested in the transport of animals, particularly dogs carried on trailers and on

the trays of trucks — and honourable members will have seen examples of that. Only the other day in Geelong I saw an untethered dog trying to keep its balance on the open tray of a truck. It was doing an excellent job of it, but it was obvious that the dog was fairly stressed. People may ask what the legislation will do to improve the situation. It will mean that dogs will have to be kept on short tethers on trailers, trays and utilities. Again, some people may ask why a government would want to do that. A survey of vets across Victoria found that more than 800 dogs a year are treated for injuries they receive as a result of falling from those forms of transport. All of us should be more aware of the need for dogs to be tethered in those circumstances. Of course, the bill exempts droving and other working dogs. But as you and others in this place would realise, Mr Speaker, those dogs are usually carried on fairly slow-moving forms of transport, so they would not be under the same stress as the dogs that are carried on vehicles travelling along freeways and highways at great speed.

I expected a government member to bring up the issue, but the other day I was amazed to read what I considered irresponsible journalism in an article in the Herald Sun entitled ‘Bad luck dogs canine passengers’, which implied that all dogs would be banned from riding on utilities and trucks. It said that we would now see utes without dogs, which, the writer claimed, would look distinctly odd. That was irresponsible journalism. Although the bill aims to educate people about dogs and trucks and utilities, a newspaper with a large circulation has implied it will have the opposite effect.

However, it is pleasing to note that other journalists have taken a much more positive view of the bill. On 8 September the Age published an article about dogs which gave a good explanation of the reasons why dogs should be tied up when travelling in the back of utilities. I hope the minister and the government will make some money available for education programs and, perhaps, for the employment of even more inspectors because at the moment we do not have enough.

I hope that when the legislation is enacted the public servants who helped to bring it about will be able to do more work to prevent cruelty to animals. As the minister pointed out in his second-reading speech, the bill introduces three tiers of enforcement:

(a) the general, in which the current inspectors are to operate (stock inspectors, RSPCA inspectors, police and local government officers).
PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Wednesday, 4 October 1995

The specialist inspectors will have the authority to enter particular premises where animals are housed or grouped for the purposes of primary production, exhibition, competition or amusement.

This will inform people so that complaints can be followed up. We must examine our relationship with animals and how we farm them. Society will become more aware of what is happening, and it must be done in a different way for the future.

I shall not go into all of the areas, but the bill will enable us to carry out more prevention work so that we can be satisfied that our animals are not in distress or disabled. It is important that we all become vigilant in ensuring that the legislation is put into action and that the government provides support to the department to ensure it happens, because obviously that is the wish of those who reviewed the act. We must also review the measures regularly to reflect the way our society looks at the various ways we use animals as mentioned earlier, such as for enjoyment, profit and pleasure, and what that relationship means to us in the future.

The opposition supports the bill, and I hope the government will support it with increased funding and education programs. It is everybody's responsibility to be vigilant, to question and to listen to those who may be thought to be radical in relation to our role with animals in society. That will bring us closer to ensuring that animals have a life that is free of cruelty. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — It gives me pleasure to speak on the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Amendment) Bill. I thank the honourable member for Altona for her supportive comments and the opposition for its bipartisan support for what I regard as an important piece of legislation.

Before dealing with the detail of the bill it is worth while going back over some of the background to the development of people's concern for animal welfare issues leading to this legislation. In historical terms the concern that people have for animal welfare issues is important. The honourable member for Altona expressed her concern, and I share those sentiments because I also come from an agricultural background and have strong empathy for all sorts of animals. I have worked with them for most of my life.

Animal welfare is a relatively recent phenomenon. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was not formed in the United Kingdom...
until the mid-1800s. The society was formed before the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. That says something about priorities. We should also be aware that at that time there was not much concern about the way people treated animals. We have made enormous progress in the past 100 years, certainly in the past 25 to 30 years, in our concern about animal welfare issues.

The RSPCA in Victoria was formed not long after that of the United Kingdom, in 1871, and the RSPCA will be celebrating its 125th birthday in July of next year. It has made a remarkable contribution to the welfare of animals not only in this state but also in this nation and around the world.

To go back a little, postwar Britain was concerned about ensuring that it would never again be caught short of food supplies. During the Second World War it almost starved because it was dependent on food coming from overseas. Successive British governments decided that they had to be increasingly self-sufficient. As a result, huge resources were devoted to increasing agricultural production, resources went into research and advice and generous grants were given to the farming community immediately after the war.

One of the consequences was the development of an intensive form of agriculture for livestock production. That same trend was evident in the United States of America, but for slightly different reasons. However, with that intensification of animal production, which was different from what had traditionally been the case, people started showing some concern about the welfare of animals. Ruth Harrison was one of the first to speak out publicly in her book *Animal Machines*. The honourable member for Altona rightly drew to the attention of the house Peter Singer’s landmark book *Animal Liberation*, which was published in 1976. Those two books were essentially at the forefront of public debate in the United Kingdom on animal welfare issues. This in turn led to the United Kingdom government setting up the Bramble committee, which consisted of people with real skills and expertise in animal production, veterinary science and agriculture. The committee was chaired by Professor Rogers Bramble. That committee presented a landmark report which essentially set the scene for animal welfare activities and legislation, certainly in the developed countries of the world.

One of the important recommendations of the Bramble committee was the establishment of the Farm and Animal Welfare Advisory Council, again a body that advises the British government. The council is made up of people with expertise in animal production, veterinary science and agriculture. It has played an important role in the debate on animal welfare.

I do not think an opportunity like this should pass without saying that the debate in Britain and the United States has been more of confrontation than cooperation — more heat than light — whereas in this country, where the debate started a little later than in the United Kingdom or the United States, we have a proud record. I am proud of our performance in Victoria on animal welfare issues because there has been a great deal of dialogue, consensus and common ground with both sides stating their cases vigorously and in the end doing things in a constructive way by finding the middle ground and always moving forward.

The bill is another step in the process of moving forward with animal welfare legislation. We have had a far more informed debate in this country than has taken place in other parts of the world. The main players have been the farming community on the one hand and on the other the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, animal liberation, the Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies and the various other animal welfare organisations.

A very important thing Victoria has done is the setting up in 1980 of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to advise the agriculture minister on animal welfare issues. I had the privilege of serving on that committee for a number of years as the representative of all animal producers in Victoria. I enjoyed my time on the committee with people such as Peter Singer, Hugh Wirth, the staff of the Department of Agriculture, Energy and Minerals and representatives of the Municipal Association of Victoria, all of whom made constructive contributions to the debate on animal welfare.

Following that stage and the constructive dialogue I referred to earlier, in 1994 the minister reviewed the membership of AWAC. The committee had been in operation since 1980 and it was time for a review. The committee is presently made up of representatives of the RSPCA, the Cat Protection Society, the Lost Dogs’ Home, the Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, the Victorian Canine Council, the Victorian Horse Council, the Australian Veterinary Association, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources,
the ministry of police and emergency services, the Department of Health and Community Services, the Municipal Association of Victoria; and two representatives from the Victorian Farmers Federation, one representing the extensive industries and one representing the intensive industries. As I have already said, that body plays an important role in advising the minister on animal welfare matters.

For a number of years various groups have been lobbying successive ministers to change parts of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act — there has been heavy lobbying regarding the carrying of dogs on tray trucks and for heavier penalties on a whole range of different issues — and last year the minister asked me to undertake a review of the legislation.

The bill extends the definition of cruelty. Clause 7 amends the 1986 act by omitting the word 'knowingly' so that now a person does not have to knowingly commit an offence; it is sufficient just to commit an offence. Whether a person knows or not in my view does not matter.

In September 1993 I was asked to conduct such a review on behalf of the minister. The review was advertised, submissions were invited and 45 submissions or letters were received from organisations such as the Victorian Farmers Federation, RSPCA, ANZFAS and a whole range of individual scientific establishments, universities, farm producers and other people interested in animal welfare. Over the past couple of years extensive discussions have taken place with all those groups. I pay tribute to Dr Peter Penson and Dr Peter Jackson of the Bureau of Animal Welfare, who were an important part of the discussions. Following that review and the extensive discussions, recommendations were made to the minister which resulted in this amendment bill.

The bill does a number of things. Firstly, clause 4 expands the definition of animals to include fish, amphibious reptiles, birds, mammals and live crustaceans. The inclusion of fish and crustaceans in the definition of animals is a significant advancement. Many people would argue that we have not gone far enough in extending the powers over fishing, but I think we have made very significant progress, and perhaps a further extension should be left to another day.

Secondly, the bill also widens the definition of premises to include a vehicle, a vessel or an aircraft. That change is a significant move in the right direction and will allow an inspector to pull up a car and inspect its boot for dogs, hens or birds of various sorts. It gives them the power to inspect vessels or aircraft.

The bill extends the definition of cruelty. Clause 7 amends the 1986 act by omitting the word 'knowingly' so that now a person does not have to knowingly commit an offence; it is sufficient just to commit an offence. Whether a person knows or not in my view does not matter. If the animal has suffered, cruelty has occurred and the person responsible should be guilty of an offence. This is an important amendment.
Clause 20 expands the powers of inspectors. As the honourable member for Altona said in her speech, the clause will provide inspectors with the power to free an animal from an entanglement, tether or bog. It will allow an inspector to go into premises — not a home because the act still does not allow any inspector to go into a person’s home — to inspect an animal showing signs of pain or suffering as a result of injury or disease to determine whether the animal requires treatment by a veterinary surgeon. That is another important part of the legislation. It allows the inspector to free the animal and inspect it to see if treatment is required, to arrange veterinary treatment if that is necessary and to give the owner the choice of the veterinarian he or she might want to provide that treatment.

The bill introduces three tiers of inspection, which is very important. Many organisations have lobbied heavily for increased powers of inspection. This provision will do that by amending section 21 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. The proposed legislation will extend the powers of inspectors so that there will be general enforcement by the current inspectors, who include stock inspectors, RSPCA inspectors, police and local government officers.

The second category will be special enforcement, in which specialist inspectors are to operate. These will be persons with appropriate qualifications and they will have less restrictive powers of entry to investigate specifically technical matters of animal welfare on highly specialised animal-use premises wherever the minister agrees that particular investigative action is necessary. It is important to note that that can occur only with the approval of the minister. The provision will allow specialist inspectors to visit premises and investigate highly technical issues, particularly in pig and poultry premises where some expertise is required.

The third category of inspector is the ministerial one, in which the resolution of a serious welfare problem is authorised by the minister using procedures which the act will empower him or her to use. This provision would be used in very specific circumstances where the minister has the power to appoint somebody with special expertise in that area to look at premises and the keeping of animals in those premises and to take the appropriate action.

Another provision that has excited some interest in the community is clause 13. It will make it an offence to carry dogs on trucks with open trays or in utilities or trailers if the animals are not properly secured. Many individuals and organisations have lobbied heavily for this provision because each year in Victoria some 800 dogs are injured by being thrown off the backs of trucks or utilities; 560 of those are in country areas, and nationally about 5000 dogs a year are injured in that way.

Dr Graeme Smith of the Lost Dogs Home surveyed 46 veterinarians throughout Victoria on injuries dogs receive from falling off vehicles. The survey revealed that 75 per cent of the vets said they treated injured dogs regularly. It was found that vets in Horsham, Swan Hill, Wangaratta and Benalla each treated 40 to 50 dogs a year for injuries incurred through falling off vehicles. Vets in Shepparton, Ararat, Ballarat, Hamilton, Camperdown, Mansfield, Echuca, Cohuna, Maffra, Bairnsdale, Orbost and Mildura each treated 10 to 25 dogs annually. Many vets said the injuries happened between farms on public roads and were caused by the owner’s failure to tie the dog on a short enough lead or because the dog was allowed to run around unsecured.

This provision has the support of the Victorian Farmers Federation. I quote from the minutes of the 69th meeting of the general council of the VFF, which say:

That if moves are initiated to amend the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act to make the carriage of unrestrained dogs on tray vehicles an offence, the following exemptions should apply:

1. The law should apply only to vehicles travelling on public roads.

That has been included in this legislation:

2. Exemptions should apply to vehicles involved in the droving of stock on public roads ...

That has also been exempted. It is clear that farmers either on their own properties or while droving stock on public roads will be exempted from those provisions of the act.

The VFF has supported this legislation. Mr Tony St Clair from the VFF said farmers were responsible animal husbanders and most of them either tethered dogs riding on the backs of utility trucks or tray trucks or put them safely inside stock crates. Those sentiments were supported by Mr Alan Bowman, the VFF representative on the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. He said that sheep dogs are valuable assets and the number of farmers who travel up and down the highway without dogs secured is not as high as people think.
It is important, to reduce the unacceptable level of injury to dogs that are left unrestrained on vehicles, that it be made an offence to do so, with exemptions for farmers who are moving stock. I suggest that in the short term inspectors should allow a reasonable period for the farming community to become used to these regulations and to give farmers time to ensure their dogs are properly tethered on the backs of vehicles if they are moving along public roads.

This is a very important piece of legislation. It is a further step in the right direction to improve animal welfare in this state. In any civilised society there is concern about the welfare of animals, and in Victoria we have a proud and progressive record of showing concern for the welfare of animals through education, legislation and, if necessary, enforcement and the application of severe penalties to those who do not respond to education, advice and counsel.

Improved animal welfare depends heavily on enlightened stockmanship. It depends on education, council, advice, and enforcement as a last resort. The government has a good track record in its concern for animals.

The minister has received a great deal of commendation from the community for dealing with the domestic animals legislation that the government's predecessors were unable to deal with. The minister and his committee dealt with a great deal of conflicting advice but were able to work their way through that maze and come up with a piece of legislation that passed both houses of Parliament and has been widely supported in the community — the domestic animals legislation. This is the second string in that bow of improving animal welfare in this state, and the amendments to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 will further progress animal welfare in this state.

I thank again Dr Peter Penson and Dr Peter Jackson for their support and for their important roles in framing this legislation. I thank the member for Altona for her comments on the legislation, and the opposition for its support of this legislation.

I conclude with the opening paragraph of the minister's second-reading speech, which sums it up:

The bill forms part of the government's commitment to ensure that Victorian legislation designed to protect animals from acts of cruelty maintains its leading edge in Australia and is suitable for the task of animal protection well into the next century.

The legislation will serve this state well for a number of years to come, but like any legislation it will need to be progressively reviewed and updated. I suggest five years time is a suitable time frame in which to review this legislation. Some community groups will be disappointed that we have not gone far enough and others will say the government has gone too far. We have been able to find the middle ground; we have been able to reach consensus. I thank all those who have contributed to framing this legislation and all those who have put in submissions and have been involved in the debate. I wish the bill a speedy passage through the house.

Mr W. D. McGrath (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank the honourable member for Rodney for his contribution to this debate, and the honourable member for Altona for giving support from the opposition to the amendment to the animal welfare legislation.

I thank the member for Rodney for his contribution in bringing this bill to the review stage and also for working with my departmental officers, Dr Peter Jackson and Dr Peter Penson. I thank them for the work they have done with the various interest groups in the wider community. This job has taken considerable time and has required a strong commitment from those people in making sure that they brought it to the agriculture committee and to me for final consideration before cabinet, and therefore for coalition party approval. The passage of the bill here tonight has completed that approval process.

I would like to mention a couple of other people while I have the opportunity. The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) within the Department of Agriculture, Energy and Minerals has been chaired for some time by Dr David Smith, a former director-general of the department of agriculture. He has recently stood down from that position. I place on record my appreciation of his work on behalf of animal welfare in making sure that as minister I was well informed of any problems associated with cruelty to animals or animal welfare in the wider community. To Dr David Smith I express my appreciation for the role he has carried out.

The opportunity is now open for Mr Alan Bowman to come forward as the new chairman of AWAC. I am sure that Mr Alan Bowman with his experience in farming practices and his previous time with that committee will carry out the role of chairman in a fair, proper and reasonable manner providing
advice to the department and me about any cruelty to animal or the welfare of animals as a whole.

The honourable member for Altona made some comments about farming methods, and particularly intensive farming methods. She made reference to the keeping of poultry and the establishment of feedlots. It is a fact of life that if you want to secure Japanese markets and maintain continuity of supply and consistency of product to meet the specification of that market, land animals need to be fed with a consistent ration. The way to achieve that is through a feedlot process. One of the reasons the chicken meat industry has done so well in the past decade has been because of the broiler industry being able to house chickens, therefore giving consistency of ration and coming forward with a consistent product. I am sure many people in the community buy chicken because they know it is of a consistent standard and quality. Much of that relates to the extensive farming practice that is associated with the poultry production and, in the other case, consistent production through feedlot for beef cattle.

In the years ahead we will see more of this in the lamb and sheep meat industry as this consistency will be demanded by the marketplace.

I have no problems in dealing with people who air their concerns about animal welfare sensibly, but I am annoyed by animal liberation groups who go right over the top. I question a group at the moment who seem to have a vendetta against a Victorian egg producing company. It is about time the members of that group carried out their protests more sensibly because they really are getting themselves off-side with the wider community and they do their cause little justice.

Two significant changes to the bill — the inclusion of fish and crustaceans under the meaning of animal — have been identified by both speakers. The changes relate to keeping those species, particularly for the restaurant trade. I re-emphasise, as I did in the second-reading speech, that the legislation has no relevance to the recreational or commercial fishing industries. Although I have received many letters recently expressing people’s concerns that the legislation may affect the recreational and commercial fishing industries, this will not be the case.

Another matter I addressed in the second-reading speech relates to dogs on an open tray. I quote from proposed section 15A, ‘Dogs on moving vehicles’:

(2) subject to subsection (3), a person must not drive on a highway —
(a) a truck with an open tray; or
(b) a motor vehicle to which a trailer is attached — if a dog is on the tray or trailer and the dog is not secured in such a way as to prevent it from —
(c) falling from or moving off the tray or trailer;

The honourable member for Altona referred to tray-trucks. Some concern has been expressed, as the honourable member for Altona rightly reflected, about a report in the Herald Sun newspaper, and I quite agree that those sorts of reports raise alarm in the community when there is no need for it.

I stress that in relation to dogs and to open-tray vehicles no RSPCA inspector, local government inspector or police officer should be looking to book people who have dogs in the confines of car-type utility trucks because the dogs have surrounds around them that give them ample support. In this case I am speaking of working dogs that are used to work production animals such as sheep or cattle.

But parliamentary counsel indicates that a tray vehicle or truck is considered a utility under the definition of tray vehicle. It is not the intention of the bill to line up people who have dogs in car-type utility vehicles and fine them for doing so.

As is outlined in the bill, we want to allow farmers with working dogs the freedom to have dogs under good control hopping off the vehicles to assist with the movement of cattle or sheep at a given time, then at the command of the owners coming back to heel and being put back into the trays at the back of the vehicles.

This year the Royal Agricultural Show included a display entitled Nature’s Way which gave the opportunity for people to see animals giving birth to new offspring. Another exhibition out there concerned the welfare of pigs. I know the honourable member for Rodney would be well aware of that display. It has been a very good educational program, giving people an understanding of the whole process of rearing and managing pigs and of the pig industry.

Those exhibitions at the Royal Agricultural Show have been very well done, with cooperation from staff of my department. Many other people have associated themselves with them to ensure a first-class educational process to give people here a
greater understanding of farm animals and production systems.

We want to see proper, sensible animal welfare systems put in place for the prevention of cruelty to animals but at the same time, while enforcement is available through the legislation and penalties can be applied, the legislation will be far more effective if we use it to educate people and give them a better understanding of the need for proper animal welfare.

Animals are important to us from a domestic point of view but, more importantly to me as Minister for Agriculture, they have an important place in our farming systems for the production of food and fibre.

Unless we undertake proper and sensible welfare practices we will not achieve the productivity necessary to ensure that good quality food and fibre are available from that source. They are the realities of life.

I thank the two honourable members who spoke for their contributions. I hope, as was said in the second-reading speech, that the bill will provide the necessary legislative requirements for sensible and proper animal welfare into the 21st century so that we will not have to revisit this act for a number of years.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

BUILDING (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 7 September; motion of Mr MACLELLAN (Minister for Planning).

Mr DOLLIS (Richmond) — The opposition will not be opposing the bill, and may I say that in this case the minister has set an example that could well be followed by other ministers in that he has supplied me with all available notes, including possible questions by the opposition and possible answers by the government. This is what you call cooperation at its fullest! This is called government working with opposition! The minister displays considerable intelligence in getting his bills through.

He has had no problems in this area because his briefings have been so spectacular!

But getting back to the matter at hand, I would say that it is a fairly straightforward bill providing changes that will assist in the administration of the building regulations in this state.

For the record I shall outline some of the changes that are provided in this bill. They include a mechanism for standardising fees for the lodgment of building permit documents with councils; preventing the temporary occupation of non-complying buildings where temporary occupation is simply an interim step to permanent occupation of a building under an occupancy permit; preventing municipal building surveyors from acting as private building surveyors in the municipality which employs or engages them — and I suggest to the minister that this is a very worthwhile reform — recognising the role of councils in building control matters by making them reporting authorities; introducing a $3000 threshold for the payment of the building permit levy; requiring a lessee or licensee of Crown land to obtain a building permit; and providing for additional flexibility in the preparation of ministerial orders relative to building practitioner insurance.

In the short time since the bill was introduced I suggested that the minister review it after 12 months. I am pleased that this has happened, although I am disappointed that no formal evaluation process was gone through in the preparation of this amending bill, about which the minister gave an undertaking in his response to the second-reading debate on the original bill. He said that this legislation is evolving and that it may be necessary to come back with a number of amendments.

A number of questions need to be answered, and I suspect that in due course the minister and his department will investigate matters that will require further amendment, so that we have a Building Act that is an example for the rest of Australia. Victoria will lead the reforms in this area!

During the briefing session we were informed that the drafting instructions were prepared on the basis of comments made by the Building Advisory Council and were revised after circulation to a limited number of practitioners in the building industry. In that sense the bill represents a missed opportunity to make amendments to the Building Act. However, as the debate goes on we will be able
to correct a number of components of the act that do not fulfil the original expectations.

We must ensure that Victoria has the best possible legislation and that it maintains and improves on the high building and safety standards we have established. That will be in the interests of everyone in the building industry — building industry practitioners and owners alike — and the public. It is to be regretted that the government introduced the bill during the dying days of the sessional period. We were given only two weeks to consult with practitioners and others, which left little time to consider the complexity of the matters with which we were dealing. There was no debate because the chopper came down, so the opportunity of making important reforms to building administration and regulation in this state was missed. It cannot be argued that the Building Act was in such difficulties that it warranted legislation being pushed through by the government. Although I make this criticism, I acknowledge that the minister has honoured his undertaking to correct any shortcomings that may have appeared as a result of the legislation being pushed through.

What is the role of the Building Practitioners Board? Does it include the assessment of building practitioners’ qualifications? If the answer to the latter question is yes, what is the purpose of a person obtaining a certificate of proficiency issued by an approved association before becoming a registered building practitioner under the act? If a building practitioner is a member of an approved association, does that constitute a form of compulsory unionism? This fair point has been made by a number of practitioners. I am not opposed to a form of compulsory unionism, but it is an issue that should be raised. If the answer is yes, is this consistent with some of the other government reforms? It could be a contradiction of government policy. If it is a form of compulsory unionism, other ministers have been advocating a different course.

The competition between the private and council building surveyors appears to be working well. However, it appears that it is at an increased cost, such as a building permit levy of 0.64 cents in the dollar, which is $64 on a $100,000 house; professional indemnity insurance; membership fees of an approved association; a building practitioners registration fee; and building permit fees. Although building permit fees were deregulated, under the minister’s guidelines issued on 16 September he recommends the fees that councils should charge. A quick appraisal will show a significant increase on the old regulations.

I did not get a chance to show the minister a table I wanted to incorporate in Hansard, but I have checked it with the Speaker and I do not believe there will be any difficulty. The table shows some of the old and some of the new regulations.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I understand the Speaker has seen the table and it can be incorporated.

Leave granted; table as follows:
**TABLE I**

**OLD REGULATIONS:**
MINIMUM FEE NOT LESS THAN TWENTY DOLLARS

CLASS 1A AND 10 (HOUSE OR NON-INHABITABLE BUILDING)
$\text{COST}/400$ I.E $250$ ON $100,000$ DOLLAR HOUSE (NOT INCLUDING LAND)

OTHER BUILDINGS:
- COST DOES NOT EXCEED $5000$ $\text{COST}/100$
  - (OR MAX COST $50$)
- COST EXCEEDS $100,000$
  - BUT LESS THAN $500,000$ $\text{COST}/500 + $500$
  - ($700$ ON $100,000$ BUILDING)
- COST OVER $500,000$
  - $\text{COST}/1000 + $1000$
  - (OR $2,000$ ON $1,000,000$ BUILDING)

**NEW BUILDING REGULATIONS**
MINIMUM FEE $100$

CLASS 1A AND 10
$\text{COST}/250$
- (OR $400$ ON $100,000$ HOUSING COSTS)

OTHER BUILDINGS
- COST DOES NOT EXCEED $5000$ $100$
- COST EXCEEDS $5,000$
  - BUT LESS THAN $100,000$ $\text{COST} \times 0.8\% +$150
  - (I.E $950$ ON $100,000$ OF WORK)
- COST EXCEEDS $100,000$
  - BUT LESS THAN $1,000,000$ $\text{COST} \times 0.7\% +$300
  - (I.E. $7300$ ON WORK OF $1,000,000$)
Mr DOLLIS — Although work has been done on the bill, it has been said outside Parliament that some shonky builders may be able to shop around for the right building surveyor to get a permit! I came across one case where an application was knocked back on three different occasions by three separate building surveyors on the grounds of structural and design discrepancies. Alterations were supposedly made and a new proposal and plans were presented, but in each case the same drawings were included. It was a coincidence that the building surveyors who checked the plans either knew each other or shared the same checking engineer, otherwise this case would not have come to light.

That sort of thing would not have happened under the old system, where councils played an impartial role and there was no alternative when obtaining a building permit. This raises an important question: how is the Building Control Commission going to address such matters in its enforcement role? How many investigating officers does the Building Practitioners Board employ to deal with complaints of this sort? Earlier this year I learnt that only one investigating officer was employed, with an additional position being advertised.

In previous debates we have discussed swimming pool barriers for existing pools areas and the requirement to provide barriers within 30 days of a sale, but who will monitor and enforce that regulation? It is important to continue to amend the Building Act, but it is also important to ensure that the body to which the minister has given responsibility is able to police the regulations and the legislation that has been enacted.

I have a problem with councils being allowed to operate in other council areas when issuing building permits. Greater efficiency should be its own reward. It is enough that private building surveyors are now competing with council building surveyors, but for government instrumentalities to be competing with each other for the sake of some extra money does not seem to be correct.

I do not believe amalgamated municipalities require that type of competition and regulation. They have enough issues to resolve without having to worry about new building regulations. I ask the Minister for Planning to give some thought to this matter because a number of amalgamated municipalities have raised the issue with me.

It may be sensible for the minister to allow building inspectors to operate within the boundaries of municipalities while limiting the competition to private surveyors. After all, direct competition will provide an efficient service. It would be inappropriate for a municipality to consider an application for a building permit when it could be capably handled by someone 100 kilometres away, given that the local municipal officers may not be aware of the complexities that exist in another municipality.

I believe council building surveyors should operate within the boundaries of municipalities but be open to competition from private building surveyors within designated areas. I am pleased that the minister has prohibited local government building surveyors from operating as private building surveyors in the same municipality. That would obviously raise concerns about potential conflicts of interest — a topic of public concern lately — and may have impacts on other areas. The reforms should address some of the problems that are beginning to emerge. There must be transparency and accountability in local government operations, because whenever they are blurred the danger of potential corruption arises.

I am pleased that the minister is dealing with these matters, but I do not believe the proposed amendment to the Building Act will fully resolve the issue because councils are able to compete across municipal boundaries. The only way to resolve the issue satisfactorily is to ensure that councils do not operate beyond their municipal boundaries.

In an earlier debate on the issue, I referred to self-certification, about which I still have strong concerns. The minister will be aware that section 238 of the Building Act allows building professionals other than building surveyors to certify their own work, and it allows building surveyors to rely on such certificates of compliance. When the matter was raised by concerned practising engineers, the minister replied in the following terms:

It is up to the relevant building surveyor whether or not to rely on a certificate of compliance prepared by an engineer. It is also up to the relevant building surveyor, having regard to the circumstances of a particular project, whether to accept a certificate from an engineer who prepared the design ...

It is expected that in the case of class 1 and 10 buildings up to two storeys a certificate of compliance from the engineer who also prepared the design for a slab or
footing or other part of the structural design would be relied upon. At the other extreme, a certificate of compliance for a structural design of a high-rise building should not be accepted by the relevant building surveyor unless the certificate has been prepared by an engineer who has not prepared the design.

It means that for the average house no second checking is required, which is disturbing in terms of maintaining safety standards. Buying a house is normally the largest single investment the vast majority of our constituents make, and they should be assured that the quality and safety of whatever they buy is guaranteed. Insurance is of little comfort to people who purchase houses of inferior quality, because some cases can go on for years before they are resolved.

In referring to the limitation on the time by which legal action may be brought I direct the attention of the house to the minister’s second-reading speech, which states:

The Building Bill defines a clear starting date — the date of issue of an occupancy permit — and a clear conclusion date of 10 years from the date of issue. This will remove the existing ambiguity surrounding the time during which the building owner retains the right to issue legal proceedings. This will provide property owners with additional protection in terms of years beyond the very short number of years that now exist.

That may not be the case. Legal opinion from Sly and Weigall states:

Where an action is brought, say, eight years after occupancy, section 134 would appear to have no application. However, it seems that the Limitation of Actions Act 1958 could still be available to a defendant where the damage ought reasonably to have been discovered more than six years prior to the date of the writ. If that interpretation is correct then an unintended result would seem to have been produced.

The issue of fraudulent concealment also arises. If more than 10 years have elapsed since the issuing of an occupancy permit before discovery, is the building practitioner entitled to use section 134 of the Building Act as a defence to the owner’s action? It is clear that if the two points I have made are correct, not one but a number of periods of limitation can apply to construction work.

I ask the minister to take these matters into consideration when replying at the conclusion of the debate. I have not provided an exhaustive list of the issues that the opposition believes require further examination. I call on the minister to undertake a proper public review process, because there is a need to review the insurance and limitation of liability provisions. Many questions need to be resolved and further explanation is required by the practitioners, the lawyers and, probably, the owners.

The debate has given us the opportunity to raise once more a number of concerns about the amendments. The minister needs to pay more attention to the bill. Public discussion is required if some of the problems raised in this debate and previous debates are not to be realised in the wider community. The minister should continue to monitor the act and seek advice on how it can be improved, especially in the areas of concern the opposition has raised.

I thank the minister for his cooperation and briefings. The Building (Amendment) Bill at least has shown that it is possible to move in the correct direction if a truly bipartisan approach is taken. Victoria will get a better piece of legislation than that which exists in any other state of the commonwealth.

Mr RICHARDSON (Forest Hill) — I note with interest that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has acknowledged that the department provided him with extensive briefing notes on this matter, which is just as well. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that without them he would have been lost. He knows absolutely nothing about the subject. I do not wish to be churlish about such things, so I will not pursue that any further.

Mr Dollis — Why not?

Mr RICHARDSON — I am a generous spirit and it is not in my nature to be unduly harsh on my fellow man, although it is difficult not to be harsh in dealing with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The Building Act, when introduced, was revolutionary legislation. It came after a gestation period of several years. It was a tortuous process in which the various states of the commonwealth came together, some willingly and some unwillingly, in trying to formulate a uniform approach to building regulation throughout the country. A multitude of conferences were held; civil servants flew backwards and forwards; ministers scurried in their wake; and eventually the Building Act, as it is now known in Victoria, was established.
When the bill to establish the act and the Building Control Commission was brought into the house, the government made it clear that the intention was to continually finetune the provisions of the regulations. The introduction of the bill, its passage through the various stages of the house and its metamorphosis into an act were simply the first stage of what was expected to be quite a lengthy process of changes — some major and some minor.

This bill is the first of those finetuning measures that have been found to be necessary as the provisions of the act have been tested. Some provisions have been found wanting; some finetuning to improve the workings of various sections has been found necessary; and some quite clear deficiencies have been discovered. The amending bill before the Parliament enacts the first set of changes that have been found necessary.

I suggest to the house that this will not be the only bill of its kind to be introduced. I give clear warning well in advance to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that, should he remain shadow Minister for Planning, he will need to do a little more homework and bone up on the subject. In that way the next time there is need for him to make a speech in Parliament not only will he be able to benefit from the briefing notes and the detailed information given to him by the minister through the department but also he might be able to draw on his personal resources.

It was not sufficient for the provisions of the controlling act simply to ensure that buildings are safe. That is of course a primary consideration, but an additional important objective was to ensure that the process of building was streamlined as far as possible. It could be said that the processes through which one had to go to construct a building in this state were akin to the difficulty of the camel going through the eye of a needle. If we were to effect a revolution in the economy of this state and revitalise the state — getting the building industry going and rejuvenating business — it was necessary to remove all impediments to a clean, clear and speedy process of resolution of planning matters to do with building. Without that, the enormous costs associated with erecting or effecting alterations to a building would continue to drag back the economy of Victoria.

That was the primary objective, which was then in line with the government’s overall objectives: to revitalise the economy of the state, to get business doing business again, to enable individuals to strive and succeed, to restore the faith of Victorians in Victoria and to have the capital city and provincial cities and towns in Victoria rebuilding and on the move again. The government’s whole strategy was dependent upon a linking of the various components of government that would assist in that way. The Department of Planning and Development with its various components — building being one of them — was important to the overall government policy of revitalisation and rejuvenation.

The enactment of the Building Act was important. It was achieved not without anguish and endless delay. Its gestation period was greater than that for an entire herd of elephants, but ultimately it was achieved, and we have now come to the first of the finetuning exercises.

The building amendments deal with a number of detailed issues. I will not canvass all of them; in essence, the amendments are of a machinery nature, further streamlining the process. The amendments will enable the standardisation of fees for the lodging of permit documents. Building surveyors must not permit the temporary occupation of a building as an interim step to permanent occupation. A municipal building surveyor is prohibited from operating as a private surveyor in the employing municipal district. There is a right of appeal to the Buildings Appeals Board if there is a refusal or failure to lift an emergency order.

The proposed legislation will clarify the powers of the minister in relation to the making of insurance orders under section 135 of the Building Act 1993. On the matter of insurance, it is relevant to inform the house that the steps which were taken by the government in addressing the matters of insurance were wide reaching. They appeared revolutionary at the time. There was some controversy associated with them but they have received widespread approval. An article in the Australian Building Codes Board News of July 1995 was brought to my attention. The article referred to a Pacific Rim conference of building officials in Darwin in May of this year, which the article says provided a significant benchmark for the work of the Australian Building Codes Board. Delegates from all over the world attended the conference and one gratifying item in the article says:

British delegates, who have been contracted to advise Thailand on changes to their building laws, expressed surprise that Thailand and other Asian nations weren’t looking to Australia for this expertise. The British were very impressed that Australia had solved liability and
insurance problems relating to private certification, issues they had been wrestling with unsuccessfully for a number of years.

In scanning the published comments in relation to the Victorian building code over the past 12 to 18 months, one is struck by the fact that many of the comments that appear in publications reflect very favourably upon the way in which the Victorian government has handled the whole matter of revision of the building code and particularly the way in which the Victorian government has addressed the need to streamline and speed up the process of certification, the processes which are necessary to get a building actually on the ground and then rising from the ground, so that it can be occupied, so that capital can be usefully utilised, so that the whole process is over and done with and the entrepreneurs can get on with something else with their money and by this whole process, then, the revitalisation of Victoria’s economy can occur.

I note, Mr Speaker, that we are now drawing close to the time at which you would interrupt business, so I do not propose to take all of the time which is available to me but will close my remarks by complimenting the minister on the way in which he and the officers of his department have handled the whole issue of the rewriting of the building code in Victoria and the way in which the legislation was first presented and the way in which it has been subject to constant re-examination. It is to the great credit of those who serve Victoria and I am confident that with the careful surveillance which the department is giving to these matters Victoria shall continue to lead the commonwealth and indeed many parts of the world in this important area of activity.

Mr MACLELLAN (Minister for Planning) — I thank honourable members for their contribution to the debate. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition was kind enough to express his gratitude for the briefings. The briefings were made available by Mr Max Croxford, the chairman of the Building Control Commission, and I am sure that he and Mr John Kotsopoulos, the legislative officer of the commission, will always stand ready to give honourable members information about building control, so that if members have technical issues which they wish to check, both as to the theory and practice of this legislation, they should feel free to contact the commission.

I would also like on behalf, I think, of all sides of Parliament to commend the commission on its work. It has reported today to the house on its first year’s activities. It is a well-presented report and shows the success the commission is having.

I am tempted to tease the Deputy Leader of the Opposition by saying perhaps I should produce some speech notes for him, but I won’t. He mentioned compulsory unionism. The shallow critics, I suppose, of national policy directions — I say national, right across Australia — will use words like ‘compulsory unionism’ or the equally monstering on the opposite side ‘deregulation’, as a means of pulling down efforts.

It is not compulsory unionism; it is really a grandfather clause and who better to be responsible for a grandfather clause than me, I suppose. It is a sort of grandfather clause for those who have had a long-term commitment to the industry before it was reorganised. So the membership of both the Master Builders Association and the Housing Industry Association were in fact allowed to become practitioners without further examination. But new entrants will not be entrants by compulsory unionism or by their membership of an association so much as by their holding appropriate skills or qualifications and it is the skill and qualifications which are the entries now.

Equally, there is the dropping off of the shonky builders, which again was a phrase used by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. It is one which is used in the industry, I suppose — about others, always. Nobody says ‘I’m a shonky builder’; they say somebody else is a shonky builder. They will be deleted because they are going to run out of insurance. Either they are going to come up to proper standards and not have claims or they are going to run out of insurance and be run out of the industry. It will not be by expulsion that we will get them. We will get them because the good builders will no longer subsidise the bad builders. That is the developing practice through having a requirement for indemnity insurance.

I thank the honourable member for Forest Hill not only for his support for the bill in the house but for his support for the bill as a member of a government committee which has worked with me and with the Building Control Commission in developing the legislation. Much of the credit goes not only to the Building Control Commission and John Kotsopoulos as their legal officer, but to the honourable member for Forest Hill and those government members who
worked closely with the commission in developing the legislation for presentation to the house.

I will continue to keep the legislation under review. It will be necessary for us to get it right so that we can encourage other states to adopt it. I might add and quickly report to the house, just in the last minute available to me, that other states are showing interest in adopting the system and I hope we have this as a forerunner of a national approach. I will do my best to commend it to them on behalf of all sides of the house.

I do not want councils to be able to withdraw from the system completely. They have a public responsibility not only to receive the documents but to have the basic statutory obligations, even if they are not actively promoting their building control work. If council officers are restricted to working in only their own areas again I believe that will get us into the restraint of trade area, where if we do not have actual competition on the broadest and most appropriate basis, others will raise the spectre that this is in fact regulation. It is not regulation; it is the listing of those people who have appropriate qualifications in the various categories and a holding out of their skills, experience and insurance as being prime responsibilities and characteristics for those who wish to be in the building industry. I support the bill, and I am pleased to have the support of the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER — Order! Under sessional orders the time for the adjournment of the house has arrived.

Waverley Park Primary School

Mrs WILSON (Dandenong North) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Education the urgent need for major maintenance at the Waverley Park Primary School in my electorate. The school council of Waverley Park has hoped for a number of years that it may have arrived at the top of the list for major maintenance, but unfortunately with such a large region it does not seem to be getting far up the list at all.

The school council has struggled along for quite a number of years doing as much work as it possibly could from locally raised funds, but the situation has deteriorated to such a stage that the parents and the school council can no longer be expected to provide the funds required.

A recent visit to the school has led me to believe that the health and safety of the students are definitely at risk because the problem has now reached quite serious proportions. I have a number of photographs and if the minister were here I would have made them available to him because he would have received an extremely clear picture of the damage that has occurred mainly from a badly leaking roof and from window frames, which are so rotten because of damp that the glass falls out.

In addition, a number of electrical fittings have to be renewed on a regular basis because the water has also damaged the fittings. The carpet is full of holes, mould and mildew. It is quite inappropriate for children to be cared for in an environment of this type. Many of the holes in the carpet are covered with masking tape.

If it were not so serious it would be a comical situation to see the number of buckets that appear when it rains so that water can be collected dripping from the roof. As I said, the parents and the school council at Waverley Park have worked extremely hard to provide as many extras, they can for the school and it is just beyond their capacity to fundraise.

The parents have been engaged in a number of activities particularly doing external and internal painting of the school, which is most commendable. However, maintenance of the roof, the gutters and other areas is well beyond their capacity. I ask the minister to look at the photographs, to give the matter serious consideration as soon as possible and to let me know exactly what can be done.

Crown land: Golden Square

Mr TURNER (Bendigo West) — I raise with the Minister for Industry and Employment who is the representative in this place of the Minister for Conservation and Environment a particular problem in my electorate, and I refer to five allotments — 223 D, 223 E, 224, 225 and 226 — in Allingham Street, Golden Square.
The matter involves the consolidation of title at the Land Titles Office. That it should be brought under freehold title pursuant to section 209 of the Land Act is causing some angst to residents. This matter arose four or five years ago when a local solicitor, in finalising the sale of that land, found the actual allotments fenced contained a substantial amount of Crown land along the roadside reserve of Allingham Street. On 19 September the department wrote to the five residents informing them of the proposed sale of land under section 209 of the act, and stating that to do so, several charges would be levied, including the survey investigation report, $300; obtaining a current valuation, $150; and possible surveys, totalling $750.

A problem has arisen in recent times in that the opposition representatives in Bendigo seem to think they could do things while in government, and that now this government has a magic wand. The opposition believes this government should not impose any charges whatsoever for the consolidation of the title, and that any charges levied should be absorbed by an appropriation. That shows how devoid of policies the opposition is.

In an editorial today, the local newspaper seems to think one can redraw lines on a map with a pen and hand over Crown land to people without any further process — which seems extraordinary thinking.

I ask the minister in the other place to inquire into this matter and ensure it is proceeding properly, and fairly and squarely for those residents because as all honourable members should know, Crown land is not subject to adverse possession. The process must proceed as it has done for decades past — that is, through an orderly process of bringing land into good title which, in the long term, benefits people who sit on land that is not freehold and does not provide good title. I ask the minister to inquire into this matter to ensure everything is above board.

Workcover: Leckie Builders

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — The matter I ask the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing to direct to the attention of the Minister responsible for Workcover in the other place concerns a letter I have received from Leckie Builders Pty Ltd, constituents in my electorate.

That company has a longstanding dispute with Workcover, which has instructed its solicitors to make an application to wind up the company. Leckie Builders has a good reputation; it employs and assists people. The matter relates to a dispute in 1988 concerning a former employee of Leckie Builders which paid the worker full wages; but the company has never been able to recoup its portion from Workcover. Leckie Builders has said it should receive from Workcover reimbursement of all wages paid; otherwise, it could not afford to pay the Workcover levy.

I ask the minister to examine the situation. Workcover has recovered its costs, but has not handed any over to Leckie Builders. The application to wind up the company involves only about $16 000 for levies owed when the dispute between Workcover and Leckie Builders commenced.

I ask the minister to examine this situation because a claim of $16 000 should not lead to the winding up of a company. Workcover has not paid to Leckie Builders the wages paid to the injured worker. In the meantime, there has been a court settlement of $50 000, yet Leckie Builders has not been reimbursed by Workcover for its out-of-pocket expenses. The company should be reimbursed by Workcover.

In spite of its filling out the proper forms, making a list of the representations and attending several meetings with Workcover representatives, about 10 to 15 jobs will be in jeopardy if the company is wound up on that basis.

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

Kingston: sports facilities

Mr LEIGH (Mordialloc) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing. The minister will be aware that he and I recently visited a site that was part of a proposed development by the Mordialloc RSL, which did not proceed. The minister will also be aware that as part of the arrangement the current government accepted some of the responsibility undertaken by the former government. So far about $150 000 in grants has been used in the construction of a hockey field. A partly completed soccer pavilion, which the council did not complete, is being vandalised. There is a substantial amount of open space that can be used to improve sporting facilities for the local community.

The City of Kingston is proposing to construct some new tennis courts and other sporting fixtures on the site and will apply to the government for some form of funding. The minister will know that about
$350 000 could have been made available for the RSL development, but that opportunity was lost when the arrangement collapsed. I seek the minister's assurance that he is prepared to investigate whether, in the next round of funding, his department will examine the development of those sporting facilities on the site, which is at the back of an industrial estate.

There are few such facilities in the area, and the arrangement would benefit the rest of the municipality because some existing tennis courts down by the sea will have to be removed and the land used for conservation purposes.

The minister has already examined the site and knows about the matter. This is a great opportunity to develop good sporting facilities in the area, provided we can get some extra assistance. The council will put in more than $100 000, but I ask the minister what he can do to assist the council.

**Wyndham: transport infrastructure**

Dr COGHILL (Werribee) — I ask the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing to raise with the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place the outcome of a public meeting in Werribee last night on transport services, including the road construction program and the bus and train services in the Werribee township within the City of Wyndham.

The public meeting was precipitated by the train derailment and the tragic death of Mrs Phillpott a few weeks ago, which I am sure all honourable members will be aware of. However, the railway accident had consequences which few outside the City of Wyndham will know about. It effectively led to the closure of one of the main intersections on the western side of Werribee, isolating a major residential area. People living there can gain access to the township of Werribee and the northern side of the railway line only through that intersection.

That has led to extraordinary situations. Some people entered the major subdivision by making illegal turns across the median strip of the Geelong Freeway, or alternatively, by taking huge detours that take them to Little River. On the other side of the intersection people wishing to go to Geelong had to make detours of perhaps 10 kilometres towards Melbourne before making legal turns across the Geelong Freeway, heading back towards Geelong.

What came out of the public meeting last night was that there is an enormous need for the development of public transport and roads in the Werribee area in the City of Wyndham which cannot be met from local resources. That should not have to be met by the council increasing its rates and diverting resources to projects that would normally be the responsibility of state government, relying in part on federal government funding but especially on state government allocations of funds.

Will the Minister for Roads and Ports give serious consideration to the matters raised at the public meeting last night which will be brought to his attention by the City of Wyndham, and will the Treasurer make appropriate provision in the allocations to the Minister for Roads and Ports to enable those projects to be undertaken?

**Greenvale: secondary college**

Mr FINN (Tullamarine) — In the absence of the Minister for Education I direct to the attention of the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing a matter I believe to be a great need in my electorate — that is, the need for an extra school facility in the Greenvale area. This has been an ongoing issue for some 18 months and I have been involved over that period in discussions with local principals, school council presidents, school councils and others. The minister would be aware that I have also spoken to him on a number of occasions about the matter.

It is not a new issue but it has gained some urgency in recent times because the Gladstone Park Secondary College, which is nearby and which takes most of the students from Greenvale, has recently been forced to institute a ceiling on its enrolments for next year. I have suggested to the local people of Greenvale that the way we might get a secondary education facility for Greenvale would be to establish a junior campus of Gladstone Park Secondary College at Greenvale. That would solve the major concern and the problem of overcrowding at the secondary college. It would also provide the Greenvale people with their own secondary college facility, which they are desperate to get.

The house may be aware that the former government promised to provide a facility but, as with so many other things, it did not deliver. We came to expect that from the former Labor government. The Minister for Education has done a magnificent job throughout this state, and in my electorate he has provided facilities and maintenance funding in a way we have never seen
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before. He has done an outstanding job in his portfolio.

Will the minister give particular consideration to providing funds for a secondary college in Greenvale? I believe there is a need for it. A number of issues need to be worked through, and I have discussed those with the locals and am also more than happy to discuss them at length with the minister at his earliest convenience. I ask him to keep in mind the needs of the Greenvale community.

Darebin: Mont Park precinct

Ms GARBUIT (Bundoora) - I ask the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing who is at the table to direct to the attention of the Minister for Major Projects in another place a number of my constituents who are requesting a deputation with the minister as a matter of urgency. It concerns two and a half years work the residents have put in as members of the Mont Park precinct reference group, which has been working to form a master plan for the development of the Mont Park area.

The groups has worked on a number of important issues: primarily the environmental sensitivities of the grasslands, forests and wetlands in the area; historical buildings that need to be identified and protected; and the matter of residential development, involving traffic flows and protecting the amenity of existing local residents in an area surrounded by many existing houses.

They now find Darebin City Council is forming another reference group to be called the Latrobe Learning and Living Precinct and is calling for community representatives to serve on the group. If, as appears to be the case, the new reference group will re-do all the work, it is a real slap in the face for the local residents who have put in more than two and a half years of work in good faith, believing that their work is starting again. Is their work being ignored or has it been rejected? In either case it is a great insult to those people. They wonder whether the whole thing was a sham and a way of keeping them quiet on a controversial issue — a way of keeping them busy and out of harm’s way. They did not protest about the issue in general, about individual problems they were having or about the slowness of the work — they kept working in good faith. It now appears they have been insulted, that their work has been rejected and that the work is starting again.

The residents want to know from the minister where they stand, where the final report is and what is happening.

Rail: Berringama crossing licence fee

Mr A. F. PLOWMAN (Benambra) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport a railway crossing licence fee. The matter has been raised with me by Mr Maurice Klippell of Berringama. Originally there was no crossing because the original owner used a gig and horse to drive about 5 or 10 kilometres along the line, go under a railway bridge and then on to the road. When the property changed hands the new owner wanted a crossing put in.

A crossing was installed and a licence was applied to it. No-one else between Cudgewa and Tallangatta actually has a licence, despite the fact that there are many cases of houses adjoining the railway line and therefore many other crossings. That situation applied even when the line was in use.

The licence was originally applied for about 30 or so years ago and cost $4. That was subsequently reduced to $2, and the line was closed 25 years ago. In 1972 a special train — the last train — ran on the line and about 20 years ago the line was pulled up. Since then fees have increased from $2 to $22, and recently to $110. After Mr Klippell objected and asked for a review the amount was reduced to $60. The reason given was that there is no actual maintenance required on the crossing.

I believe the current situation results from the isolated nature of the line and the reluctance of the bureaucracy to come to terms with it. There is no crossing because there is no railway line. The charge of $60 is set to meet an administrative charge for a service that ceased 20 years ago.

I ask the minister to review the situation and, if possible, revoke the licence for a service that no
The incident reported by Mrs Skinner of Braybrook occurred yesterday, 3 October, when she was travelling between Braybrook and the city. She reports that two youths, together with two dogs which were not on leads, got in the carriage in which she and a number of other passengers, including elderly people and young children were travelling. While they were waiting at the station for the train to depart the two uncontrolled dogs started fighting with one another and terrorised the rest of the passengers.

One elderly gentleman got off the train and sought the assistance of two police officers. As the police officers were about to enter the carriage the doors locked and the train left. The police officers were left abandoned on the railway station rather than being on the carriage providing the much-needed assistance.

At the next station a passenger waiting on the platform got on the train with a third dog, which immediately joined in the canine brawl. The passengers were in fear of bodily harm and of being dragged into the brawl.

The lady concerned was unable to gain any assistance. There were no guards or station staff. When she later asked the Public Transport Corporation what assistance was available to her she was told that she should have asked the driver to stop the train and provide assistance. That was the same advice given by the PTC last week when a rock was thrown through a train window at Camberwell. The passengers also sought assistance on that occasion. They were told some days later that they should have asked the driver to stop the train and get him to assist.

The opposition wants to know whether this is the new PTC policy — that when people need assistance they should ask the driver to stop the train and provide assistance — or if it is just a public relations exercise to try to smother what are potentially dangerous and serious situations.

**Rail: passenger safety**

Mr BATCHELOR (Thomastown) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport. I would like the minister to explain to the public what steps passengers should take if they feel threatened when travelling on our trains. I have been advised of another terrifying incident involving people being threatened on trains. They want to know what steps should be taken when many of our stations are no longer staffed and there are no guards on our trains to assist passengers.

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**Responses**

Mr REYNOLDS (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing) — The honourable member for Mordialloc referred to an application from the local residents and supporting communities of the City of Kingston for facility grants which are available from the Department of Sport, Recreation and Racing to upgrade sporting facilities, including tennis courts and the completion of a pavilion originally started by the Mordialloc RSL with a project that has since fallen over, to put it gently.

This site has a chequered history, and I have visited it on a number of occasions. Given that the good local member has raised it again, when the application comes forward I will be well and truly aware of it. Having visited the site on a couple of occasions and now being aware that an application is to be presented, I am sure it will receive all the attention it deserves. I know the facilities are much needed in that area. It is a great tract of land which requires development.

The member for Dandenong North, who seems to be missing, raised the matter of the Waverley Park Primary School for the attention of the Minister for Education. Maintenance is needed due to rain damage and general wear and tear. I will direct that matter to the attention of the Minister for Education, and I am sure he will respond.

The member for Bendigo West raised the matter of the issue of the ownership of Crown land in Allingham Street, Golden Square for the attention of the Minister for Natural Resources. He seeks the assistance of the minister to bring this land under freehold title to consolidate the blocks that are currently occupied by the residents who live on those blocks. I am sure the Minister for Natural Resources will be delighted to sort this out for the honourable member for Bendigo West. I hope that this matter can be resolved because there is nothing more frustrating than having your house on land that does not belong to you and that is not owned by you.

The honourable member for Keilor raised a Workcover problem that I will raise with the
Minister for Finance in due course. I am sure I will receive a direct answer.

The member for Werribee raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports following a public meeting in Werribee last night. It concerns the upgrading of roads, infrastructure and accessibility to the Melbourne-Geelong freeway in and around Werribee. He asks that the minister consider the requests from the City of Wyndham which obviously convened last night's meeting. I am sure that that information will be communicated in full and proper form by the city and that the minister will respond. I suggest to the honourable member for Werribee that he might make a few representations to his federal counterparts so that we get our fair share of the petrol taxes and road funds that we ought to get. We might then have the money to advance for the infrastructure that he needs down there.

The honourable member for Tullamarine raised the need for an additional secondary school at Greenvale. He has raised this matter before, and being the good local member that he is, and having taken over that area from two local members who looked after it very well, I congratulate him on raising the issue again. He made a very heart-rending plea, which I am sure the Minister for Education will be delighted to attend to for him.

The member for Bundoora raised a matter for the Minister for Major Projects in another place seeking a deputation from the Mont Park precinct reference group who have done a report on the future development of Mont Park only to find out that the Latrobe learning and living group appear to be undertaking the same task on behalf of the City of Darebin. The member for Bundoora wants to know what has happened to the Mont Park precinct reference group report and what action is to be taken. I am sure the Minister for Major Projects will respond to the honourable member for Bundoora and sort out this dilemma. Local residents, as well as the honourable member herself, are concerned about the future development of Mont Park.

The honourable member for Benambra raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport concerning access over a disused railway line where the adjoining landowner who uses this access over the railway line has to pay a licence fee of $110. The Minister for Public Transport can sort that one out because I do not think I can. I am sure that he will get back to the honourable member with a very logical answer.

The Minister for Public Transport will also respond to the member for Thomastown who raised the issue of brawling dogs on trains, causing a furore. That is an interesting story which I will be delighted to bring to the attention of the Minister for Public Transport. I ask him to respond directly.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house stands adjourned until next day.

House adjourned 10.35 p.m.