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

PETITION

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

South Eastern Arterial extension

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

The humble petition of the Stonnington freeway committee sheweth that we streamside residents, other affected citizens, and users of the Yarra and its adjacent amenities, are adversely affected by noise and other environmental pollutants emanating from the South Eastern Arterial.

Your petitioners therefore pray that Parliament ensures that plans to expand the South Eastern Arterial include adequate provisions for the protection of residential amenity and character by:

(i) reducing noise levels to internationally accepted standards;

(ii) effectively camouflaging any structure at ground or above-ground level.

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

By Mr Doyle (1033 signatures)

Laid on table.

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Malvern be considered next day on motion of Mr BATCHelor (Thomastown).

PAPERS

Laid on table by Acting Clerk:

Historic Buildings Council — Report for the year 1994-95

Police Review Commission — Report for the year 1994-95

RACING (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Mr REYNOLDS (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The main purpose of the bill is to improve the legislative framework for the regulation of the greyhound racing industry. The bill also specifies in the act a time limit for the lodging of appeals to the Racing Appeals Tribunal as well as a contempt provision to protect the processes of the tribunal. Finally, the bill effects a machinery change in respect of the payment of remuneration and expenses to members of statutory bodies constituted under the act.

Greyhound racing is a significant sector of the Victorian racing industry. The greyhound code's 752 annual race meetings capture around 9 per cent of the wagering market. There are more than 5800 trainers, owners and breeders participating in the sport and some 3400 registered greyhounds. An independent economic analysis of the racing industry, the 1992 ACIL report, calculated that the greyhound sector adds nearly $50 million to the state's GDP and employs an estimated 2500 people.

At present, the registration of greyhounds and the regulation of the greyhound breeding sector is carried out by the National Coursing Association of Victoria. The association has been registering greyhounds since 1873 and this function is recognised by section 78 of the act. The association is a non-proprietary incorporated body that administers greyhound registration by its own Rules of Greyhound Registration. However, certain requirements, including registration fees, are prescribed by the Greyhound Registration Regulations 1988.

During 1994, the association became concerned about certain limitations on its powers especially in respect of controlling the activities of breeders and studmasters, the enforcement of DNA testing requirements and protocols for the use of frozen greyhound semen.

In a joint review of the matter, the Greyhound Racing Control Board and the association came to the conclusion that it was desirable that all laws for the regulation of the greyhound racing industry be
This bill introduces changes which will contribute to the maintenance of public confidence in the integrity of the racing industry and its efficient management.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mrs WILSON (Dandenong North).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 19 October.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Mr HAYWARD (Minister for Education) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Since the 1920s, the apprenticeship system has been accepted as the most appropriate mode of training in many vocations. The system is regulated by part 5 of the Vocational Education and Training Act, which confers various powers and functions on the State Training Board of Victoria.

Recent developments in the Training Reform Agenda have extended the apprenticeship concept beyond traditional trades into new and emerging industries by way of traineeships. A further development has been the emergence of group training companies.

The bill will allow specified functions to be delegated by the State Training Board to approved training agents. Approved training agents will be persons or bodies with an interest and expertise in training appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the minister. They could include TAFE college councils, key employer associations and group training companies.

A number of safeguards are proposed to avoid potential conflicts of interest that may arise in the case of delegations to employer or enterprise bodies. The act currently allows delegations by the State Training Board to TAFE college councils, but not to the other two groups of bodies. Approved training agents will be selected by a tender process and appointed on a regional basis.

Finally, the bill provides for the remuneration and expense allowances of the members of the Bookmakers and Bookmakers Clerks Registration Committee, the Greyhound Racing Control Board, the Harness Racing Board and the Racing Appeals Tribunal to be determined by the Governor in Council. This measure will result in improved administrative efficiency in that four sets of regulations will not have to be amended as changes occur. Further, it will bring the act into line with the current legislative practice of not prescribing remuneration and allowances by regulation.
review of an approved training agent’s decision. Core regulatory functions will also be retained by the State Training Board. These include:

- quality control over the apprenticeship and traineeship systems;
- declaration of apprenticeship and traineeship vocations, the form of contracts of training and the determination of ‘approved training schemes’ for apprenticeships;
- resolution of disputes between apprentices and employers, where these cannot be resolved through conciliation processes;
- maintenance of central apprenticeship records and register of qualifications; and
- prosecutions for breaches of the act.

The primary object of this reform is not to achieve significant cost savings as the current system is already highly efficient. Rather, it is to develop a system for the administration of regulated training which will enable a greater participation by industry in the training process and a decentralised, multi-point delivery of services. The proposal is, however, expected to achieve cost savings for both government and industry.

The proposal is consistent with reforms advanced nationally. The report of the Employment and Skills Formation Council, which originally mooted an Australian Vocational Certificate Training System recommended that training agreements be negotiated flexibly at the industry or enterprise level. The report also recommended that responsibility for these agreements be devolved from state training authorities to industry bodies.

In May this year, the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs also approved a report on the administration of training agreements under the Australian vocational certificate training system. This report provided a framework for the future administration of training agreements. It also acknowledged that the decision to devolve aspects of this administration to suitably qualified industry and other bodies is at the discretion of the states, in consultation with industry.

An extensive consultation process has indicated general support among stakeholders for the proposal to outsource.

The bill also proposes a partial deregulation of apprenticeships and traineeships while retaining the essential nature of these ‘institutions’. This is consistent with government policy, at both state and federal level, to minimise regulation where possible.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr BACHELOR (Thomastown).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 19 October.

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE HOUSING AUTHORITY (REPEAL) BILL

Second reading

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the bill is to make provision for the winding up of the Government Employee Housing Authority, to amend the Government Employee Housing Authority Act 1981 and to repeal that act as was foreshadowed during the debate on the Government Employee Housing Authority (Amendment) Bill which was passed during the autumn sittings earlier this year. It is anticipated that the authority will be wound up by 31 December 1995, and financial statements will be prepared for the preceding 18 months in accordance with section 6 of the Financial Management Act 1994.

When the Minister for Finance introduced the Government Employee Housing Authority (Amendment) Bill, he indicated that approximately 711 properties would be designated as ‘essential’ and that these properties would be transferred from the authority to participating departments that have an ongoing requirement for employee accommodation. Following further consultation with relevant departments, the number of ‘essential’ properties has been reduced to 671 and these properties have now been transferred.

As stated at the time, departments will be responsible for the administrative arrangements, as well as all costs including the capital charge, associated with the management of these ‘essential’ properties.

When the authority is wound up, all remaining assets and liabilities, including rights and obligations, will be transferred to the Minister for
Finance. Proceeds from the sale of surplus properties will be returned to the consolidated fund.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr LEIGHTON (Preston).

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — I move:

That the debate be adjourned until Thursday, 19 October.

Mr LEIGHTON (Preston) — On the question of time, Mr Speaker, the opposition has a number of questions on notice regarding the Government Employee Housing Authority. Important information is sought that would assist us in debate. Can the Treasurer indicate whether it is possible to in some way expedite the receipt of that information, either by way of a briefing or by a response to questions on notice, so that the opposition can be fully briefed in its reply?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) (By leave) — I will pass on the request to the Minister for Finance. The government is normally prepared to provide briefings. It may well be that the matter can be resolved through briefings.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until Thursday, 19 October.

DANGEROUS GOODS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Mr PESCOTT (Minister for Industry Services) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The major amendment to the act is the insertion of a new definition of ‘dangerous goods’. The existing definition of ‘dangerous goods’ relies on a set of out-dated regulations to prescribe substances and articles as dangerous goods. The proposed new definition of ‘dangerous goods’ has two parts. The primary part is the adoption of the definition of ‘dangerous goods’ from the Australian Code for the Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road or Rail (the transport code). The transport code is a nationally recognised document based on recommendations prepared by a United Nations committee. The other Australian states and territories rely on the transport code to varying degrees as the primary document for defining ‘dangerous goods’ in those jurisdictions. The adoption of the transport code’s definition of ‘dangerous goods’ will ensure that Victoria’s definition of ‘dangerous goods’ becomes more nationally and internationally uniform. It should be noted that the transport code is already in widespread use in industry.

The transport code adequately defines ‘dangerous goods’ for transport purposes but it does not completely cover ‘dangerous goods’ for non-transport activities such as storage and handling. The second part of the new definition of ‘dangerous goods’ addresses this matter by supplementing the primary part of the definition. Explosives and combustible liquids are included in the supplementary part of the definition of ‘dangerous goods’ in a way that ensures consistency with other jurisdictions.

The transport code is not a statutory document in itself; it provides guidance on how dangerous goods should be transported by road and rail. Therefore some of the substances and articles that are included in the transport code definition of ‘dangerous goods’ are not suited to being controlled by statute. For this reason, the bill makes provision for the Governor in Council to make orders to exempt specific dangerous goods from the operation of any or all of the Dangerous Goods Act provisions and regulations. The bill also makes provision for the Governor in Council to make orders to declare substances and articles to be dangerous goods. These declaration orders may only be made if the minister with responsibility for the act recommends that such orders be made in the interests of public safety. In addition, if a declaration order is made, the minister must attempt to have the substance or article referred to in the order classified as dangerous goods in the transport code. The primary purpose of this last provision is to ensure that
Victoria's definition of 'dangerous goods' remains as nationally uniform as is practicable.

A further amendment to the act is the correction of an anomaly relating to the purposes for which dangerous goods inspectors may issue written directions. The act currently enables dangerous goods inspectors to issue written directions for safety reasons while persons to whom inspectors' powers are delegated — road officers, police, fire officers — have the ability to issue written provisional directions where there appears to be a contravention of the act or regulations. The bill corrects this anomaly by providing a power for dangerous goods inspectors to issue written directions to a person for reasons of non-compliance. The bill provides a right of appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for persons to whom these new inspectors' directions are issued.

Another improvement provided by the bill is the ability for the minister to approve codes of practice. Codes of practice will be used to provide practical guidance to persons who have a duty under the act or regulations. Traditionally, statutory controls over dangerous goods have been very prescriptive and therefore inflexible. The new codes of practice provisions will enable the prescriptive statutory controls to be replaced with more flexible performance-based controls where basic safety objectives are set. Technical details about how those safety objectives can be met will be placed in the codes of practice.

It should be noted that the provisions in the codes of practice will be non-mandatory — that is, a person may choose to comply with a provision of the act or regulations in some other way than is described in the code, provided that alternative way of complying also meets the requirements of the act or regulations.

The remaining provisions of the bill remove redundant act provisions. The most significant of these is the removal of the requirement for draft regulations prepared under the Dangerous Goods Act or the Occupational Health and Safety Act to be made available for public comment. These requirements are redundant because the Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 contains comprehensive requirements for draft regulations prepared under all Victorian acts to undergo a public comment process. There will therefore be no diminution of consultation requirements for draft dangerous goods regulations or draft occupational health and safety regulations.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr MICALLEF (Springvale).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 19 October.

ROAD TRANSPORT (DANGEROUS GOODS) BILL

Second reading

Mr BROWN (Minister for Public Transport) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the Road Transport (Dangerous Goods) Bill is to adopt national standards and codes of practice for the safe transport of dangerous goods by road. The bill covers all aspects of the transport of dangerous goods by road, including the loading and unloading of goods for the purpose of their transport by road, and other matters incidental to their transport by road.

The adoption of uniform national road transport law is a requirement under the intergovernmental agreements of 1991 and 1992 for heavy and light vehicles respectively. The agreements established the National Road Transport Commission (NRTC) to develop a national package of transport laws to improve transport efficiency, enhance road safety and reduce administration costs. Clause 17(2) of the light vehicles agreement requires the commission as a matter of priority to develop national standards and associated codes of practice for the transport of dangerous goods.

The agreements established the following key features for the process of adopting uniform legislation:

- the establishment of the Ministerial Council for Road Transport (MCRT);
- the development of appropriate NRTC-sponsored heavy and light vehicle legislation;
- template legislation to be introduced first into the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and subsequently adopted by the remaining jurisdictions through specific adopting legislation;
- the passage by the parliaments of the states and territories of appropriate legislation to ensure that
the existing legislation of those jurisdictions does not conflict with the template legislation enacted in the ACT.

The intergovernmental agreements require the enacting of template legislation. The rationale for template legislation is that it ensures uniformity on a continuing basis: the legislation is passed through one Parliament and then adopted by other parliaments through adopting acts which reference that legislation. When and if amendments are made to the legislation they are automatically applied in all jurisdictions through the initial adopting acts, ensuring continuing uniformity. A template bill to adopt national heavy vehicle charges was introduced into the Parliament on 31 May 1995 and has passed through the lower house during this current session.

In September 1994 the Ministerial Council approved the Road Transport Reform (Dangerous Goods) Bill. The resulting commonwealth act received royal assent on 12 April 1995 and will come into operation in the ACT on 12 April 1996. It is necessary to have adopting legislation in place by that time to ensure that the regulations to be made under the act are also adopted. These regulations will replace the road-specific part of the Australian Code for the Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road and Rail (ADG code) which is currently called up through Victoria's Dangerous Goods Transport Regulations 1987.

In Victoria the road transport of dangerous goods is administered together with other matters related to dangerous goods, specifically storage and handling, within the portfolio of the Minister for Industry Services by the Health and Safety Organisation (HSO). It is important to avoid incompatibility between the Victorian legislation covering dangerous goods and the Road Transport Reform (Dangerous Goods) Act because the latter act covers transport and 'matters incidental to transport' which potentially overlap with matters of a storage and handling nature. The adopting bill therefore explicitly provides for the Road Transport Reform (Dangerous Goods) Act to prevail on road transport matters where there is inconsistency with Victoria's Dangerous Goods Act. In the longer term it is proposed to undertake a broad review and revision of the Victorian act to achieve, inter alia, the incorporation of the national template legislation covering road transport.

I wish to comment on the bill in relation to the April 1995 agreement of the Council of Australian Governments to implement the national competition policy and related reforms. Under the conditions of payments to the states in the agreement is the obligation to demonstrate effective observance of the agreed package of road transport reforms. Standards and codes of practice for the road transport of dangerous goods represent the second element in the agreed package of road transport reforms being adopted in Victoria through the template method stipulated in the intergovernmental agreements.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr HAMILTON (Morwell).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 19 October.

APPROPRIATION (1995-96, No. 1) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 4 October; motion of Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer).

Mr TURNER (Bendigo West) — It is with pleasure that I speak on the Appropriation (1995-95, No. 1) Bill to support the massive changes made by the Treasurer and the government over the past three years. I commence my contribution by quoting from the Treasurer's speech some of the important words he had to say. The Treasurer said:

Since 1992, Victoria has made a good start to rebuilding from the disastrous mismanagement of the 1980s. The decline in our budget position has been reversed, but we still have much to do to build a strong, competitive and secure Victoria into the 21st century.

In 1994-95, the state budget achieved a current account surplus of $932 million and an overall surplus of $215 million. This is the first time since the present series of budget strategies commenced in 1961 that Victoria has recorded a surplus on both the current account and overall in the same year.

He went on to say:

Victoria cannot fully recover from the mistakes of the past in just three years. The social and economic costs of Labor's mismanagement can be reversed only gradually. In particular, Victoria's excessive debt, and the consequent diversion of revenue from other priorities to paying interest, will require concentrated attention and action over the whole of this decade.
We have stopped the haemorrhaging but we have not yet secured a competitive and prosperous Victoria.

They are very wise words, particularly those in the last quote. I can relate them to my electorate prior to 1992. In the lead-up to that election, during which I was a candidate for Bendigo West, Labor made massive promises. They were made right across the board — in education, health, you name it. When those promises were analysed, and when the budget and the accompanying papers were looked into, it was clear that none of them had been funded. They were purely pork-barrelling promises. In other words, Labor tried to assure the people in my electorate that it would do a number of things that it clearly could not do.

The things that happened in the first 12 months after the 1992 election have been very important to this state and will be even more important in the future. In the first week after the election, the members of the board of a water authority that had been amalgamated under Labor, bringing the Rural Water Commission under the banner of the Coliban Water Authority, knocked on my door, saying 'Mr Turner, we're in trouble. We've got about $20 million worth of unfunded liabilities'.

That really was the basis of things right across the board. Everywhere I went people, organisations and authorities were all suffering massive debt. The board members of Coliban Water asked, 'What are we going to do? We can't service this debt; we can't put in infrastructure. What's going to happen in the future?'. Later I will tell the house what has happened to Coliban Water, which has had a complete turnaround. That paints just a little of the picture of what was happening in my electorate.

To the average man in the street — and I place myself in that category — the debt figures looked like telephone numbers. Prior to the 1992 election people did not understand the massive debt this once great state of ours was facing. Councils in the Bendigo region had stagnated; they were unable to make decisions and there was no leadership. The situation culminated in the sacking of the council in the Shire of Strathfieldsaye.

The infrastructure of schools in my electorate was falling down around their ears. Shortly after the 1992 election I visited schools where I saw pieces of three-ply nailed over gaps where white ants had eaten through the floor. A lot of the education budget was being soaked up by the bloated number of schoolteachers. The education infrastructure needed urgent attention. The Bendigo Hospital had a huge debt liability and no reserves, and hospital waiting lists in my region were blowing out. Later on I will describe what has happened to those hospitals in the years since 1992.

Unemployment in the Bendigo West electorate was totally out of control. Bendigo was the unemployment capital of Australia. Even worse, the level of confidence was zero; in basic terms, the private sector had collapsed. Middle-aged Victorians were being thrown onto the scrap heap, with no hope of finding jobs in the future. Probably the most difficult task that I faced in the early days was sitting at my desk talking to middle-aged Bendigonians who had lost their private sector jobs and had no hope. They were men in their 40s, with mortgages to pay and children to educate. They were looking down a very bleak dark tunnel. Those of our youth who were leaving school had no prospects of employment. It was a very dark and bleak picture. We were the butt of jokes right across the nation.

Something had to be done, something had to give — and that has certainly happened in the months and years after the October 1992 election. We certainly had to restructure the bloated public sector, so public sector management was introduced. We certainly had to manage our debt. As I said, to most people the debt figures read like telephone numbers. The Cain-Kirner tax had to be introduced. The government had to quickly commence to restore pride and confidence in our great state.

I will list just some of the things that have occurred in my electorate and in the Bendigo region since 1992. I want to go through the categories because it is important that I point out to the house that right across the spectrum of government good things have happened and continue to happen. Over the past 18 months or so approximately $1.3 million has been injected into the arts in the region. Some $150 000 has been provided for the regional arts upgrade, which will result in the first regional art gallery of 20th century Australian paintings being established at Bendigo. The Maldon Museum and Archives Association has received funding to conduct workshops to improve the knowledge of volunteer staff in handling items and documents.

The historic Buda homestead at Castlemaine has received $150 000. Any honourable member who has been to Castlemaine but not been to Buda has missed something. I invite all honourable members to go and have a look at it. For the first time the house will be expanded, including an expansion of
the dining room conference facilities. That will be very important to Castlemaine, particularly to the tourism industry.

Through the Central Victorian public library service, the City of Greater Bendigo and the shires of Central Goldfields, Loddon and Mount Alexander will share in the $441 000 that has been allocated to enable them to keep up to date with the rapid technology changes that are taking place in the provision of library services. In July a grant of $45 000 was announced for the North Central Goldfields library service to improve facilities and information sharing between libraries in Bendigo, Castlemaine, Woodend, Gisborne and Kyneton.

Aged care is a very important component of the services provided to our aging community. Recently in the vicinity of $500 000 has been allocated to projects in that portfolio. Funding has been provided for the Anne Caudle Centre, the Bendigo Hospital, the Mount Alexander Hospital and the Golden City Residential and Support Service to ensure that elderly people continue to have access to a range of support services.

In April this year the Anne Caudle Centre received $50 000 for nursing home beds and in June received $100 000 for the development of a best-practice protocol manual for palliative care. Bendigo is leading the field. The Minister for Health has shown confidence in that by allocating funding to produce a manual for palliative care right across Victoria.

At the other end of the scale, Castlemaine's Senior Citizens Centre received $9000 to purchase and install airconditioning. The government looks after the state's senior citizens.

I shall turn to the gallery I mentioned earlier because it is important. The Bendigo Advertiser of June 1994 states:

Bendigo will have regional Australia's first gallery of 20th century Australian paintings, thanks to a $750 000 state government grant announced yesterday.

The grant, to be matched with Bendigo Gallery funds, will go towards buying and redeveloping a historic building at 32 View Street.

The Minister for Community Services will be aware of the good news about the Bendigo area to be announced shortly. For those opposition members who have been coming to Bendigo whingeing, carping and moaning, I invite them to look at the further developments occurring in the area. Community services projects totalling some $750 000 have been implemented. This week gambling support services in central Victoria received a $120 000 boost. That money will go towards counselling for problem gamblers - a matter we have heard the opposition whinge, carp and moan about. I invite opposition members to look at what is happening in Bendigo because the projects are good.

I shall turn to conservation and environment. We have seen a major upgrade of Victoria Hill, which will be opened shortly. That project is progressing well after having received a $200 000 grant. Again, the upgrade of the project links it up not only to tourism but also to Bendigo's historic features. A number of minor grants across the electorate are benefiting conservation and environment.

I shall turn to education, which is dear to most of our hearts. I dare say most honourable members in this chamber have children who have been or are going through the education system and who have high expectations for employment. Significant improvements have been made in Bendigo. Big Hill Primary School received $1.4 million for major expansion works, which effectively will double the size of the existing school. That was overdue because in the past no money went into the infrastructure and there was a $600 million debt to effect urgent works.

I refer to Bendigo Senior Secondary College. I have no problem going anywhere in this state — in fact, I have no problem nor hesitation going anywhere in Australia — and saying that this government is the best senior secondary education provider. There has been massive expenditure at this particular school, particularly in the area of science and technology. It is one of six sites in the state to receive that funding.

Six primary schools in Bendigo West, namely Lockwood South, Newstead, Yapeen, Dunolly, Eastville and Guildford received between $2000 and $30 000 from the 1995 Rural Schools Redevelopment Fund. That fund is an important component in what is happening in education. No longer are we seeing the grants going out to one or two schools across an electorate; we are seeing it shared around to update the badly decayed infrastructure the government was left with.

Because of Bendigo's goldfields history some schools in the area are magnificent old buildings. Because of the decaying infrastructure some of those older, magnificent buildings needed attention. I was
pleased to work with my colleague the Minister for Community Services, Michael John, to assist Camp Hill Primary School during its application for funding to undergo upgrading and maintenance work. The school received $500 000 for the works. It is a beautiful building situated at the top of Roslyn Park, and I know the Minister for Planning will be happy to see the school receiving attention to improve its overall present condition, not only for education purposes but also for the betterment of the people who visit our city and walk in our wonderful Roslyn Park.

A further nine schools in my electorate shared in the $78 000 for the upgrading of staff amenities and administration areas. It is important that we look after our teaching fraternity and provide them with proper facilities to work in. That is another area that had fallen into decay because all our dollars were going into wages — nothing more, nothing less.

Under the Labor government the notion adopted was, 'Do not worry about education, just keep the fat cats going'. That was what was happening under Labor.

The Castlemaine Senior Secondary College has undergone significant upgrading during my time as the member for Bendigo West. Having been under a Labor government for 10 years, Castlemaine was taken for granted. There is a long way to go, but we are finally seeing something happening. The former government took the town for granted. I want to see Castlemaine expand in many areas, and it will not be taken for granted under this government.

We have seen a number of major projects in the health area: firstly, the amalgamation of the Bendigo Hospital with the Anne Caudle Centre. A voluntary amalgamation will take place in health services in Bendigo into the next century. I believe we are the first in Victoria to do that and we will see the benefits flow through into the future.

Castlemaine's Mount Alexander Hospital is currently undergoing major refurbishment with stage 1 expected to be completed by December this year. The state government has provided $3.57 million for that project, which has involved the consolidation of the hospital's two campuses onto one site.

Again, would like to turn the clock back and consider Labor's approach to health services in Bendigo in the lead-up to the 1992 election. It was going to spend something like $23 million building a new greenfields hospital at Castlemaine. Even the public was not hoodwinked; there was a public meeting saying, 'This is stupid, why are you doing this?'. The new approach under this government was to consolidate the existing services which will provide a better service for our community in the future. The $23 million proposal was totally unfunded, but that was par for the course in those days.

The state government will provide $3.5 million for a 30-bed nursing home and access roadworks worth $1.2 million. That will bring about the amalgamation of two sites that were old and inefficient. I am also happy to report that Mount Alexander Hospital has recorded an increased in-patient throughput. In fact it recorded the highest overall patient throughput in Group C hospitals throughout Victoria. Again, Bendigo is leading the way.

The Victorian government has also serviced the Mount Alexander Hospital and the Anne Caudle Centre by providing more than $538 000 to help those centres meet the cost of the federal government's wage decision. Around $160 000 has been allocated to Bendigo, Maldon and Mount Alexander hospitals for capital equipment expenditure.

Some $4.3 million has been spent on housing projects in the Bendigo region. Currently, the state government is involved in two joint initiatives in the Bendigo West electorate. Some 21 one-bedroom units for elderly persons will be built in Kangaroo Flat in a joint venture between the state government and the RSL.

In Castlemaine this Sunday the first sod will be turned in the construction of 11 one-bedroom units in a joint initiative involving the government and the Catholic Church. This is a government and a community working together; that is what it is all about. These projects have gone to tender and it is expected they will be worth between $500 000 and $800 000 each.

Some $6.7 million has been allocated to a number of natural resources projects within the Bendigo region. As I said, the Coliban Water system was in disarray financially. Recently the state government agreed to pay for staff costs associated with the formation of Coliban Water in 1992. The approach previously was for the former government to send the problems of the then Rural Water Commission and to say, 'Here you are; here is the water commission, take it as it is — debts, the whole mess, the ratepayers can look after it'.
That settlement is in line with a $6.78 million grant to the water authority to undertake liabilities in superannuation as they occur. That decision is very important in my region because for the first time in many years it will enable the authority to install new infrastructure. A couple of weeks ago Coliban Water announced that $880 000 would be spent on the establishment of a water treatment plant for Dunolly, Tarnagulla and Laanecoorie. There used to be signs on the taps there which read, 'Do not drink the water'. How can you get further infrastructure or attract industry without a reasonable water supply? We have fixed that problem! By next July those towns will have a first-class water supply.

The government has allocated $6.6 million for public transport and roads in the Bendigo area. Today the Minister for Roads and Ports is in my electorate opening a new bridge at Newbridge on the Loddon River. That bridge was in a state of disrepair and had to be closed, which meant people in my electorate were forced to detour for miles. The closure of the bridge almost isolated Bendigo to the west.

Mr Cole interjected.

Mr TURNER — That is a result of the 3-cent-a-litre levy at work. Country Victorians have seen the benefit of that levy through what has been a major development in our rural community.

Mr Cole interjected.

Mr TURNER — We could spend another 7 or 9 cents on the toll and get country people to pay for that! I am opposed to that and I will remain opposed to that.

Regional development is our future in northern Victoria. We received a $300 000 grant under the Rural Victoria 2001 scheme which was launched in Bendigo.

Mr Cole interjected.

Mr TURNER — I am telling you how good we are, if you would like to listen. Empire Rubber has undertaken a $300 000 grant to assist its $6 million expansion program, thereby creating 80 jobs. I am moved to tell honourable members how good we are and what has been done in Bendigo and to talk about future jobs.

Mr Cooper — The Labor Party wouldn't know about that.

Mr TURNER — They wouldn't know. Small business is important in my electorate. Two Bendigo West small businesses have received subsidies under the Ausindustry program jointly funded by the commonwealth and state governments. I applaud the commonwealth for that initiative. The state government will continue to act in that way.

The company B. Keogh and Sons is one of the few manufacturers in Australia building specialist materials handling equipment, which is important for rural Victoria. Another small grant was made to a company, Boyer Fibrecraft, which builds the fastest catamaran in the world; that company employs about 28 people. The former Bendigo Building Society, now the wonderful Bendigo Bank, has benefited from a $100 000 rural development grant to assist the bank's development of a new databank, thereby creating 45 new jobs. The bank plans to spend $8.5 million between 1994 and 1997 to establish a data-processing centre in Bendigo.

The state government has provided $500 000 towards the $1 million establishment costs of the proposed Discovery Science and Technology Centre in Bendigo as well as $500 000 towards relocation costs to the freight centre to allow this project to be developed.

I draw the attention of honourable members to some press headlines. I do not quote only what the government says or what government members may say! The first is a Bendigo Advertiser headline that reads, 'Empire upgrades'; the article refers to a $300 000 state government grant:

A state government grant worth $300 000 will allow Bendigo's Empire Rubber a $6 million upgrade and create 80 new jobs under the Rural Victoria 2001 package.

In April the Bendigo Advertiser carried an article under the headline 'Science centre boost'. The article states:

Bendigo's planned $1 million science and technology centre yesterday received a $500 000 boost from the Premier, Jeff Kennett.

The centre, to be opened this month, is expected to attract 70 000 visitors to Bendigo each year. Imagine the sorts of incentives or assistance that will provide to the local economy! I applaud the government for providing money for such real job opportunities in Bendigo.
Mr Cooper — No mickey mouse stuff there!

Mr TURNER — No. I refer to more headlines from the local newspaper. I do not always agree with it, but the media in Bendigo is now recognising the wonderful steps the government has taken through its economic management.

In June 1995 a *Bendigo Advertiser* article with the headline 'Kennett's grand vision' states:

Premier Jeff Kennett has predicted a period of almost unparalleled expansion to carry Bendigo into the 21st century.

He has backed his vision with a commitment of large amounts of state government funding and a promise of more to come.

That article outlines some of the vision of the Premier and what he hopes to achieve for rural Victoria — in particular, Bendigo, the gateway to northern Victoria.

Under the headline 'Bendigo’s $60 million boom', a further *Bendigo Advertiser* article outlines the strategies and programs for Bendigo. Never in my life has the local press been able to print headlines which refer to a $60 million boom for Bendigo. The newspaper and the citizens of the area recognise that Bendigo is on the move.

A headline in the *Bendigo Advertiser* of 29 July reads, ‘City jobs bonanza’; its subheading reads ‘CES offers 400 new jobs’. That article states, in part:

Bendigo’s long-suffering jobless have some good news at last — 400 jobs up for grabs.

I do not remember headlines like that or such job vacancy figures in my area in the past two decades. Now it is happening in Bendigo!

An article in the *Bendigo Advertiser* of August 1995, under the headline ‘Jobs boost for city’, states:

Irish company Keenan Pty Ltd will establish a multimillion dollar manufacturing plant in Bendigo, creating 100 new jobs in the next few years.

We are starting to turn around — that is good! *Another bendigo Advertiser* headline states, 'New firm revives foundry'. The private sector is now prepared to invest in Bendigo. That article states:

One hundred new jobs will be created in Bendigo early next year when a Sydney firm, Keech Castings, relocates here.

The government has been working hard to create jobs. For decades past the Bendigo railway workshops, under either a Labor or Liberal government, have experienced a decrease in employment opportunities. Now a management company has become involved at the workshops. Recently a secret ballot held on the shop floor at Bendigo resulted in employees voting 60 to 33 to accept management proposals for the workshops. I have seen that place employ 800 people and have seen the number of employees fall to 120 under both governments. Now we have an opportunity to put some real life and vitality into the place: that will happen in the very near future. Up to 200 new jobs will be created.

I am happy with what is happening in the Bendigo area. I am fully supportive of the process we have undertaken in the past three years. We have a long way to go, but the signs in Bendigo — as they are across Victoria — are positive. Now we can walk around with our heads held high.

Mr CARLI (Coburg) — I will focus my contribution on the issue of gambling — the social and human costs of the increase in gambling and the government’s negligence in failing to tackle problem gambling. Governments have always kept a tight rein on gambling. Gambling addiction and indebtedness affect the most vulnerable and gullible in society, so any increase in gambling revenue is an extra tax on the poor, the weak and the vulnerable.

The government has been negligent in failing to combat problem gambling. Of the $124 million that has been spent by the Community Support Fund, which was set up with gambling dollars to assist problem gambling, only $6.6 million has been spent on gambling-related matters. Gambling has become the opiate of the Victorian masses. Victorians who have had their living standards lowered and rights taken away by the cuts made by the government have also had to deal with the distracting sights of the rolling dice and the roulette wheel.

There was to have been a community blitz, which would have cost less than $700 000 and which would have used television and radio, including the ethnic media, to demonstrate the effects of and the assistance available to problem gamblers, but the Minister for Community Services crushed the initiative. That is disgraceful. The gambling
industry —Tattersalls and the privatised Tabcorp — the welfare sector and the bureaucracy were all in favour of the program. However, Crown Casino objected about one aspect of the television campaign, so a minister of the Crown became the Minister for Crown.

We should all focus on that campaign. It was set up after government-commissioned studies and reports demonstrated that 3 per cent of the population was affected by problem gambling — that is, 120 000 people. It also means that hundreds of thousands more are affected, including family members and other relatives. Problem gamblers are addicted to gambling, and the consequences of their addiction affect their daily lives and the daily lives of the people around them. Many of those 120 000 Victorians — the weak, the vulnerable and the poor — are found in the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne.

A campaign was initiated as a result of one of the studies, and a problem gambling reference group was set up to tackle the issue. Members of the group included representatives from Tabcorp, Tattersalls, Crown Casino, ethnic communities, local councils, the Victorian Council of Social Service, Gamblers Anonymous and numerous other organisations, as well as public servants. The committee identified the needs of problem gamblers. It recognised the importance of doing something about it. The committee decided it needed a hard-hitting campaign that showed problem gamblers and their families that support mechanisms were in place.

Crown Casino was given two spots on the committee — not one, like every other group. Ken Carney, the public affairs director of the casino, and his understudy attended the meetings. They were paranoid not only about the casino being seen in a bad light but about any campaign that tried to identify the number of problem gamblers in Victoria, which, as I have said, has now been estimated at around 3 per cent. Studies conducted overseas show that in places like Las Vegas the number hits 6 per cent. So it is a big problem and it needs to be tackled early. Problem gambling is an addiction, just like any other addiction, whether it be drugs or alcohol.

Ken Carney was critical of any advertising that showed table games because he saw that as relating to Crown Casino and putting it in a bad light. In effect, Crown Casino representatives said, 'We are a major player in gambling in Victoria. We want to be part of the reference group because we want to have a say in the sort of publicity campaign that is undertaken — but we don’t want to be part of that campaign'. They wanted to help make the rules, but they did not want to play by them! The Tabcorp and Tattersalls representatives made it clear that they wanted a hard-hitting campaign. As a result, Crown Casino representatives found themselves isolated; they were the only ones who were saying that they did not want that type of campaign.

So the campaign was decided on; and there was strong community consultation. Tattersalls, the privatised Tabcorp, the industry, welfare groups and the bureaucracy were all behind it, so much so that a letter arrived from a senior health and community services bureaucrat saying, 'The whole campaign is fine. We are only waiting for the minister to sign it off'. But what happened? The whole project was vetoed by the minister. We all heard his pathetic excuse about not wanting to stir up the population, about not wanting to create too much trouble because only 3 per cent of the population was affected.

We have seen blatant political interference by the casino. One can only imagine what was said when Ken Carney told his boss, Ron Walker, about what had happened. Ron Walker would have rung the Premier or the minister and said, 'We don’t want this'. Why? They did not want people to see the image of dice rolling and rolling and crushing someone’s house. They did not want gambling to be seen to be affecting the Australian dream of owning a home of one’s own. The minister was blatantly negligent in allowing Crown to politically intervene. The government has also been negligent because the daily lives of 3 per cent of the population — 120 000 people — and their families are being affected by the problem of addictive gambling.

This government treats gambling revenue as manna from heaven, as though it somehow just arrives. It does not just arrive: it is a cost on the community, and as a responsible community we need to do something about it. Let’s look at the revenue from gambling. Over the past 3 years there have been major increases in overall government revenue. In 1992-93, revenue increased by 7.8 per cent; in 1993-94, it increased by 15.8 per cent; in 1994-95, the increase was 4.5 per cent; and the projected increase in the latest budget is 2.9 per cent. That growth is primarily due to new taxes. But the single biggest increase in the revenue collected from the Victorian community came from gambling.
In 1994-95 there was a 36 per cent increase in the revenue from electronic gaming machines. This year revenue is projected to increase by another 14.5 per cent — that is, $400 million in revenue will come from electronic gaming machines. How much comes from Crown Casino? In 1995-96 there is a projected increase of 22 per cent, to $82.7 million. Overall, the government gathers more than $1 billion in revenue from gambling. I am not a wowser; I believe gambling is part of the Australian culture. According to government studies 84 per cent of us gamble in one form or another. But the issue is not so much about gambling while having a night out as about problem gambling. As I said, that affects 3 per cent of the population — or 4 per cent or even 6 per cent if we take account of the Las Vegas figures.

The government does not want to jeopardise its milch cow by campaigning against problem gamblers. Meanwhile, Crown Casino spends millions of dollars on advertising campaigns that are inspirational. They show young people gambling and enjoying themselves. They project a win-win image. Crown does not want to project an image that shows that gambling can cost or that people can lose their dreams of owning their own homes. Crown just wants to show inspirational, win-win, beautiful people. That is not dissimilar to what the tobacco industry did or to the sorts of things we have now stopped relating to the consumption of alcohol. Governments have taken action to address other areas of addiction — but not problem gambling.

I turn to the Community Support Fund, from which only $6.62 million of the $124 million has been spent on gambling-related activities. Where is it being spent? In areas where there is a shortfall in government expenditure, government projects and as a slush fund.

In an article in the Sunday Age of 24 September the Salvation Army pressed for an independent authority to oversee the spending of that money. Why? Because of the observation that the money was going into slush-fund activities such as the Melbourne Maritime Museum, which received a cheque for $100 000 after Mr Kelly had a conversation with the Premier. There was no application, but the museum received $100 000.

It was the same situation with the Albert Park squash centre, which received a cheque for $36 000 without making an application. I can refer to numerous grants to assist gamblers that were not funded. There is a rehabilitation and family support centre in my electorate that historically has counselled people who have drug and alcohol problems but is now counselling mainly women who have gambling problems. The centre requires $50 000 to survive because it does not have the resources for that additional counselling. There is no cheque in the mail for the centre: it has to go cap in hand to the government for funding.

A fund has been set up to tackle problem gambling and to assist those who are affected. Up to $1 million a day is going into that fund, yet the government refuses to tackle the gambling problem because the fund is seen as a slush fund. Tabcorp and Tattersalls want to be involved in helping problem gamblers. They are willing to be part of a hard-hitting campaign to alert people to the problems of gambling. In the long term it is in their interest to ensure gambling is carried out responsibly and that the fund is there to assist people who have gambling problems.

Crown Casino, Ken Carney and others are paranoid about the image of the casino. Australia is the first country to allow major casinos in major urban centres. In other countries casinos are either in resorts or remote locations such as Monte Carlo, and often the local population is prohibited from going to the casinos. In Australia casinos are looking for the mass audience. Because of that we do not know what the social consequences will be.

The Melbourne casino is by far the biggest urban casino in Australia and will become even bigger when the new casino is built. No research has been undertaken into the social consequences that such casinos have on people who have gambling problems. Overseas studies show that problem gambling affects the gullible and the poor. It is the poorer parts of Victoria, including the northern suburbs, that will be most affected, and I condemn the government for not taking the necessary action to assist people who are badly affected by gambling.

In a recent study the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority showed that problem gambling was on the increase. The study was conducted before the temporary casino was opened. Clearly gaming machines were the first impetus for the increase in problem gambling. One can conclude that if children are being left in cars in the casino car park they are being left in cars at the car parks at hotels and clubs. We have a gambling crisis in Victoria because casinos and gaming machines have been introduced virtually at the same time. The problem has become so bad that something must be done because of the
extraordinary increase in the number of people affected by gambling.

One story that came to my attention is of a family law case where a judge decided that since the husband did not wish to make maintenance payments to his wife because she had a gambling problem, the money would be put towards paying off the mortgage. I do not believe we should be allowing third parties to make such decisions. There should be a mechanism in place to assist such people.

The government refuses to acknowledge there is a gambling problem among younger people. In earlier days the under-18-year-olds would sneak off to the hotel to have a beer, but now it is the thing to sneak off to play the gaming machines.

If the government is serious about the problem it should have a campaign that targets the young saying that gambling is a game and entertainment, but when people have problems they have somewhere to turn. People are not prepared to admit how much they spend and how gambling affects their daily lives. Currently the average expenditure on gambling is $20 a person a week and is on the increase.

It is the working class, the poorer people and the ethnic community who are most affected by gambling. Members of some ethnic communities accept gambling more readily than others, but little is being done to assist them.

The reference group on the issue, the Victorian Council on Problem Gambling, envisaged a broad-based television, radio, newspaper and media campaign. That broad-based approach has been knocked on the head and nothing has been left in its place. Presently no program is in place to do the work to get the message across, to show what services are available, and to examine ways of providing new services to ensure that we tackle the problem.

We are talking about a different phenomenon in Victoria from that which exists in other cities and countries. Everything has been introduced over a short period in Victoria. We have had an incredible publicity campaign for all forms of gambling right across the board — it has been inspirational! We also have a huge casino, a huge enterprise — the largest new employer in the state, which is there for a massive audience. That is a new phenomenon. It is not common to casinos around the world. It is not true of all Australian cities, because while some have large casinos they have not had the promotion that Crown Casino has had in this state. Other states have not had the relationship to government that we have had in Victoria. We have had a powerful lobby group in Crown Casino, a powerful set of individuals who are able to dictate government policy. That is a different phenomenon. The effect of Crown Casino is poorly researched, and we do not have the mechanisms to intervene.

Welfare groups and council services will be picking up the pieces in Coburg. Once it was drugs and alcohol but people are now taking up gambling. My electorate office is picking up the pieces of a massive problem. There is nothing exclusive about Crown Casino; there is no limit to the number of people who spend or the amount they spend. It is the opposite: the casino encourages more and more spending.

Crown Casino offers very little in terms of counselling services. The people in the Crown consortium seek to influence the way we approach the problem gambling campaign: how we use the media, how we use television. They did it within the reference group for problem gambling quite loudly and articulately. They got done in at that committee. Tattersalls and Tabcorp supported the campaign; they supported a hard-hitting campaign because the minister would not. He would not support it because it affects Crown Casino, and what affects Crown Casino affects the government.

The government has dealt Crown Casino three aces. It gave Crown two positions on the reference group on problem gambling. Everyone else got one. Crown was given a third ace when Ken Carney said, 'We want to have a say in what sort of community campaign we have but we do not want to be part of it. We do not want references to table games. We don’t want the rolling dice image. We don’t want anything that will affect the image of the casino'. He can say that, but they did not want to be part of it. They have three aces but what happens when they pull the fourth ace out from under their sleeve? That’s it! The political connections and the power of not what you know but who you know — the power of Ken Carney and Ron Walker with this government. That is how the decision was made, and that is how the Minister for Community Services crushed the initiative to have a broad campaign to demonstrate to Victorians the effects of problem gambling.

Getting problem gamblers to recognise they have a problem is not easy. The first thing they do,
surreptitiously, is fail to recognise there is a problem. Gamblers Anonymous, like Alcoholics Anonymous, tackles the addiction and helps the families, the people who have to suffer the problem of problem gamblers. People can tackle their gambling additions but without the help of Crown Casino.

I am angry when I witness the effects of gambling on families in my electorate. I see what happens — I have the problem gamblers in front of me. They are vulnerable, they are gullible, they are poor, and they are at the mercy of the publicity campaign launched by the gambling industry. Out of that industry Tabcorp and Tattersalls want to be responsible citizens. They know that it is not in their interests to see problem gambling get completely out of hand. They want to do something. They say, 'We'll do something. We'll be involved in the campaign. We'll show images that affect our industry and we'll show them very clearly. We will tackle problems that are associated with horse racing or gaming machines'. They are responsible because they know that it is in their long-term interest.

Crown Casino's attitude is: no, no, no! If we cannot beat it at a committee level, if we cannot beat it at a bureaucratic level, if we cannot beat it at any other level, we will beat it at a political level. It is why I am so angry about the attitude taken by this government.

When it was in power the opposition approached the issue responsibly. Sure it was hard-hitting but so are the TAC ads and a host of other ads currently shown on television. The opposition's approach would have brought the problem to light, but we have had no response from Crown Casino. It does not want to be involved. Crown has two gambling counsellors for the whole place. That is all it is prepared to do. It does not want its 'win, win, win! we are a great attribute to this state' image affected. If it is such a great attribute to this state, let it be responsible like Tabcorp and Tattersalls. Let Crown work with the community and the welfare sector — the people on the ground who have to take up and work with the results of problem gambling. Let the casino take the initiative for once, because it has created the public perception that everyone wins. The government has created the false perception that to go to the casino is to win at the casino. The ramifications must be tackled on television, on radio and in the ethnic media. We must be concerted in that effort. We must use Community Support Fund moneys to be able to provide the necessary infrastructure and to fund the necessary media campaign. We must be vigilant, not negligent.

I accuse the government of sheer negligence. It is aware of and has seen the consequences of problem gambling. The government's own research has brought to light the problems of problem gambling, yet it does nothing about it. The weakest people in society are being affected by problem gambling. The whole idea of gambling being manna from heaven is false. Gambling and gambling revenue is a tax on the poor, the weak and the vulnerable.

My constituency has been strongly affected by this problem. This is true right through the northern and western suburbs. We have to recognise that gambling is not about rich people, the high-fliers, the big spenders. That is not where the bulk of the revenue is coming from. It is not coming from overseas visitors. There is a margin — —

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

Mr WELLS (Wantirna) — Having just listened to the honourable member for Coburg for 30 minutes, I had to actually pick up the notice paper to find out which bill we were debating because I am not sure whether any of his comments were directed towards the appropriation bill.

What the honourable member for Coburg forgot to say in his speech was that the casino has created 2500 new jobs, many of which went to long-term unemployed people, and that a portion of the money derived from the casino has contributed to some very worthwhile public infrastructure such as the museum and exhibition building. I would like to remind the honourable member that the exhibition building was a project proposed by the former Labor government, but of course it did not have the financial skills, management or know-how to put that venture together.

The Community Support Fund is an excellent idea: it is helping people with gambling problems and is also used to help promote sport. I also remind the honourable member that the casino authority was established under the previous Labor government, and I believe the board members were also appointed by that government. Imagine what would happen if the licence to run the casino had been awarded to an overseas company! What community outrage there would have been, particularly from the opposition. It would have been screaming about the amount of money flowing out of our country.
The 1995-96 budget is without doubt another good, strong budget which is transparent, and lays the foundation stones for future generations. That is reassuring for many of us in the house who have young children.

In 1992, when the coalition took over this state and its financial mess, the gross debt was approaching $70 billion, and the current account deficit was heading towards $3 billion. I am often reminded of the fact that the state of Victoria had been travelling along for about 150 years, raking up debts totalling about $11 billion, but then from 1982 to 1992, in just 10 years under a Labor government, those $11 billion worth of debts increased to almost $70 billion! Who would have thought that was possible? But the Cain-Kirner governments found a way of doing it. At the end of the 1994-95 financial year we have a current account surplus of $932 million and an overall surplus of $215 million — and of course it is the first time this has happened since 1961.

The 1995-96 budget is a steady-as-she-goes budget, and the forecast is to maintain a sustainable current account surplus — and that is good news. Although many would say the bad news is behind us because we have this sustainable current account surplus, we need to maintain tight fiscal management to ensure that we can regain our AAA credit rating which we had in 1982 and which, of course, was downgraded during the 10 years of the Cain-Kirner governments.

The Treasurer made it very clear when he delivered his budget speech that we still had many important objectives to maintain, including:

- The reduction of our still excessive debt and interest burdens;
- appropriate levels of infrastructure investments;
- a stable base for delivery of quality services; and
- establishing foundations for future sustainable reductions in state taxation.

And don't we need that!

Our privatisation policy is having a positive effect in our state. The proceeds from the privatisation sales of the SEC are being used to retire debt, and that means the interest cover on those retired debts is finished — and finished permanently. Of course, this is different from the way the federal government runs things. It has used the sale of Qantas for recurrent expenditure. In other words, the sale — and it is a capital sale — of Qantas is being used to pay the salaries of public servants and interest. What happens the year after when we do not have another sale of Qantas? We have to go back to borrowings, and that is totally irresponsible financial management.

The budget also provides for increased expenditure, including: $112 million for acute care hospitals; $9.4 million for the Mandatory Reporting and Child Protection program — and I remind the house that this government introduced mandatory reporting while the previous government tended to lose its way in that particular debate; an increase in the grants for libraries; and a further $6.3 million for the education portfolio to maintain the state's vocational training efforts.

At the next election Victorian voters have a very clear choice. On the one hand, they can have a government that has provided a balanced budget that is clear for everyone to see — the government has made some very tough decisions and it is the greatest financial turnaround by far in the history of this country; and on the other hand, they can have a Brumby-led government, and I will make a couple of quotations on that front.

John Brumby said on the ABC's 7.30 Report — and I am sure the opposition is disappointed that that program is going out of business:

- We can't put things back the way they were and it would be foolish of us to promise to do that and we have made it clear that under a future Labor government which I'd lead —

make no mistake about that, and we hope he remains opposition leader for many years to come —

- there will be no borrowing for recurrent purposes, we will balance budgets, absolute commitment to balanced budgets...

On 3AW's Paul Barber program he said:

- I will balance the budget. In fact, I will produce a budget surplus, and I will get this state going again.

Now, of course, he went on to reinforce that a couple of days ago in his budget reply, stating that:

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 sustainable surplus on the current account.

Let us just look at the cost of some of the promises he has made. Firstly, he said that he is not happy about the grand prix, but we will not put a figure on that. Also, he hopes to legalise marijuana. I am not sure what that will cost the community, with more kids susceptible to smoking and having access to marijuana, but so far his promises are not costing the state a lot of money. However, he goes on to promise an additional $40 million for hospitals. On the Paul Barber program he also said:

Yes, the hospitals are $40 million ...

And there he is talking about the ALP health rescue package. At the moment our health policy is treating an additional 100,000 patients per year. That is what is happening now compared to the situation under the previous government. But let us move on to some more promises. He has said on the ABC radio station 2CO that:

If a school was being closed and the school continues to exist — in other words, it hasn't been sold off — and there is a clear and demonstrated continuing educational need in the area, we'll reopen that school. We've made that clear. I think the same goes for country hospitals.

Pretty big promise! So even if we assume a hundred new schools will be reopened at $3 million or $4 million a hit, that would be about a $400 million a year commitment to country people.

The Labor Party has also said that it will re-employ the teachers and decrease class sizes. I am not sure how the ALP will do that. About 6000 teachers were taken out of the system, and at a cost of $50,000 a teacher I estimate it would cost $324 million a year in recurrent expenditure to re-employ them. The Leader of the Opposition has not made that promise to reduce class sizes but to repay his teacher union mates.

The Leader of the Opposition visited my area and made a man of himself by promising another $11.5 million for kindergartens. The opposition obtained some publicity about that. However, a parent in my area asked, 'John, can you send us a copy of your policy?'. That was six months ago and the parent is still waiting for a copy of the policy. It must have been written on a whiteboard!

The Leader of the Opposition said that under a Brumby government, 'The point is we don't need tolls on Victorian roads. Labor's policy — we've released from our policy, Melbourne Access 2000 — is no debt, no tolls, and you will be able to drive from Gippsland to western Victoria through the city without a single set of traffic lights'. That is sensational! However, as the honourable member for Mornington pointed out, the Melbourne Access 2000 policy has a black hole of around $1 billion, which demonstrates that the Labor Party cannot add up. If we were to ask how a future Labor government would fulfil its promises, we would find that it would cost taxpayers approximately $150 million a year to repay Transurban. John Brumby pointed to the New South Wales example, which is dangerous stuff!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Cooper) — Order! The honourable member for Wantirna is using an inappropriate title for the Leader of the Opposition. He cannot refer to him by name. He must refer to him by the position he holds.

Mr WELLS — Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for your guidance and wisdom. The Leader of the Opposition, in his budget speech on Tuesday, mentioned the New South Wales experience. He spoke about the mistakes made on the Sydney Harbor tunnel project. There were serious problems with that project because the government underwrote the financial risk and also guaranteed traffic flows. The New South Wales Auditor-General has acknowledged that, but that is not the case in Victoria because our government has not given any financial guarantees, nor has it guaranteed traffic flow numbers — quite the opposite! If there is an excess in traffic flow, the Victorian government will receive an additional bonus. That is good sound management.

When he was Leader of the Opposition, Bob Carr promised, 'Elect me and I will scrap the tolls'. Does that sound familiar? That is what the Leader of the Opposition is promising Victoria. We know what happened in New South Wales when Bob Carr became Premier — he went back on his word! If a Labor government were ever elected again in Victoria, it would have to do the same because it could not afford to remove the tolls, nor could it support the financial implications. The New South Wales Premier is becoming an embarrassment to the federal government because of his broken promises.

We should look at some Victorian examples, such as the support for the City Link project by the former
Labor government. That was acknowledged by the honourable member for Mornington who made the point that a former minister, David White, in another place said in a press release on 22 May 1992, 'A range of funding options is possible including direct or indirect tolls'. This was a couple of months before the last state election. He made it clear that the road would be built by the private sector and that direct tolls was an option. Another former Labor minister, Jim Kennan, also said, 'Roads would have to be constructed and operated by a private sector group and be operated as a toll road using high-tech collection'. Two former Labor ministers said that toll roads and the private sector were the way to go, but now the Leader of the Opposition says that this is not an option.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr WELLS — I know that the cost of privatisation is dear to the heart of the honourable member for Morwell! He and his party are saying that the utilities should remain in public hands but that is hypocritical and unrealistic! Who sold part of the SEC to Mission Energy? It was the former Labor government. It started the trend, but it sold it for the wrong reasons. It sold this utility because it was strapped for cash and it used the money for recurrent expenditure. Our government is using privatisation to retire debt, to ensure we do not have on-going interest payments and, more importantly, to bring back some efficiency into a bloated SEC.

For a future Labor government to buy back the SEC in its new form — I am sure there will not be a Labor government in my lifetime — it would cost approximately $15 billion and about $1.5 billion in interest costs. If you allow for a dividend payment it would cost approximately $1.3 billion in recurrent expenditure. Moreover, it would have to get Australian Loan Council approval. We are familiar with the shonky deals that the former Labor government did when it side-stepped loan council approval. The reality is that any future Labor government would not be able to buy back the SEC.

Consumers and householders want cheaper power, but if we do not attract efficiencies now, in the future people will have the right under the national grid to buy their power from over the border.

I am not sure what the Labor Party policy is on public transport but it will probably have to repay its public transport union mates, which would probably total an extra $200 million. According to my calculations of the promises made by the Leader of the Opposition — he has made promises like a drunken sailor — the recurrent expenditure will be $2.38 billion.

I suggest to the Labor Party, and particularly the Leader of the Opposition, that it has racked up promises that total $2.38 billion in recurrent expenditure. Perhaps the honourable member for Morwell could write these figures down so he can pass them on to the Leader of the Opposition later. And to ensure it can fulfil those promises, it will be necessary for a future Labor government to massively increase taxation. It has a number of options to pay for those promises: firstly, by hitting the poor old families again; secondly, by introducing a state deficit levy of $1500 per household per year, not for one year, or two years, but forever, to pay for its promises; thirdly, it could borrow more money and continue the debt; or, fourthly, it could admit to the Victorian public that it is incapable of government, that it is a pack of dingbats and that it does not deserve to govern. The final option would be the most appropriate course for the Labor Party.

After three years in opposition the Labor Party has not learnt one thing. By making promises like a drunken sailor, it would take the state back to the days of 1992.

People in my electorate remember the promises the Leader of the Opposition made. They remember when he spoke to them about preschools. Now the people have asked, 'Where is the policy?'. The Labor Party forgot to send the policy to my people.

I refer to a press release issued by the Leader of the Opposition on the day he made his speech on the budget. It is a little confusing. I need to clarify some points.

Mr Sheehan interjected.

Mr WELLS — Maybe the honourable member for Northcote will listen. He has much to learn about financial management. The press statement of the Leader of the Opposition states:

In the 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 ...

A little further down the press release states:

Mr Brumby also:
argued that the real budget deficit could be as high as $1 billion ...

In the opposition leader's press release, in one breath he says he welcomes the budget being back in the black and in the second breath he says the real budget deficit could be as high as $1 billion. I wonder whether the honourable member for Northcote wrote that for him. The press release continues:

... families could spend up to $50 000 on tolls — the equivalent of almost half the cost of a family home ...

I remind the Leader of the Opposition that the former Labor government wanted to introduce tolls. It wanted the private sector to build roads. The opposition leader goes on to contradict himself:

Victorians do not want to see their valuable and highly profitable state assets sold off to overseas owners.

Who sold Mission Energy? Was it the former Labor government? The press release continues:

Victorians do not want to be paying tolls every time they use their car.

That is not the case. Passing through a toll is the driver's choice. No-one is forced to drive on a toll road. A driver using such roads can elect to pay his 80 cents, $2 or $3.

Business confidence in the state is growing. Much literature supports that suggestion. The September 1995 edition of Business Matters states:

While growth has fallen, economic activity has been more resilient in Victoria than in the rest of Australia. Victoria's annual GSP growth in the March quarter was around 4.7 per cent compared with 4 per cent for Australia ...

Employment rose 0.2 per cent in Victoria in July. National employment rose 0.1 per cent. Employment growth in Victoria has been stronger than expected during 1995, having risen 3 per cent in the six months to July, given the slowdown in economic activity.

Locally, Wantirna has done well out of the budget. It is not hard to see why Wantirna had to do well, considering the previous 10 years under Labor government. Labor completely forgot where the east is. Invest in the west and forget the rest — that was its policy. The people in the east will never forget what Labor did. There was poor infrastructure. Schools and roads were ignored. Only now are people in the outer-eastern suburbs starting to feel a part of Melbourne because the coalition government is starting to balance the ledger. I will give a couple of examples.

Wellington Road — the section of Monash Highway that passes through Rowville — in 1988 was voted in an RACV survey as the most congested road in Melbourne. What did the Labor government do about that? It was election year and it decided to do nothing because it knew it would win government anyway. That is the way it felt.

In 1991 when in opposition I, together with the honourable member for Boronia Province in another place, the Honourable Gerald Ashman, and the honourable member for Knox, encouraged the now Minister for Roads and Ports to study the congestion at Wellington Road. Only then was there any action. I am pleased to report that the duplication of the road is now half built. I read in the budget papers that the final payment will ensure that Wellington Road is completed on time in about March next year. The people of the outer eastern suburbs are grateful for that. They should also be reminded that if ever a Labor government were to come to power, who knows what it would use the 3-cent levy for. There is a chance that some roads would not be finished.

Wantirna Secondary College was forgotten in Labor's 10 years. It had the equivalent of 65 portable classrooms on site. The school has a population of 1200. Fortunately, the Minister for Education saw fit to allocate $2 million to this school, so the schools will be able to start moving out the portables. That is good news for the suffering students, teachers, principal and strong parent groups.

Rowville Secondary College was bursting at the seams with about 2000 students. It hopes to have around 2000 students by the end of this century. It is one of the boom areas in Melbourne. The government has been able to establish a second campus in the Rowville area. That will relieve some of the congestion in that school.

Just last night I was fortunate enough to go to the Governor of Victoria export awards. Those awards add to the good work the government is doing in encouraging businesses. One business in my electorate, GCD International, was awarded the Austrade services award. That amazing company finds engineering solutions for clients around the world. At the moment it is delivering services in Belgium, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Brazil. It provides engineering solutions to companies
working in extreme heat or cold conditions anywhere in the world. I first visited that company as a new member a couple of years ago. It has built strength on strength. It was great to see the company well rewarded last night.

The Minister for Industry and Employment said last night that Victoria's exports increased from $8.5 billion to $12.4 billion between 1988-89 and 1993-94 — that is, an average annual compound growth rate of around 7 per cent. The fact that people, companies and the state are exporting means more jobs and more growth. It is definitely the way to go. The minister must be congratulated on his work.

Recently, I was approached by one of my constituents who works in Hong Kong for a Chinese company. He is desperately seeking Victorian companies as joint investment partners because Australian managerial skills, know-how and expertise are desperately needed, especially in high technology fields. Australians are very professional in areas such as telecommunications.

I turn to youth affairs and the work of the Minister responsible for Youth Affairs. The previous government fed the bureaucracy. It did not worry about the poor, disadvantaged kids on the street. The minister has set up regional youth committees across the state and their success has been exceptional. They have properly addressed problems at the local level, particularly service and housing problems.

I congratulate the Treasurer, the Premier and the government as a whole for putting together such a responsible budget. It will lay the foundations for the future, especially for the younger generation. Who would have thought in 1992, when Victoria was the rust bucket of this country, that we would be now leading the country in many fields? One field of expertise that has to be included is the financial management of the public sector.

Mr SHEEHAN (Northcote) — I am sure making valedictory speeches is a poignant moment for many government members. This is the last budget that many of them will live to address politically, and what a budget it is — the high point of casino capitalism. Victoria: where the dice is loaded in favour of mates and conflict of interest is the order of the day. We live in an extraordinary state, and this budget illustrates that extraordinarily well.

There are two key features of casino capitalism. The first is the redistribution of wealth, assets and jobs away from the public sector towards the private sector and the redistribution of the burden of taxation from the wealthy to families and the poor of the community. It is the most massive redistribution of resources ever engineered in Australia's history.

This budget is an explicit expression of the Premier's arrogant comments about making the fat man fatter. Not only is this fundamental shift of wealth in society reflected in the budget, but there is also the shift of power from the community and the state to wealthy individuals and companies. Not only are individuals in our community impoverished, but the state has less and less capacity to intervene to achieve economic and social objectives. The redistribution of resources and assets away from the state and the public sector towards the private sector and wealthy individuals and organisations is a very strong theme of the budget.

The second feature, which is not quite so explicit, is the thread of state patronage, cronyism, corruption and media complicity. At the macro level of redistribution we have the sale of major utilities — gas, electricity and water — under way or being contemplated. It is not the right of the state to dispose of those assets. The state and the community hold certain assets in common: natural resources, capital assets such as the utilities and certain cultural assets. It is the responsibility of the government of the day to protect and enhance the value of those assets. They are held in common. The government of the day holds them in trust for current and future generations and has no right to dispose of them. Less still does it have the right to dispose of them at the prices at which this government is disposing of them. For example, it is being done with the SEC at a cost to the community conservatively estimated at $3 billion — a massive loss to this community of a valuable resource at an appallingly low price. One error compounds another. And who wins? Of course, it is the wealthy individuals. Who loses in the roll of the dice in the casino economy? The weak and the poor in the community.

Looking at the impact of the budget on the Victorian community, it is my guess that about $5000 to $6000 per family has been paid out in taxation to service the ambitions of this government. That is what the government has imposed on families in Victoria over the past three years with the outcome of worse health, education and community services. Who wins? Of course, business and the wealthy win because there have been no increases in taxes and
charges for business and there is the possibility of $600 million in concessions to come.

It is an extraordinary approach to financial management which sees the redistribution of wealth and power away from the state and the community toward the mates and the wealthy individuals and companies in this state at the macro, community and individual levels.

How does a government get away with that? How does a government hold together this quite extraordinary political approach of making the fat man fatter? What is the key that holds together this version of Mussolini's state capitalism? What is the common thread? How do they manage to do it? I put it to the house that it is the common thread of state patronage, cronyism, corruption and media complicity that makes it all possible. So many people in this state are in each other's pockets it is, for the time being, holding together the corrupt ship of state.

I turn to some of the particular examples before us. I refer specifically to the granting of the licence to Crown Casino. The review of financial submissions prepared for the Victorian Casino Control Authority by SBC Dominguez Barry Corporate Finance Ltd identifies six specific weaknesses in the June bid of Crown Casino: firstly, an offer to the state of $150 million for a 10-year exclusivity period, compared to the Pacific bid of $235 million — an enormous gap; secondly, a committed equity of $408 million by Pacific compared to the Crown committed equity of $138 million; thirdly, a sensitivity analysis which assessed the capacity of each applicant to absorb revenue shortfalls indicated that Crown had the least capacity of all three applicants; fourthly, the estimate of each participant's capacity to meet its equity contributions indicated deficiencies in the Crown bid; fifthly, in assessing the degree of financial commitment the Crown bid rated a very poor second to the Pacific bid; and the sixth weakness is that contingency finance plans for the Pacific bid were superior to those in Crown's bid.

So six specific weaknesses were identified by SBC Dominguez Barry Corporate Finance Ltd. What happened in September? Surprise, surprise! By September all of those six issues had been resolved. The Pacific bid had not changed, but by some miracle Uncle Ronny's bid had just pipped the Pacific bid at the post. It just got there by the roll of the dice in the casino economy — the dice loaded in favour of mates. How could you possibly explain the closing of that gap? One bid didn't change and the other bid, found deficient on six clear points, snuck home. I would like to back a race horse with those odds!

Mr Mildenhall — The TAB pulled out of the consortium.

Mr SHEEHAN — Indeed, and that brings me to Lloyd Williams and further aspects of the development of Crown Casino. Terry McCrann writing in the Herald Sun of Tuesday, 8 November, had some concerns and asked:

Did Crown Casino breach the prospectus provisions of the Corporations Law by failing to publically disclose its desire to dramatically increase the size of the hotel at the complex while its prospectus was open?

Did it? That is a very interesting question.
Mr McCrann continues:

That is the fundamental question raised by the new revelations that Crown actually — and presumably formally — lodged 'a proposal' with the Victorian government to increase the size of the hotel late in January, while the prospectus was open and nearly two weeks before it closed on February 9.

Yet, at no stage did it release that information to the market.

So Mr McCrann was concerned about the propriety of that, yet that was reasonably public. What Mr McCrann does not know to this day but I can put on the table now is what Mr Lloyd Williams said at a meeting held in January 1994 on the second floor of 99 Queensbridge Street, while the prospectus was still open. Mr Lloyd Williams assured the people who were there that they would get approval for an extension to the casino. When pressed on the issue and asked how he could be so sure, Mr Lloyd Williams said, 'My mate is the Premier and he runs the state.' Mr Lloyd Williams was prepared to say that in January 1994, but in April the Premier was denying all knowledge of it. Of course, we now know that it has all been approved. In January Lloyd Williams felt sufficiently confident to tell a meeting of key executives from Crown Casino that he had received a personal assurance from the Premier that the bid to extend the casino would be approved. The Premier was his mate; he would see that it happened. They are two extraordinary examples of how this state works — that is, how the casino economy works.
Of course, it is much worse than that. We have seen example after example of conflicts of interest in this state. The most recent to come out involves Mr Michael Rodd, the Premier's brother-in-law. He had only a brief telephone conversation with the Premier yet stitched up a deal for $250 million — and he made $5 million from it! Not a bad return on a telephone call, is it? Some $5 million for a local call. Once again, you would need a fair bankroll with the TAB to be able to make a call like that. But of course, there was no conflict of interest!

As Uncle Ron Walker said in his normally sensitive way, 'Anyone who wants to level conflict of interest allegations against me can go to hell'. That is the way the dice are loaded in the casino economy: if you're not a mate, you can go to hell! Some people will soon be going to hell. Where is the Darcy Dugan principle in all this? Remember Darcy, the man who was offered a plane flight. He got the sack and was vilified by the Premier, but it's all right for the Premier's mates. It is just a coincidence that Ron Walker, who has personally raised more than $30 million for the Liberal Party and is its federal treasurer, can get a casino licence — and so can tell people to go to hell — and that his mate Lloyd Williams can assure people that they will get the extension to the casino because the Premier is their mate.

This state is rife with corruption, with cronyism, with conflicts of interest. I will refer to more of them. DDB Needham got a $1.8 million contract to promote the sale of the state electricity system. Leeds Media, Baillieu Knight Frank, Michael Tilley and Leonie Burke — and the list goes on. KNF was a beauty, something the Premier is always belly-aching about. KNF has been sold to Corporate Kudos, and, just by coincidence, Corporate Kudos has picked up a whole raft of state contracts. Why was KNF not put on the public market? We know why: that would have led to the disclosure of its financial details. Corporate Kudos is just KNF reincorporated.

I can go on and list conflict of interest after conflict of interest. It is little wonder that the Premier anticipates that when he leaves the job — presumably after he is defeated at the next election — he will spend some time on some boards. I wonder what boards he will go onto? Hudson Conway? There must be a job there for Jeff. You could imagine his mate, Uncle Ron, fixing that one up, after providing $7000 for the boys on the basketball trip and raising $30 million for the Liberal Party. He will find a guernsey for Jeff on the board. How about an electricity authority?

Mr Finn interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Tullamarine used an unparliamentary expression. I ask him to withdraw it.

Mr Finn — Totally out of deference to you, Mr Speaker, I withdraw.

Mr SHEEHAN — Perhaps DDB Needham would be appropriate, or Baillieu Knight Frank. The possibilities are endless. We can just see comfortable positions for him on various boards. It would be terrific! No wonder the Liberal Party is anticipating $5 million worth of donations. That would be the tip of the iceberg. If you are in business in this town the best way to get a deal is to chip in for the party. Why would you pay $1000 for a dinner unless you were getting something out of it? This state is rampant with conflicts of interest. That is what is holding together the government's extraordinary approach to financial management. Furthermore, it could only happen with the complicity of the media.

Mr Finn — The Sunday Age, I suppose?

Mr SHEEHAN — No, I refer to the Age, which reminds me of an old dog I had. He was a bit of a mongrel but nice looking, friendly, energetic and quite intelligent — and he had a pretty mixed history. He survived being dumped in freezing streams and days lost in the wilderness. He was a comfortable part of the family life, but eventually we had to put him down because he could not stand the summer heat. The vet said, 'Look, we can fix him by lowering his temperature. But the next time it's hot, he'll keel over again.' He was just like the Age. It is an old newspaper with a mixed pedigree — a bit of good and a bit of bad but overall not bad — and a part of family life that generations of Victorians have read and enjoyed.

Under this government, with its intimidation and brutalisation, the Age, like my old dog, has not been able to stand the heat. It has rolled over; and, just like my old dog, it should be put down. You only have to look at the paper's financial analyses and the scyphophic nonsense that comes from its state political reporter, who has written about the Japanese erecting statues to the Premier. Have you ever read anything more absurd in your life? What about the story of him solving Australia's international problems at the United Nations? This
man is not welcome anywhere other than in a Liberal Party establishment in his home state!

I put it to the house that this government's approach could not be sustained without the complicity of a newspaper such as the Age, which has completely lost its integrity.

Mr Turner — What about the Herald Sun?

Mr SHEEHAN — It is very interesting that that question has been asked because Terry McCrann, who rightly criticised aspects of our financial management, has also criticised this government — for very good reason. Furthermore, Stephen Mayne, a former adviser to the Treasurer, has consistently exposed the financial mismanagement of the government — in the Herald Sun. I invite you to read what is being said about this government by Terry McCrann and Stephen Mayne — and thanks for asking!

What do we do about all this? It is imperative that this house adopts the principle that no minister, no adviser, no consultant and no senior bureaucrat can take a position on the board of any privatised utility or authority in this state. That is a principle this house must adopt, because it will impose integrity on people who otherwise operate in a complete ethical vacuum. It is a fundamental starting point. If we have a media that is supine and a government caucus that is supine, Parliament must impose ethical constraints on the government.

The Premier is already flagging where he is going — to boards of companies that have profited from this government. Mind you, I do not know what one company is doing with Tom Austin on its board. I am not sure what they did to deserve Tom — but that's just an aside.

One of the extraordinary things is that despite this rampant cronyism and state patronage we find the Premier — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr SHEEHAN — I am getting on to the positive stuff — this is all very positive. The government is extraordinarily sensitive to attacks. Every time someone attacks this government, the Premier or the Treasurer say, 'Don't hit me, it hurts my family. Think of my family'. Like the bullies and sooks they are, they duck for cover behind members of their families. Every time they are criticised they say, 'Don't hurt the family. You're really attacking the family'.

I make it clear to the house that I would never personally approve of attacks on families of members. Despite considerable provocation I have never indulged in them. Make no mistake who the targets are: the Premier, the Treasurer and the people who facilitate the cronyism and corruption. When they belly-ache and hide from the media behind their families saying, 'Don't hit me because it hurts my wife and kids' we will not let them get away with it.

One should consider what they have done to this state and what they have done to their political opponents. You cannot dish it out and then squeal when some of it comes back. Labor members copped it sweet and we expect Kennett, Stockdale and the rest of the government to stand the heat, because the heat is coming.

One should further consider what the government did to the Labor Party; the Guilty Party advertisements. It was clever politics, but what a debasement of the political process that a party would choose to criminalise members of a government during the deepest recession the state had seen. What an appalling thing to do; to licence attacks on individuals — I note the Attorney-General smirks — and their families, but not one Labor person squealed. No-one said, 'It's too hot for us, stop the phone calls at home, stop the harassment in the street'. We did not squeal; we copped it sweet, and we expect the Premier and the Treasurer of this government to have the guts to tough it out too.

I remember the attacks on former government members: the appalling attack on John Cain's son-in-law who worked with Midland dairy and the attacks on his daughter who worked for the Gas and Fuel Corporation raised by none other than the former Minister for Finance, Ian Smith. He said that the appointment was incest. We all know about Ian Smith. He would be a great person to comment on other people's morality, wouldn't he! He accused Premier Cain of incest because his daughter worked for the Gas and Fuel Corporation. There were ferocious attacks on Joan Kirner's son, David, a trade union official working with the Trades Hall Council and Maureen Lyster and her husband, who was a health professional in industrial relations working for the Monash Medical Centre.
The list goes on. There was the attack on Bill Gurry for his alleged holiday with John Cain in Brisbane. Why? It was a deliberate attack to sabotage the Woodward royal commission. Why? Because the mates, Graham Samuel and the Kroger brothers had to be protected, that is why!

When in government Labor ministers, members and their families were subjected to appalling personal attacks. The opposition has not repeated that and it will not, but the government should not let its people squeal because the opposition and the Victorian community will not give them the time of day.

One should consider the brutalisation and intimidation of critics and journalists. The Premier punching a journalist as reported in the Sunday Age, there were legal suits against television companies and direct approaches to management to remove journalists. The attacks on advocates — Rayner, Levine, Bongiorno, Fogarty and Nicholson. What a list of people who have been vilified and marginalised by the government. Why? Because they spoke on important issues and they spoke on behalf of decency and ordinary people.

One should consider the attacks on the churches. What a top performance that was! The churches, according to the Premier, no longer have a right to speak in our community. To their everlasting credit they have refused to buckle under. I will refer to the front page of the Northcote Leader. It quotes the Reverend Brad Harris of the Northcote Uniting Church, Father Geoff Baron of St Joseph’s Northcote parish, and Reverend Marian Welford of the Thornbury Baptist Church who all tipped a bucket on the Premier, and so they ought.

It is monstrous that the Premier should say that churches should have no right to speak out on issues of public policy. Why did he say it? Because he thought he could intimidate them and squeeze them out of the debate the way he squeezes out members of his cabinet, backbench, journalists and trade unionists. As reported in the Australian the Premier has attacked academics and public servants. It is extraordinary stuff!

We had the former Minister for Finance confess to obtaining a computer list of people who worked for the ALP or who had some association, and he showed it to the Herald Sun. What the government did was to look out for people who had been or were current members of the ALP, people who were active in ALP branches and party activities, former ALP members of Parliament, former ALP election candidates, trade union members, and activists in movements sympathetic to the Labor Party.

What does that smack of? What sort of government would conduct a purge of members associated with a different political party? What sort of government would skite about that? What sort of people running this state would openly confess to conducting purges of members of Australia’s oldest political party? It is quite extraordinary. When the heat goes on let us remember the Dugan principle; let us remember the Guilty Party advertisements; let us remember the attacks on families!

Mr Finn — Hear, hear!

Mr SHEEHAN — Yes, hear, hear. The price will be paid mate, and you’ll be the first to go! Let us remember the brutalisation and the intimidation of critics, the pursuit of individuals and the ruin of individuals who had only a passing association with the previous government. They were on Ian Smith’s hit list, and what a person to put in charge of that sort of thing!

In this casino economy, the Premier and the Treasurer observe no rules. No-one is safe from them nor their attacks. The dice are always loaded in favour of their mates. Conflict of interest is the order of the day. Under this Premier who observes no rules, there are no rules. Do not expect the Labor Party to pull any punches when it observes conflicts of interest, impropriety, cronyism, corruption, patronage or media complicity.

The Labor Party is not going to be cowed by the attacks of the Premier, the Treasurer or the ministers, or indeed by the complicity of the media in the strategy of the government. The key ministers in this government and its senior bureaucrats have consistently acted with malice and viciousness towards members of the opposition, their critics and members and family members of the Labor Party when it was in government. Former government members received death threats and abuse, but we did not squeal, we did not wimp it — we kept on with the struggle, as we are doing now.

We should let neither the Premier nor the Treasurer hide behind their wives or their children because that is the behaviour of cowards and sooks. If they are not prepared to come in here and cop it sweet in the rough and tumble of political debate people will see them for the cowards they are. The attitude of the bullies and the sooks is quite predictable: when
you take them on they will cave in because they cannot stand the heat.

Mr FINN (Tullamarine) — In the three years I have been in this place I have never heard such two-faced humbug as I have heard in the past 30 minutes. The house heard the former Treasurer of a government which sent this state broke, which sent business to the wall, which put people out of work and which made families lose their homes come in here to lecture us about propriety and doing things the right way. The only thing he has ever done properly is wreck everything!

The honourable member for Northcote was one of the chief wreckers in the Cain-Kimer governments, and now he wants to have another shot. It is unbelievable that he has the gall even to sit in this house, let alone lecture this government — a government which has done more for the credibility of Victoria and Victorians than any government in history.

I congratulate the Treasurer on the remarkable economic turnaround we have experienced in Victoria in the past three years. Several weeks ago I was fortunate to have the Treasurer join me at a business breakfast in Sunbury. I repeat to the house what I said at that breakfast when introducing the Treasurer. I said those who sit in this house are entitled to have the initials MP after their names and that that stands for member of Parliament. In the case of the Treasurer, however, it stands for miracle performer because that is what he has been in the past three years, having taken over from a government that had no idea and was lurching from crisis to crisis.

We took over in October 1992, and in the three years since, Victoria has been completely turned around. Victoria is no longer the laughing-stock of Australia. Labor like to tell us we should be putting people in front of economic responsibility. Allow me to point out one or two realities. How can anybody put people first when the state is broke? Is pushing up the debt, paying vast interest bills, borrowing wherever possible from whoever is available putting people first? Is placing the debt burden on our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren putting people first? That is what the Labor government did for 10 years! We will be paying off Labor’s debt for many years to come. Now the Labor Party wants to be elected so it can do that again. That is one of the most remarkable and extraordinary possibilities that I could envisage.

Labor has shown what it is like. People have a clear choice.

I do not have a lot of faith in opinion polls, but in the past two years or so the polls certainly show people are aware of their choices: they can stick with the Liberal-National government and have economic responsibility; they can have a government that is returning Victoria to strength and to power; they can have a government of which they can be proud. Indeed, they can be proud of their state! The alternative is to return to a period like the years we experienced between 1982 and 1992 — that is, Labor’s decade of darkness. We can return to episodes such as the Pyramid Building Society, the State Bank and Tricontinental corporation; we could return to record unemployment and record bankruptcies, daily disasters and major crises in confidence; we could also return to the statewide feeling of shame Victorians felt during that decade.

Victorians do not want to go back. They see what the Kennett government is doing for every Victorian, and they are proud of what the government is doing for them.

Ms Marple interjected.

Mr FINN — I can understand that the honourable member for Altona is a little touchy on these subjects because if I were a member of a party that was as responsible for the destruction of a state as was the Labor Party for those 10 miserable, bleak years I would be touchy, too! I would want to hide my face and not to show myself in public. Fortunately I do not need to worry about that because I am a member of a government that has returned Victoria to glory. Victoria is going so well at the moment we are back to winning interstate football matches — although we cannot take the full credit for that!

So far as Victorians are concerned, there is little doubt that the greatest achievement of the government has been the return of pride in their state. When I was a young lad — not all that long ago — Victorians were a rather arrogant bunch, but we had plenty of reason to be arrogant. We were top of the heap. We lived in the financial capital of Australia. Victoria was the no. 1 state in Australia; people throughout Australia looked to Victoria and envied this state.

Something changed in about 1982 when John Cain took over. That is when the slide started. Unfortunately, by the time we took over in 1992, the state was in severe danger of slipping out of the
country altogether. We were at the bottom of the ocean; we were gone. Nobody had any hope for the future and Victoria was an exceptionally depressing place in which to live.

What has happened in the past three years brings the truth to the slogan that Victoria is on the move.

Ms Marple — To Queensland!

The SPEAKER — Order! The previous speaker from the opposition enjoyed the protection of the Chair. I extend that protection to the honourable member for Tullamarine. I ask opposition members to remain silent.

Mr FINN — Members of the opposition like to tell us Victorians are on the move to Queensland. However, that movement has continued for many decades — and has more to do with the weather than anything else! In the past two years that migration has slowed. People are returning to Victoria from Queensland — even to my electorate. Victoria is attracting people again. Victoria is showing its strength. Members of the opposition must realise that we are returning Victoria to greatness, to its rightful place as the no. 1 state.

The opposition is a whingeing, carping, knocking mob. Have Victorians heard anything positive from opposition members in the three years they have sat on the benches opposite? In the past three weeks we have seen a new low in Australian political life; the opposition could not get any lower — although whenever I say that, it finds something else to put up. Recently we have seen a vicious level of personal vindictiveness against families of government members. That must be the lowest point we have ever reached in Australian political life. The individual in another place, if he cannot get the Premier or the Treasurer — and he cannot because obviously they are doing a wonderful job — is more than happy to go for their wives and their kids. What next? The family dog? That is what this character is like.

The people of Victoria are disgusted. They know that politics can sometimes be pretty rough and not the most pleasant of pursuits, but when they see innocent family members — wives and children — being attacked and vilified in the way they have been over the past three weeks, they feel sick to the stomach. That is not the sort of thing we do in Victoria; indeed, it is not the sort of thing we do in Australia. The opposition's behaviour over the past three weeks has been un-Australian in the extreme. Many opposition members know that; what a pity their leadership does not! The message I am getting from my electors is that they have been appalled by the actions of the opposition and certain newspapers — the Sunday Age in particular, which is a rag anyway — over the past three weeks or so.

Since October 1992 we have heard nothing positive from the opposition. Since I have been in this house I have spoken in every appropriation debate. In every one I have asked the same question, and I will ask it again today. I ask opposition members to get up — either in this house or on the front steps — and express their heartfelt apologies. I ask them to say they are sorry for what they did to Victoria, sorry for what they did to Victorians, sorry for what they did to average families, sorry for what they did to the working people of this state and sorry for what they did to the small business people of this state. They should say sorry to every single Victorian for the destruction that they caused in their 10 years in office. I ask the honourable member for Altona to apologise, and I ask the honourable member for Footscray to apologise. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to apologise, but he is so rarely in the house that I do not often get the opportunity. Those apologies are long overdue.

Instead, all we hear from the opposition leadership is that it was not their fault, that it was all a media beat-up. Was Pyramid a media beat-up? Was Tricontinental a media beat-up?

Give it a rest! The opposition will not have a chance of getting back into government until it accepts reality, faces up to its responsibilities and apologises. I am doing opposition members a favour by bringing this to their attention. So long as they sit back and refuse to accept responsibility for what they did they will be out of office for a very long time. We can only hope, for the good of all Victorians, that that will be the case.

Earlier I mentioned the honourable member for Northcote, who preceded me in the debate. During his contribution he exhibited something that is often typical of Labor Party members — that is, a deep and abiding ideological hatred of all things private. The Victorian ALP must be the only organisation left in the world in which communism is held to be sacred. It is absolutely extraordinary. Somebody should tell these characters that even the Soviets have gone. Yet here in Victoria the ALP is still praising Stalin, still praising Lenin and still saying that Mao Zedong is the way to go! And still they
want to return us to the dark days we endured during those 10 miserable years.

A good example of that is the ALP’s attitude to the SEC and the privatisation of the electricity industry. The first benefit of the privatisation of the electricity industry will be paying off Labor’s debt. These characters carry on about privatisation, saying, ‘No, don’t do it. This is the end of the world. The sky’s falling in. This is the greatest tragedy ever to have befallen us’. If it were not for the former Labor government it would not be as necessary as it is. If we did not have Labor’s billions of dollars of debt hanging over our heads the issue would not be as pressing, the urgency not as great. These characters caused the mess, but they abuse the people who are trying to fix it! It is a bit like the arsonist beating up the fire brigade when it arrives on the scene — it is just not good enough. When Labor’s debt is paid off, we will see the introduction of competition.

I am surprised that members opposite do not reel in horror at the mention of the word ‘competition’. Competition means efficiency, things that never enter the heads of the honourable members of the opposition! Those things are totally alien to them; they just cannot get their teeth into them at all.

Mr Mildenhall interjected.

Mr FINN — It is now our constituency! In this budget the government has allocated $88.9 million to improve educational facilities in Victoria. I am exceptionally proud of this government’s achievements in education, and I congratulate the Minister for Education on the work he has done. I regret his announcement that he will not be with us in the next Parliament, but I have no doubt that he will go down in history as the man who got education in Victoria back on track.

There has been an enormous increase in funding for the maintenance of schools in my electorate. During the 10 years of Labor government most if not all the schools received not even a single cent for maintenance! So much for Labor caring about schools; so much for Labor caring about teachers; so much for Labor caring about education. It’s all humbug and hypocrisy; it is said just to catch votes. When reality sets in, Labor just wipes them — like everything else. Education is just another thing to be pushed aside, another promise to be forgotten. Promises such as those are dragged out every four years when there is another bag of votes up for grabs.

In my electorate major funding has been provided for the Gladstone Park Secondary College.

The SPEAKER — Order! The time being 1 o’clock I must interrupt the honourable member. The Chair will resume at 2.00 p.m., when questions without notice will be called. When the matter is next before the house the honourable member for Tullamarine will have the call.

Debate interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.04 p.m.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have given permission for still photographs to be taken from the press gallery during question time today. No additional lighting or flashlights will be used.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Hudson Conway: fraud allegations

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer to the Treasurer’s admission on 3AW today
that cabinet has not yet made a final decision to approve the expansion of the new casino. In light of this will the Treasurer ensure that when cabinet makes this decision it is provided with all details of fraud allegations against Hudson Conway, including any legal advice given to the SECV shell, or will cabinet make a decision on Crown's application in ignorance of the full details of the fraud allegations?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — The ALP should go into the lumber business because the Leader of the Opposition is as thick as two planks. I have told him repeatedly since he began this line of inquiry that the content of the information relative to these allegations is confidential to the parties involved in the proceedings. Because the matter was to be taken to court by the SECV shell they were not at liberty to disclose the information to anybody who was not a party to the proceedings without the leave of the court.

As a result, because the other party involved has voluntarily provided the information to the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority and to the police, no court order has been made. As a matter of law it is not proper for anybody else to have access to that information. As I understand the position, the government could not obtain access to it.

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr STOCKDALE — The Leader of the Opposition has just demonstrated again how he cannot hold his mind on the task for 2 seconds. As I said yesterday in answer to a question, the legal advice given to me was in relation to the issue of disclosure, not in relation to the content of the allegations. So far as I am aware, nobody other than the relevant police officers, advisers and parties to the proceedings is aware of the allegations. The Leader of the Opposition certainly is not aware of, cannot possibly have and does not claim to have information. He is beating the air as usual seeking to create an aura of controversy around something that is being investigated by the appropriate authorities in accordance with the law. There is no impropriety.

Mr Batchelor — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the question to the Treasurer — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair cannot deal with points of order while there is a continual barrage of interjections from the government benches.

Mr Batchelor — While we are thankful for an explanation of the process, the question to the Treasurer was designed to find out whether when cabinet considered this matter it would do so on the basis of having all the information or on the basis of ignorance.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The answer by the Treasurer is relevant.

Mr STOCKDALE — We are not a Labor Party cabinet and do not operate on the basis of ignorance. There are two issues involved, and they will be handled in accordance with the proper processes. I believe the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority is considering how these matters should be dealt with.

The government will deal with the matter in the light of the advice from the authority. We have made preliminary in-principle decisions on the principles involved. Details are being resolved by the authority and by the Department of the Treasury and Finance. In due course some overall proposal will be made and the government will deal with it on its merits, as it always does.

Ambulance services: industrial dispute

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — Will the Minister for Health advise the house on the current position regarding negotiations between the ambulance officers and the government over pay increases?

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Health) — I thank the member for his interest in the important negotiations taking place between the ambulance union, the Metropolitan Ambulance Service and Ambulance Service Victoria. Some weeks ago the ambulance officers were offered a pay increase of 10 per cent on exactly the same terms and conditions as the increase offered to and accepted by the ANF, representing the nurses across Victoria.

That offer reflects a wage increase for ambulance officers of between $70 and $80 a week. The proposition was reasonable and should have been accepted. We are currently in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission because the ambulance union has not accepted that offer and has placed considerable industrial bans on the use of
ambulance vehicles impacting on Victoria’s ambulance services.

In addition to 10 current bans, since 7.00 a.m. yesterday morning the Ambulance Employees Association of Victoria (AEAV) has imposed bans prohibiting any overtime being worked by ambulance officers and prohibiting any roster change whatsoever. If anyone presents and is sick the roster cannot be changed. The use of pagers or selcall radios is prevented. The only means of communication is through telephone or vehicle radios. Officers are refusing to phone in or to communicate when a job has been completed, when they are available for new work or when they have arrived at a hospital or a point of contact. It is incredibly difficult for the ambulance service to operate while these bans are in place.

A union official rang the Herald Sun earlier today reporting on an accident at Rosebud last night involving a small child. Similarly, an ambulance official rang into 3AW with the same story. The response to that incident was quite remarkable. The accident took place at approximately 7.00 p.m. The ambulance was there 2 minutes later. The child was taken to the Rosebud Hospital. The air helicopter was there within 20 minutes. The child was loaded into the helicopter and was flown to Melbourne, landing very close to the Royal Children’s Hospital. It is estimated that there was a delay in the vehicle meeting the helicopter of some 7 to 10 minutes, partly because of the difficulty ambulance services have been experiencing over the past 24 hours.

Two MICA vehicles and two other vehicles were off the road and ambulance officers were not phoning in with information. You cannot run a service while there is that sort of industrial action.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the house that we are all beholden to listen to the minister’s answer in silence.

Mrs TEHAN — We are dealing with matters of life and death. Nearly 70 000 emergency cases are treated each year — up to 200 emergency cases a day. The system cannot work with this sort of industrial blackmail. We are currently seeking to negotiate a fair outcome in the industrial commission for ambulance officers, but the union leaders are not even considering a reasonable offer and are imposing these unacceptable bans.

The claim in the commission is to have the bans lifted immediately for the sake of the health and wellbeing of all Victorians. I hope union leaders will exercise some responsibility and lift the bans, and that the commission delivers an order demonstrating that bans will not be tolerated. I had hoped industrial thuggery in this state was a thing of the past. We saw it bring the government and the Victorian economy to its knees in the 1980s and in years gone by. We will not tolerate that, but it makes it very difficult for Victorians to have confidence in our excellent ambulance system when this sort of industrial blackmail continues.

Hudson Conway: fraud allegations

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Treasurer to the Age editorial of 30 September and to the article by Mr Terry McCrann in the Herald Sun of 2 October. Both articles condemned and attacked any suggestion of approving an expansion of Crown Casino while Hudson Conway is being investigated for blackmail and fraud. Mr McCrann said such a decision would be totally improper. Does the Treasurer support a decision being made to expand the new casino while Hudson Conway is being investigated by the Victoria Police for blackmail and fraud?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — Victoria will never have the misfortune of having the present Leader of the Opposition participate in cabinet discussions. My cabinet colleagues will be entitled to my view expressed around the cabinet table on the basis of the information before the cabinet, including the report, if any, of the casino authority. I believe there will be a report from the casino authority and I would wish to see that before I express any view in relation to the matters.

I am not aware of the substance of the allegations. Cabinet will consider the matter with all the propriety it warrants and on the merits of the issue. It is ridiculous for the Leader of the Opposition to be seeking to create an aura of propriety. I challenge him, as I have challenged him many, many times before, to present one shred of evidence — —

Mr Brumby — That is what Mr McCrann says.

Mr Kennett — You are stupid!

Mr STOCKDALE — Mr Speaker, I challenge the Leader of the Opposition to come up with one shred of evidence to support — —
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Mr Brumby — It is a matter of whether you deal with it now or not.

Mr STOCKDALE — This matter will be dealt with with the usual propriety. As somebody who has now spent three years and two days cleaning up the mess the Labor Party left behind, unpicking all the rorts — —

Mr Brumby — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, on the question of relevance, the Treasurer was asked a specific question by me, and that is: does he support a decision being made by the cabinet on this matter while Crown Casino continues to be investigated for blackmail and fraud?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair cannot direct a minister to answer a question in a particular way. Up until the last two sentences the minister was relevant, but I would ask him now to come back to the question.

Mr STOCKDALE — The question is about fraud. The architects of fraud in this state were the Labor Party. They committed fraud on Victoria's public finances on a scale this country has never seen before, and I do not accept you as a reference book on propriety. You and your colleagues — —

The SPEAKER — Order! Has the Treasurer completed his answer?

Mr STOCKDALE — I have, Mr Speaker.

Tourism

Mr A. F. PLOWMAN (Benambra) — I ask the Minister for Tourism to inform the house of the latest figures on international and domestic tourism to Victoria.

Mr McNAMARA (Minister for Tourism) — I have pleasure to announce to the house that the international visitor survey for the year ending March 1995 has just been released by the Bureau of Tourism Research. We have more good news for Victoria. The figures on international tourism to Victoria grew last year by 9 per cent to 853 000 visitors. It is also important to recognise that since 1988 Victoria's market share had been decreasing. We have certainly stabilised that situation. Our market share is now 27 per cent, and we aim at growing that even further.

Visitor nights — that is, the yield of those tourists — increased by 16 per cent last year compared with a national increase of 14 per cent; so not only are we getting more tourists to Victoria but those who are coming are staying longer.

The increase in yield is particularly important, and one of the areas of real growth has been with our Asian visitors. The continuing emergence of the Indonesian and Singapore markets has certainly been a big plus in that area, and the visits by the Premier and the Minister for Industry and Employment to those countries have certainly generated a lot of enthusiasm in those markets.

Last year the increase in visitor nights from Indonesians to Victoria increased by 144 per cent, and visitors from Singapore increased by a massive 178 per cent. That number is significant, and in fact the total number of nights spent in Victoria by Singaporeans was more than 50 per cent of the total number of nights spent here by North Americans.

This has certainly been a strong rebound in the international market, and it follows a recognition by the government that we were under-resourced in our overseas marketing campaign.

A decision was made in April 1995 to increase that budget by $4.5 million, which was a great investment for every Victorian. We were able to increase the international budget to some $7 million, and as a result I was able to open new offices in Taiwan, Korea and Indonesia, appoint new managers in Osaka and Hong Kong, and reopen offices in New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The good news on these statistics does not stop there because domestically Victoria is again leading the way in tourism in this country. In the same financial period ending March this year the figures reveal that domestic tourism to Victoria increased to 11.7 million trips. That was an increase of 12 per cent, whereas nationally in the same period domestic tourism fell by 3 per cent. New South Wales was down 1 per cent and Queensland was down 11 per cent.

There is, in fact, even more good news: the share of the domestic tourism cake normally moves in one-tenths of a per cent. Last year we took a massive 4 per cent increase in the market share of the national cake. We now have 25 per cent of domestic tourism. Queensland fell two points to 20 per cent.

Mr Seitz interjected.
The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the honourable member for Keilor for the last time. If he bawls out once more I will deal with him.

Mr McNAMARA — If anyone had suggested three years ago that after only three years of a coalition government Victoria would be a more popular domestic tourism destination than Queensland he or she would have been laughed at, but we have beaten Queensland hands down by a massive 5 per cent.

There has also been an excellent reaction by the industry right across Australia confirming that what we are doing in Victoria is right. I could quote hundreds of people, but I shall read one carefully selected quote from Australia’s peak tourism lobby group, the Tourism Task Force, which is chaired by the former federal Labor tourism minister, Mr John Brown. He said:

Victoria is leading the way in tourism promotion in Australia.

He went on to congratulate me and Tourism Victoria on the way we are running one of the finest tourism advertising campaigns since the Paul Hogan commercials of the 1980s.

He also said:

It is wonderful that the diversity and splendour of tourism experiences available in Victoria, from the vineyards of the Yarra Valley, the snowfields at Mount Hotham and the rich sporting and entertainment culture of Melbourne, are once again taking pride of place in Australia’s unique and unparalleled tourism product...

I look forward to bringing more good news to the house on international and domestic tourism.

Crown Casino: expansion

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — Is the Treasurer aware of any legal obligation on the government to allow an expansion of the casino, as has been requested by Crown Casino?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — I am not aware of any legal advice in relation to the issue the Leader of the Opposition has raised. If there is a legal issue of the kind he is raising, I would be confident that the issue would be raised with the government by its legal advisers and by the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority.

I await earnestly anything the Leader of the Opposition has managed to find that could be called an issue in among all the non-issues he has bandied around in recent times.

Mr Brumby — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the Treasurer was not asked about legal advice or legal issues; he was asked whether there was a legal obligation on the government to deal with the application for an expansion by Crown Casino. That is the question. Why don’t you answer it and stop running away from it?

The SPEAKER — Order! As I heard the question the Treasurer is totally relevant.

Mr STOCKDALE — I can understand now why the secretary of the Labor Party did not want to disclose the party’s campaign — obviously it does not have enough money to fund its own legal advice!

I have not seen any legal advice on the matter; I have not been asked by anyone other than the Leader of the Opposition for my own legal advice on the issue, and I am confident that if there is any issue of the kind he is raising in his question it will be brought to our attention and considered.

Mr Brumby — Why don’t you deal with the question?

Mr STOCKDALE — I understand your question. You are not listening to the answer.

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr STOCKDALE — You know what the answer is? The Leader of the Opposition not only provides the question, he provides the answers too. Why did you ask the question if you already knew what the answer was? If he tells me there is no legal issue, I am happy at this stage.

Mr Brumby — Is there an obligation to deal with it?

Mr STOCKDALE — If you say, with all the authority you can muster, that there is no legal
obligation, until I get some legal advice I am content to accept your view.

Gas: grid extension

Dr NAPTHINE (Portland) — Will the Minister for Energy and Minerals inform the house of initiatives taken by the government to extend the natural gas grid to more areas of regional Victoria?

Mr S. J. FLOWMAN (Minister for Energy and Minerals) — I thank the honourable member for Portland for his question because, like the Deputy Premier’s question, it gives me an opportunity to tell the house some more good news, particularly for regional Victoria. Prior to the government’s coming to office, the last major initiative to extend gas services to regional Victoria was taken by the Hamer and Thompson governments by providing tempered liquefied petroleum gas (TLPG) supplies to the towns of Colac, Ararat, Stawell and Horsham. At the time it was considered a great economic boost to the areas. A 10-year vacuum then followed, but with the election of the Kennett government, we have overseen connections from the Paarate fields to the towns of Warrnambool, Portland and Hamilton, which were strongly supported by the honourable member for Portland. There has also been an extension of natural gas to the Healesville area.

Representations were made by the honourable members for Ripon, Polwarth and my ministerial colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, and their upper house colleagues, about TLPG supplies to the towns I mentioned earlier. They pointed out that supplies to these towns were limited by the capacity to transport gas by road truck or rail truck and there was also a limit in storage capacities in the towns, which has meant there has been no opportunity to expand supplies for industrial or domestic development use beyond the capacity set up under the original plan.

Following those strong representations, the government determined as part of the Rural 2001 initiative for rural Victoria, to instruct Gascor to seek expressions of interest and follow up those with a competitive tendering process for the connection of a high-pressure natural gas pipeline to the towns of Ararat, Stawell and Horsham. Yesterday, I made an announcement about the connection to those towns, and it was extraordinarily well received by local government commissioners, regional development bodies, business people and the local members of the towns concerned.

The situation in Colac is different because it will not be connected immediately as is the case with the other towns, but it will eventually be connected with a spur line from the high-pressure pipeline between Corio to the Otways and Paarate fields currently being planned. The Otways field is being developed by BHP and the Paarate field is being developed by Culas, which has purchased GFE resources.

This is a great initiative for rural Victoria. It is one that has been most welcomed, and will bring about enormous economic development as part of the Rural 2001 program.

Hudson Conway: fraud allegations

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Treasurer to his answer today in which he said that cabinet would not make a final decision on the expansion of Crown Casino until cabinet had received a full report from the Victorian Casino Control Authority on the allegations against Hudson Conway. How does the Treasurer reconcile his answer today with the Premier’s comments on 27 and 28 September that cabinet would approve the expansion irrespective and despite any allegations that have been made against Hudson Conway?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — The Leader of the Opposition has misrepresented both sets of comments. We have been entirely consistent throughout this matter and his attempt to portray the answers inaccurately will be seen by everybody in the community for what it is.

The fact is I have said exactly the same thing as the Premier and exactly the same thing as the minister: that certain matters required decisions by the government on policy issues that were outside the authority of the Victorian Casino Control Authority and the state’s nominated representative in relation to architectural matters.

The government made decisions in principle on those matters. There are details that must still be resolved as to how they are to be applied at the level of detail. The casino authority and, including the matters within the purview of the authority, the government will be in a position to make a final decision. There is a perfectly orderly process that is compatible with the procedures instituted by the former Labor government. We are
dealing with a framework of regulation and oversight of the casino that was not established by this government but by the former Labor government.

\textit{Honourable members interjecting.}

Mr STOCKDALE — You may not like what you did when in government but you did it! We will make a decision, where relevant, on the advice of the casino authority. There are certain matters that involve policy decisions for which the government is responsible. It will be clear to everybody what the government’s decision is when details have been resolved, and, if any announcement is then to be made, when it is made.

The government has made in-principle decisions on matters for which it is responsible. It will make a final decision when the full proposals by all the relevant agencies have been determined.

\textbf{APPROPRIATION (1995-96, No. 1) BILL}

\textit{Second reading}

Debate resumed.

Mr FINN (Tullamarine) — Before the suspension of the sitting, I was congratulating the Premier, the Treasurer and the government for the remarkable turnaround in the Victorian economy during the past three years. I was describing to the house what would occur in Victoria if a Labor government were to get back into power again. We would return very quickly to times similar to the 10 miserable, bleak and dark years of Labor government that we had between 1982 and 1992.

I was particularly congratulating the Minister for Education who has done a magnificent job getting education back on track in this state. I was describing how many of the schools in my electorate — every school in my electorate is an excellent one, I am fortunate in that regard — received not one red cent for maintenance during the years of Labor government. However, during the past three years, Gladstone Park Secondary College, Gladstone View Primary School, Gladstone Park Primary School, Sunbury West Primary School, Greenvale Primary School, Tullamarine Primary School and Bulla Primary School — I could go on for some time — have received more funding than they did in the previous 10 years. It goes to show that this government cares about education. This government cares about school kids and it is committed to excellence in education. That was something you could not say about the Labor Party!

The Labor Party is committed only to its mates in the unions, the union bosses in particular. It does not care about teachers, children and schools. All it is worried about is how much its unions can sling come election time. That is what its entire education policy has been based on for decades. Under this government that is a thing of the past. Education is about educating children — not featherbedding union bosses in the way the Labor Party abused the system.

Further, there has been an extraordinary turnaround in the economy and the business community over the past three years. After a decade of Labor having destroyed business confidence, sending businesses scurrying from the state and causing massive unemployment, at last business is flocking back to Victoria — a truly marvellous thing!

It is important to realise that business is not for business’s sake: business means jobs. That is what it is all about. Clearly, the more businesses we have and the healthier the business sector, the more jobs we will have.

Mr Kennett — Hear, hear!

Mr FINN — I am pleased to hear for the first time in three years positive comment from the other side of the house.

Mr Kennett — You should see our candidate.

The SPEAKER — Order! Talking about seats, I ask the Premier to move from the seat he is occupying.

Mr FINN — Earlier this year I was at the launch in Footscray of the Martin Dawes Telecommunications group, which the government attracted to the western suburbs.

Mr Mildenhall interjected.

Mr FINN — I do not know what is upsetting the honourable member for Footscray. I would have thought an extra thousand jobs would have done him the world of good. I do not know what he is whingeing about. I can only put it down to habit.

The locating of that group shows the strength of the government in attracting business to Victoria and in particular to the northern and western suburbs. I
have a great interest in that area, clearly an area the Labor Party does not give a damn about. It says it does. It likes to trumpet how it cares about the so-called working class. The Labor Party is still fighting the class warfare of the 1930s and 1940s. It is this government that is doing the most for the people of the northern and western suburbs.

I will list just a handful of businesses that have come to Victoria because of this government. Dominance Timber, based in Wangaratta, has made an $80 million investment, creating 120 jobs — 120 people working who were not working under the Labor Party. Geelong Spinning, a wool spinning plant based in Geelong, has made a $22 million investment, creating 200 jobs. Air International, based in Port Melbourne, has made an $18.9 million investment, creating another 85 jobs in Victoria. Snowbrand, based at Tatura — —

Mr Kilgour — Hear, hear!

Mr FINN — The honourable member for Shepparton would be interested in this. The $25 million investment from Japan in Snowbrand has created 40 jobs.

A project close to my heart is Leading Synthetics, based at Tullamarine, a polyester fibre and filament plant. I have visited that plant with the Minister for Industry and Employment. The $90 million investment from Indonesia has created 175 jobs. My electorate has felt the brunt of Labor's decade-long recession and desperately needed the 175 jobs that plant provided.

In Melton there is Melton Wool, with a Korean investment of $20 million and another 80 jobs for the western suburbs of Melbourne. In Dandenong there is Shimadzu Australia, an $8 million investment creating 21 jobs.

I could speak for some time on the work of the Minister for Industry and Employment in attracting business and investment to Victoria. All of a sudden Victoria has become a major attraction in Australia. Companies are coming from interstate and overseas. They are saying, 'We are coming not because we like the Yarra or particularly like the footy but because Victoria has the best government in Australia.'

My speech on the budget will focus on a major feature of government financial transactions: the use and abuse of contracts — contracts for employment, services, the sale of assets and purchases. The transparency of contracts, the integrity of the process that is used in arriving at the signing and concluding of contracts and accountability to third parties and
regulatory bodies are critical in ensuring the public's confidence in the process of government.

On the third anniversary of the Kennett government it is time to take stock of how the government is travelling in that critical area of operation and integrity of process. The low point in the government's integrity of process was reached in the autumn session of the Parliament, when it was revealed that the former Minister for Finance, the minister with personal responsibility for the oversight of contracts and for ensuring compliance with contracts, had entered into an employment contract with a chief of staff that was in breach of two fundamental guidelines the government is subject to.

One was section 95(A) of the Public Sector Management Amendment Act, which stated that ministerial advisers are employed subject to the Premier's guidelines. The second was that it breached the Premier's guidelines of October 1992, which required the names and CVs of intending appointees to ministerial offices to be forwarded to the Premier prior to appointment and that appointments not be made without the Premier's specific written approval. So both the legislative requirement and an executive requirement of the Premier himself were breached.

We ought to reflect for a minute on that particular low point in propriety which revealed the level of personal commitment a person at the centre of the senior levels of the government held to those principles. One can talk about activities or transactions that might go on at the lower levels or in an outposted or out-sourced agency, but this was in the office, and was central to and an intimate part of the operations of that office.

The Victorian community is particularly concerned about this type of activity. It is particularly concerned about the hypocrisy that was evident in that episode, which was certainly the highlight of the autumn session in this house. The community is also concerned that this type of activity, this breach of guidelines and lack of adherence to integrity and the principles of tendering, has become one of the defining characteristics of the government.

Doubtful deals with party allies, with cronies, friends and family members all leaping aboard the gravy train, are as much a badge of the government as the doctrinaire silly brass badges that are worn by and distinguish members of the government.

This is despite what we all heard in the Governor's speech in October 1992: that the government was committed to providing responsible, open, honest and accountable government. The Premier's statement, which followed hot on the tail of that, was: if you have nothing to hide you have nothing to lose from any inquiry. Those words ring hollow because the government does not reveal the details of contracts.

The key thing I want to talk about today is the lack of information, the hiding of detail and the failure to reveal information that would provide a level of accountability and transparency and a perception of fairness of process. The failure to provide those things is one of the key hallmarks of this government.

I challenge the government and request the Premier to reveal the details of the secret top 50 contracts which the public cannot obtain and which have remained hidden — 'dead cats' is an appropriate term for them. Certainly one of the most famous is the casino contract. The dead cat label came from the Prime Minister. The Premier has tried to redefine the term. When discussing democracy at a business breakfast he took a straw poll and talked about throwing a dead cat out on the table. That is an idea he wants to float and to get some sort of response to. However, I prefer and defer to the national interpretation.

We have 50 malodorous dead cats of contracts that the community of Victoria needs to see to have any confidence about transparency or accountability in the process of signing contracts that surrounds the activities of the government.

The first group of contracts is in employment. We would like to see, and challenge the government to table, the contracts of employment for ministerial staff. The first obvious example was a gross breach of the guidelines in the office of the former Minister for Finance.

The opposition wants to see the contracts for the ministerial staff because these are critical appointments and public money is involved. These are absolutely central appointments and it is essential there be some level of confidence that a proper process has been entered into. It would not surprise anyone to know that more than 60 of these appointments have been made. There are more than 60 of these contracts in existence, and we would like to see them.
The opposition would also like to see the contract for the appointment of Nick Papas as Chief Magistrate. I have met Mr Papas; he is a very enthusiastic and nice guy who is very keen to do his job, but he was plucked from obscurity in very controversial circumstances. We want to see the contract and details of how it happened if we are to have any level of confidence that a proper process was entered into.

We want to see the details of the contract of the appointment of Mr Ross Wilson of Tabcorp, who was appointed when Tabcorp was a public authority. That was public money — public resources were committed to that appointment. The Treasurer has said, 'This was my biggest mistake. The biggest of mistake of my ministry was to get involved in this issue'. We would like to see the contract to shed some light on this biggest mistake of the Treasurer.

At least the Tabcorp appointment was drawn out a bit. The appointments of Michael Tilley and Centaurus Corporate Finance involved the fastest $3 million appointment you would ever see. I have looked at the relevant dates and the Michael Tilley contract was offered within four working days. However, despite the fact that the job is finished, the consultancy has gone, the money has been spent and the agency is no longer a public agency, you can't see the contract. It is outrageous!

The opposition would also like to see the contractual arrangements between the government and Mr Roger Graham, who advised the government on the privatisation of Met bus services. It's like the introduction of a racing bill. This guy had 50 cents each way: he was working both for the government as a consultant and for the firm that got the contract. That is a pretty handy set of arrangements if you can get it. Of course, we can't see the details because the government won't reveal them.

Then we have Christophe Chung of Chung Corporation Ltd, the TAB's Vanuatu agent. Wasn't there some controversy and stirk around that one? He was convicted of exporting adulterated fish, so there was an odour around that one. But we cannot see the critical contractual documents hidden among linear feet of files. We want to see those documents.

I refer to the appointment to the Local Government Board of Leonie Burke, once the Liberal candidate for the federal seat of Kooyong and mooted to be the Liberal candidate for Prahran, as well as the other local government commissioners. We lodged FOI requests about that, but the response was no. We asked to see the contracts, but we were told: 'No, it's public money'. So the reaction to our FOI requests for documents about the government's major structural reforms is: 'No, you can't see the documents'.

Mr Greg Craven was appointed Crown counsel. His position had no distinguishable differences from that of any other ministerial adviser, except that the maximum salary for a ministerial adviser is around $65 000 and his position had a salary of around $110 000. We would like to see that contract and all the details of the documentation. He has left the position, but he is still at large. The AAT and other tribunals live in fear of the review he is conducting in stealth and secrecy. Again, we would like to see the details of that appointment. A number of the appointments of district liaison principals were affected by the involvement of Liberal MPs. We would like to see the details of both the contracts and the circumstances of their appointments.

Mr Pat Stone was appointed to undertake a review of the management of the Metropolitan Ambulance Service, a topical issue. If ever there were a time when impartial, objective and skilled advice was needed, it is now. We need proper advice on the future of the ambulance service. But who do we have? A brewing executive, a member of the Crown Casino board, someone who played an integral part in the raid on the Adelaide grand prix. They are quite extraordinary qualifications for the job. We would like to see the details of the contract and the rationale that links his background to the tasks he will have to carry out.

We would also like to see the details of the contracts awarded to the chairs and directors of the new power, water and gas boards. Some very interesting appointments have been made, and parts of the process have been unusual. In my community successive generations built up an equity in their power arrangements. Despite owning part of the electricity supply operation that was abolished by the government, the people were not even allowed to be represented on the board of the new utility — although plenty of the government's friends were. We would like to see the details of both the contracts and the appointment process.

We would also like to see the details of the tender processes for the awarding of a number of contracts. The most immediate and most high-profile tender process that springs to mind is the one for the Melbourne casino. Try as we might the newspapers
and members of the opposition cannot shed any
light on the process and on the level of integrity
involved.

Just before the suspension of the sitting for lunch the
honourable member for Northcote detailed some of
the characteristics of the tender process that would
have aroused a great deal of suspicion in the mind of
any reasonable person who observed it. An obvious
part of it was the major criticism of the successful
bid by SBC Dominguez Barry, which had a number
of difficulties with it. We would like to see the
details of all tender processes for the casino
involving the state government, Crown and its
associates.

We would like to see the contracts entered into by
the VRC and the government for the development of
the gambling curriculum for secondary students.
That would make interesting reading. The
government is keen to see a new gamble-at-all-costs
spirit introduced into the secondary curriculum, in
line with its aim of having the biggest casino in the
world. The two big education announcements by
this government have been the introduction of
compulsory sport and physical education, which I
support, and the gambling curriculum. That is an
interesting comment on its priorities.

We would also like to see the contracts for the
Vicroads supply, which was awarded to Australian
Highway Plant Services, a company associated not
only with Richard Pratt but with federal Liberal MP
Mr Julian Beale and Mr Charles Abbott. What a
grubby in-house deal that was! There was no
independent valuation, and it was suggested that
$90 million worth of plant and equipment was sold
for $40 million — and attached to that was a
five-year, $50 million hire-back agreement. The
private sector agencies I have spoken to are
incredulous about the rates that Vicroads is paying
to hire that equipment back. What a lucrative,
grubby in-house deal! Other contracts we would like
to see include a Public Transport Corporation
contract awarded to IBM to operate the computer
services for Vicroads. Some residual questions about
that remain unanswered.

The response to our requests to see the contracts
regarding the Australian grand prix licence fee is
one of the greatest furphies of all time. We have
been told that if those details are revealed Victoria
loses the race. While the great controversy down at
Albert Park was going on, someone involved in the
conduct of the Hungarian grand prix said they paid
$580 000 a year for theirs. They did not lose their
race. But this one is top secret. It involves a contract
that allegedly has clauses in it that say that despite
any Victorian laws to the contrary, no details can be
revealed. Other contracts associated with the grand
prix need to have some light shed on them,
including those with Bernie Ecclestone and those
with the track construction company. There is a
range of residual issues, including the involvement
of police and other key identities in the precinct.

Other obvious contracts include those affecting
KNF Advertising and the Urban Land Authority. It
would be interesting to see those contracts to
examine the integrity of the process and the
accountability of the Urban Land Authority with
regard to the payments made from its pooled
funding to KNF. The Leeds Media and DDB
Needham contracts are controversial and
unresolved. They are a permanent stain on the
operations of the government and a real symptom of
its lack of integrity. Let's have a look at those
documents. Let's shed light on the process!

Then there is the involvement of David Nettlefold in
the pre-1992 expenditure on a range of billboards
and other deals for the then Liberal opposition, as
well as the deals that have been done with
Mr Nettlefold since then. Let's have a look at the
contracts he has been a beneficiary of since the
change of government. Let's see the details of the
AMR Quantum Victorian attitudes monitoring
survey. The former opposition went to the High
Court to get those sorts of details.

The public had a right to know four or five years ago
because it was a matter absolutely critical to the
future of democracy. However, the government
response is, 'No, it all took place in secret.
It is all commercial in confidence and you cannot see it'.

Let us look at the Metropolitan Ambulance Service
contracts. The Minister for Health is in the house, so
let us get the minister's undertaking that we can
look at the Intergraph and Henderson Consulting
contracts for the ambulance service. Let us look at
the contracting out of Cranbourne's emergency
station.

I shall get back to transport by referring to the
$200 million National Bus Company contract, which
obviously is a matter of great public significance.
That is one of the top 50 contracts we would like to
see. There is the contract awarded to Transurban for
the City Link. If ever there were a project with some
ill-defined and unresolved details it is that one. I
have never seen more newspaper articles or
comments on any major project that contemplates such a wide variation of end cost and practical difficulties. It is a huge contract and it is quite obvious that it has been done in a fairly fast and loose manner.

I turn to the Onelink contract for the Public Transport Corporation. I would love to see the penalty clauses and the details of that. How can that contract still be in operation two years after the deadlines were not met? What sort of contract is that and what sort of deal did this government get itself into?

Let us turn to some other portfolios: the police fixed air wing services to Victorian Airlines; and the government and Stratcom company. Mr Tom Austin is involved in that company and he is a former member and minister of this place. Let us have a look at his involvement and shed some light on that to see the sort of integrity in the government’s processes.

I turn to the Urban Land Authority and Mr Andrew Hayes. The government's friends, allies and party members keep cropping up again and again. Isn’t that the sort of detail all of us would like to have? Pick up the land for $200 000 less than the VG’s valuation saying ‘We can’t do the project any more’. The government totally underwrote the deal but still picked up 75 per cent of the profits. Wouldn’t you love a contract like that? The government’s response is, ‘No, you can’t see it, but it is all above board’. It is not transparent, it is not accountable but, by jingo, it has an odour!

The unprecedented signing up of the planning, development, building, and management of the corrections system is another example. Nowhere else has this happened, but the government is signing up with some doubtful characters who have interesting reputations. Can we see the contracts? No. The community’s response is, ‘It’s our money’, but the answer is, ‘You can’t get a look at that either’.

The contracts for the building of the Albert Park sports and aquatic centre is another. It is a great project, it was always needed, but why does the government have to stuff up the tendering processes? Let’s have a look at the contract. The company that does the brief gets the contract. It is like Byrne Fleming, and what a corrupt process that was. The company that drew up the brief strangely ended up with the contract, but can we see the contract? No. You say, 'But it’s our money'. The government says, 'Yeah, it’s your money but you can’t have a look'.

Let us look at the loan arrangements out of the Community Support Fund for the theatrette at the Rialto. Let us have a look at the contract for the oneAustralia boat that went to the bottom of the harbour. We cannot even see the draft contract for the boat that went down before the contract was signed. The government gave the money out and the boat went down when the contract was unsigned. What possible point is there for keeping those details secret? It is still the same response of, ‘No, you can’t see it’.

Let us look at some of the asset sale contracts, the sale of the State Supply Office, the sale of the Shamrock Hotel in Bendigo and the sale of a former school site to Hudson Conway. It seems it is the same companies and cronies who keep coming up again and again. The government’s veterinary laboratory was sold to Centaur International in which a member of the National Party is involved. Other examples are the sale of the SEC building in Flinders Street, the sale of the Grain Elevators Board, the contracts for the sale of state government nursing homes — I wonder who was involved in those — and the contracts for the sale of cleaning and cooking services in public hospitals.

Can’t we have some measure of public accountability? There are the other miscellaneous contracts such as the proposed redevelopment of Mount Stirling, which is a controversial issue. Let us shed some light on that. There is the personal guarantee given to the bank by Mr Ron Walker on behalf of the Liberal Party — I wonder what sort of details were involved in that matter — and the tax concessions given by the Department of Business and Employment to any company that rolls up. Let’s look at those.

The granting of a permit to business associates of the brother of the Deputy Premier for the service centre at Euroa was an unholy mess. There was the relative by marriage of the Minister for Health who has now turned up as a commissioner in Strathbogie — let us shed some light on all of those processes to see what sort of integrity was involved.

We would like the government to honour its commitment. The opposition wants it to supply the contracts to the Auditor-General and to a joint parliamentary committee. Let us have some MPs examine the contracts to see the standards for the government’s awarding of contracts. Let us consider
implementing the American system where you can get a much higher level of accountability.

The matter will be a continuing disgrace and a continuing stain on the government. The top 50 dead cats will lay around and provide an air of a stench around the government for as long as it is in office. It is a disgrace, it is a continuing scandal, it is a cover-up, and the government ought to come clean and allow proper process to shed some transparency on the matter.

Mrs ELLIOTT (Mooroolbark) — After three years of this government it is interesting to look at the opposition. The outgoing Premier of 1992, the former member for Williamstown, found a new niche for herself as the icon of the feminist movement within the Labor Party — defending Carmen Lawrence one minute and inveighing against the party the next only because it has not elected a female president to succeed her. Even on one piece of paper, which recently landed in my office, she was being named as an honorary neon girl — I have to wonder what that is.

Because she is an icon of the feminist movement within the ALP she is not being held to account for what really matters. The former Premier left the state with a debt of $69.8 billion. She could hardly have been a successful Premier. She was not very successful in having a woman succeed her in Williamstown. She has not been successful in getting a woman to succeed her as President of the ALP and she may not be successful in keeping the federal Minister for Health in her current position. A debt of $69.8 billion: the legacy of the Guilty Party.

Some remnants of the Guilty Party remain in this chamber. The honourable member for Thomastown, an honourable member representing the province of Doutta Galla in another place, the former state Treasurer and the current shadow Minister for Education continue to peddle their half-truths and myths to an increasingly sceptical electorate.

The life of the Leader of the Opposition must be absolute purgatory. Behind him he has the honourable member for Werribee — an honourable man, but one who has been disendorsed; he has the honourable member for Sunshine on his back bench, and two other members will leave this place to seek greener pastures in the federal arena. Every day at 2.00 p.m. he cannot lay a hand on the government.

I read the budget reply of the Leader of the Opposition with its promise to maintain fiscal probity in this state, to wind back all the gains made by the government, to reopen closed schools, to restore to teaching those teachers who have accepted redundancy packages and have perhaps found employment elsewhere, to reopen hospitals, to unwind the City Link project, to remove tolls — he must be either mad or bad, but I suspect it is worse than that.

The Leader of the Opposition realises that, like the Democrats in the federal arena, he can promise anything because he knows he will never have to deliver. He has no chance of becoming leader of a government after the next election. In a desperate grab to retain the leadership he has promised everything possible, especially to interest groups, which have always been able to prey on the ALP. The worst of the camp followers is the Public First campaign, the front for the unions. That group is being used by the unions; it demands a lot but delivers little. When it calls a public meeting the attendance would hardly fill a telephone box. It is not highly regarded by the public. The opposition has no credibility or chance of being in government in the foreseeable future.

This government has done what is tough and difficult but what had to be done. The state debt has been wound back. Now we have a sustainable current account surplus. I remember that shortly after the election of this government, when I was a new member, 100 000 people demonstrated outside this place. Parliament House was full of police and I detected an atmosphere of apprehension. Now, on the third anniversary of the election of the government, probably fewer than 300 people have assembled in a raggle-taggle mob outside. Incidentally, I noticed the police were dressed in Liberal blue! The public no longer feels apprehensive because it supports the government. The honourable member for Werribee referred to the badge that we all wear.

Dr Coghill — I didn’t say anything about that at all.

Mrs ELLIOTT — I am sorry, I meant the honourable member for Footscray. We wear the badges with pride.

Mr Mildenhall — Crony badges.

Mrs ELLIOTT — When next you stand at any traffic light or go into a store or eat at a restaurant, look around and see those badges on members of the public. They are in great demand.
Last night, at the presentation of the Governor's export awards, I noticed that many of the people from the business community — the people who export our products — were wearing Victoria badges. It is a pity that the members of the ALP do not have badges they can wear with pride, as we do.

The ALP wishes to wind the clock back, to undo what has been done, to return to the party days — but with no credibility and no responsibility. There must be a few members behind the Leader of the Opposition who would like his job, who feel they could do better and who have some doubts about the program he has proposed in the event — actually a non-event — that he ever became leader of a government.

I will spend some time talking about my electorate and how it will be affected by the government's budget brought down by our extremely competent and responsible Treasurer, who actually understands fiscal responsibility and how figures add up. In this house we hear much about the western and northern suburbs. That is how it should be; members who represent those electorates should talk about them. In a speech he delivered recently the current candidate for the federal seat of Batman referred to himself about 16 times as a battler.

Many of the people in my electorate are genuine battlers. We do not hear much in this house about the battlers in the outer-east, but the outer-east, too, has its battlers. They battle for their families and for a better deal. They battle to do their best in their jobs. They certainly battle for the Croydon and Kilsyth football clubs particularly and, most importantly, the Mooroolbark Football Club, of which I am the no. 1 ticket holder.

I spend a lot of time doorknocking. In my electorate the people still spend Saturday or Sunday afternoons listening to the football on the radio, perhaps while washing their cars; and they mow their lawns — often, I must say, while a can of beer sits on the letterbox — and are active outside. Kids ride their bikes in the street.

My common experience in the past few months is to turn up and say, 'I am the local member of Parliament'. Some say, 'Yes, we know who you are'. Some say, 'Are you Liberal or Labor?' When I say 'Liberal' they say, 'On your way; we support the government: spend your time at the next house'. That is so common as to be almost universal. As I doorknock rarely do I hear an adverse comment about the government.

Those are not people who ask for much. They do not want a free kick but a fair go. They feel a fair go is what they are getting from the government. In what respect have they had a fair go? In education.

When I was endorsed as a candidate for Parliament I was asked by the staff at Montrose Primary School to visit their school. It was a cold, windy day and the rain was dripping through the roof. The school had very little heating. Montrose Primary School, for which I share responsibility with the honourable member for Monbulk, is set in the most attractive environment of any primary school I have seen. It lies in the lee of the Dandenong Ranges, particularly Mount Dandenong. For a long time that school received no maintenance funding. It is also situated in one of the financially poor areas of my electorate.

The school drew up a long-term plan, but under the Labor government it received no maintenance funding whatsoever. Staff morale was low and, although the children were receiving a good education from their teachers, the working conditions were appalling. Under this government the school has been transformed, and with it the morale of staff and students. It has a new entrance and a newly painted fence around the school, with a lychgate at the entrance to emphasise its country character.

Because it is an old and long-standing school, people have donated historic artefacts to decorate the foyer. The staff now have good areas in which to work and the feeling at the school is totally different.

Often you can tell how people are feeling about themselves by the way they dress. The teachers now dress professionally. They look like professionals and they act like professionals — and they are running a damn good school.

Wonga Park Secondary School, which is on the other side of my electorate, is also in a semi-rural area. The school library was burnt out and the school received a government grant to restore it. The students and parents did a great deal of enthusiastic work. The school also has new accommodation for staff, and the dangerous asbestos has been removed from the school roof.

Pembroke Secondary College, which is a multicampus school, provides outstanding education for its year 11 and 12 students, who come from the entire area of my electorate. The school has received grants in excess of $900 000, which have helped bring it up to world-class standard. I no
longer hear too many complaints about education in my area. People are too busy getting on with implementing the Schools of the Future program and providing their kids with the education they undoubtedly deserve.

I have already referred to the footy. As a supporter of the Carlton Football Club I was very happy last Saturday. I felt for the honourable member for Tullamarine and for the Cats, but I was very pleased that Carlton won. I have become equally as passionate about the Mooroolbark Football Club. Believe me, the heartland of Australia is in its football clubs.

On Saturday afternoons I sit in the corporate box, which I think is a converted chook shed, and watch the Mooroolbark team play. My dog once ate all the sausage rolls for afternoon tea. It is a great experience, because it has a sense of community spirit and voluntaryism. All the people there — the players and their wives, the girlfriends, the mums and dads and the kids — plug away for Mooroolbark. They have a great Saturday afternoon. The oval is dreadful so the players are often knee-deep in mud; but theirs is the sort of commitment that characterises Australia's heartland.

I was interested to read a little piece in the newspaper — I tried to find it in the parliamentary library before but could not — about the amount of voluntary work done by Liberal, National and Labor Party voters. Guess who do the most voluntary work? National Party members. Guess who is second? Liberal Party members, 40 per cent of whom do voluntary work. What did the ALP have? It had only 21 per cent.

An Honourable Member — They are the carers.

Mrs ELLIOTT — They are the carers, but they obviously care only if they get some remuneration for it. The coalition party members do most of the unpaid voluntary work in the community. That is what I see in my electorate. People who genuinely care enough about others work for them without expecting any remuneration. Although one can hardly characterise football as voluntary work, it is in a sense because it provides so much enjoyment and involvement for so many people. I think the caring that is evident in football clubs like Mooroolbark and Kilsyth extends even more widely. Football clubs are like big families: they look after each other.

I have digressed from what I intended to say. Let's look at business in the outer east. Last night, along with my colleague the honourable member for Hawthorn, the Minister for Industry and Employment, I went to Government House to attend the Governor's export awards. I was puzzled about the reason for the minister particularly wanting me to go, but when I got there I realised why.

ANCA in North Bayswater had won the major award for export — the primary award of the night. Last year it won the small to medium-sized business award; this year it won the large business award. In just one year, it has jumped a category. Last year it won; this year it won. Over the past 12 months it has increased its business by nearly 100 per cent. ANCA produces computer-manufactured precision machine tools. It found a global niche market. It now exports to 21 per cent of the entire global market from its small factory in North Bayswater. ANCA has two principals, both called Pat. One Pat said to me last night, 'I didn't vote for your government, but by golly you get things done. You are a government that achieves things'.

I was immensely proud to stand there and see ANCA receive the award. It is a growing firm, but many other firms in my electorate in the outer east are also growing. One which is totally different from ANCA but which has received a NIES award of $11,500 — that is a relatively small award but then it is a relatively small company — is Tommy Finns, which has no relationship to the honourable member for Tullamarine. The firm is in the smoked trout business. The small family-run business, which employs six or seven people, has incredibly high-quality standards. It must have because it is inspected regularly — once a week — by the health department, given the dangers posed by the rapid growth of various bacteria in fish products if they are not looked after properly. The company is also developing an export market, which is what the NIES grant is for.

One day I went to Kenworth Trucks to present a government grant of $250,000 to enable it to build on-site training facilities for total quality management. Kenworth Trucks are well known; there cannot be a member in this place who has not been behind a Kenworth truck at some stage. That company is also exporting its products. I was taken for a drive around the block in Kilsyth in the biggest prime mover I ever saw. I felt like Thelma from the movie Thelma and Louise.
I have gained the strong sense that this is a state in which you can do business, a state in which, if you have the confidence to invest, manufacture something and create jobs in your local area, you will be able to sell what you produce. At businesses like Kenworth, Tommy Finns, and ANCA, I was asked for Victoria badges for the principals and workers. They are proud to be Victorians under the current government.

The last business in the outer east I will mention is Croydon Travel, run by Phil Asker. Croydon Travel, which operates from an unpretentious shop front in Croydon, won the major tourism award this year. Phil Asker initiated flights to the Antarctic, which many members will have read about. Because I spend a great deal of my time travelling to and from my electorate in my car I often listen to talking books. The last was Sir Ranulph Fiennes' account of his trek with a colleague across the wastes of Antarctica. Sir Ranulph Fiennes and his friend each hauled loads in excess of 480 pounds for more than 90 days in an effort to cross Antarctica, competing against a team from Norway. They suffered terrible privations and had to be airlifted out on the 94th day.

People like Phil Asker and companies like Croydon Travel enable those of us who do not have the courage, the spirit or the resources of a Sir Ranulph Fiennes to see Antarctica from the safety and comfort of a plane. Phil Asker and Croydon Travel also understand the importance of NIES marketing. The business is growing under this government because people now have some spare money to spend on holidays and on adventures like travelling to the Antarctic and back on a plane. The company was recognised at this year's tourism awards.

I have been told that the best barometer of public opinion is taxidrivers. I do not often use taxis; I prefer to walk my dog or drive my own car. Recently when I have had to take taxis the drivers have said to me about the government, 'No problems; things are going well: we have no complaints'. If it is true that taxidrivers are a barometer of public opinion, the government is doing very well.

If one prefers to believe the opinion polls, they show that if there were an election tomorrow the government would be returned with at least the same majority it obtained in the 1992 election. If that is not a sign of confidence by the public of what the coalition government is doing under the leadership of the Premier together with the Treasurer and other ministers, I do not know what is.

I hear no complaints about the government's reforms to health care under the capable Minister for Health. Health care to the community in the outer east has been recognised by this government, and resources will be shifted to improve services.

Victoria has become the state of excitement. During question time today we heard the Minister for Tourism say that tourism has been boosted by 9 per cent. If one watches people's body language and what they do during their leisure time in the city one realises that Victoria is a different place from what it was three years ago. Melbourne is a very different place. The restaurants are full, and both Australians and overseas tourists are taking full advantage of what this city and the state have to offer. The mood is one of optimism. The figures show that employment is rising and business confidence has returned to the state. People are willing to invest. There is no reason why Victoria under its current leadership should not go from strength to strength.

I congratulate the Premier, the Treasurer, the ministerial team and all government members on what has been achieved in the past three years. I commend the budget to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Dr COGHILL (Werribee).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

PORT SERVICES BILL

Second reading

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The bill introduces significant and far-reaching reforms to the ports industry in Victoria. While Victoria has a well developed port structure, with the port of Melbourne being Australia's largest container port and the three commercial ports handling significant volumes of bulk trades, the
industry has a legacy of high costs, limited competition and user choice and poor commercial practices.

The objectives of port reform therefore have been:

- to increase port efficiency and improve services;
- to reduce port costs to cargo importers and exporters; and
- to achieve a reasonable return to Victorian taxpayers.

In January this year, following extensive consultation with port users, port authorities and other interested parties, the government announced that it would restructure Victoria’s port industry as follows:

- establish a new public body to hold port land in Melbourne, acting as a landlord on a commercial basis, and with lessees of land and berths being the predominant providers of port infrastructure and services to port users;

- offer the onshore port assets of the ports of Geelong, Portland and Hastings for sale, with the underwater assets retained in public ownership;

- establish a new statutory authority to be responsible for channels in the ports of Melbourne and Geelong, and Port Phillip Bay.

Already significant steps have been taken in implementing these reforms. Even prior to the establishment of the new Melbourne landlord body the existing Port of Melbourne Authority has called for expressions of interest for private sector berth operators to take up opportunities to acquire medium and long-term leases of berths and sites and develop their own major new facilities throughout the port.

The government implemented the abolition of state tonnage duty effective from December 1994. The further reforms facilitated by the bill will produce additional substantial cost benefits to port users.

The bill also establishes the Victorian Channels Authority, the role of which will be to manage channels, channel assets and the navigation of vessels in the port areas of Melbourne, Geelong, Portland and Hastings. It will, among other things, have prime responsibility for navigation aids and dredging channels. Like the Melbourne Port Corporation, it is required to operate and determine fees and charges in a commercial manner. The VCA will be empowered to contract for third parties to operate facilities and services on behalf of the VCA.

The bill also provides for the economic regulation of port services. To ensure that the market power of the MPC and the VCA is not abused the bill provides that the prices charged by them for non-contestable services are to be regulated by the Regulator-General. This regulation is an important element in ensuring that prices of port services are as low as is commercially justifiable. The Office of the Regulator-General will also oversee the obligation of the channels authority to facilitate third-party access to the prescribed channels. The economic regulatory regime is consistent with systems put in place by this government in reforming the electricity, water and grain handling industries.

Under the bill the Marine Board of Victoria will undertake a regulatory role for safe maritime operations in all state waters, including port areas. It will also be empowered to set the standards and requirements for operations in designated areas.

In Portland, Geelong and Hastings the government’s January announcement provided that dedicated berths would be offered to users on a right-of-first-refusal basis. Subject to the outcome of those offers, the onshore assets of each port would be offered for sale as a single parcel. The bill facilitates these sales by providing for the allocation of assets by the Treasurer and enabling the Treasurer, on behalf of the state, to enter sales agreements.
MENTAL HEALTH (AMENDMENT) BILL

This bill is a critical step in achieving wide-ranging and enduring reform in Victoria's ports. The government is determined to make this state's economy the most efficient and competitive in Australia. Port reform will ensure that port users — that is, merchandise exporters and importers — benefit from an efficient and competitive service, and will thus provide a further significant improvement to our state's economic performance.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr LONEY (Geelong North).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 19 October.

MENTAL HEALTH (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Mr GUDE (Minister for Industry and Employment) — On behalf of the Minister for Health, I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Mental Health Act 1986 has provided an effective and responsive legislative base for the provision of services to Victorians with a mental illness.

The purpose of this bill is to make a number of amendments to provide the legislative base for the new models of service delivery currently being implemented and to improve the act's consistency with national and international human rights instruments.

In April 1994 Victoria's Mental Health Services: the Framework for Service Delivery was introduced. The framework provides for the mainstreaming of psychiatric services into the general health system and identifies new service delivery options, giving greater emphasis to community-based services and involvement by the private sector.

The framework is consistent with the national health policy and plan which were endorsed by all Australian health ministers in May 1993. State and territory governments undertook to review their legislation to ensure consistency with the United Nations' Principles for the Care and Protection of People with a Mental Illness and for the Improvement of Mental Health Care (1991) and the Australian health ministers' Mental Health Statement of Rights and Responsibilities.

The Report of the National Inquiry into the Rights of People with a Mental Illness (1993) found that the Victorian Mental Health Act includes some of the best provisions in Australian mental health legislation. However, it found some significant deficiencies, such as the failure to provide a statutory definition of mental illness. This matter is addressed in the bill before the house.

Consistent with the national policy and plan, the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council (AHMAC) Working Group on Mental Health Policy commissioned a consultancy in 1994 to draft model clauses for the use of states and territories in the development of nationally consistent mental health legislation. The report of the consultancy has informed the development of these amendments.

In parallel with the national consultancy, the Department of Health and Community Services undertook a review of the Mental Health Act which commenced in August 1994.

A working party was established to review the act in the context of relevant international, national and state policies and make recommendations for change.

The working party's recommendations were incorporated into the discussion paper Victoria's Mental Health Services: Proposed Amendments to the Mental Health Act 1986. The publication of the discussion paper was followed by an extensive public consultation process.

The discussion paper was distributed to over 500 professional, consumer and carer groups and individuals. Meetings with clinical and consumer groups and information forums in metropolitan and country areas were held over a three-month period. Over 90 written submissions were received. Issues and concerns identified were considered in the development of the amendments. I wish to draw the attention of the house to a number of these amendments.

Section 7 of the Mental Health Act currently regulates voluntary admission for a mental illness. However, the admission of a person voluntarily seeking treatment for a mental illness should be treated in the same way as a person voluntarily seeking treatment for any other medical condition.
As inpatient mental health services are increasingly provided by general hospitals this separate regulation is no longer appropriate and continues to contribute to the stigma surrounding mental illness.

To address this concern, section 7 of the act will be removed. In this way voluntary admission for a mental illness will have the same informal status within hospitals as other admissions.

People who are able to consent to treatment will still be able to seek and receive this treatment in an approved mental health service. The principles contained in the act will continue to apply to all people receiving treatment for a mental illness and the act will still regulate specific treatments such as electroconvulsive therapy, regardless of a person’s status as a patient.

The objects of the act, the objectives of the department and the functions of the secretary will be amended. The changes will support the focus on the rights of people with a mental illness, the priority for treatment in the community and the mainstreaming of mental health services.

A set of principles of treatment and care will be introduced into the act to guide the provision of services to all people with a mental disorder. In particular they are to promote high quality treatment in the community and encourage increased self-reliance in people with a mental disorder.

The Mental Health Act contains detailed procedures for involuntary admission to hospital for a mental illness. However, some amendments are necessary to clarify practice, to ensure better consistency with our human rights obligations and to increase protection of patients rights.

A definition of mental illness will be included in the act. This will provide guidance to consumers, practitioners and the broader community about the grounds for detention.

The definition has been developed from the broad community consultations and in consultation with specialist groups including the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, the Ministerial Advisory Group on Mental Health, the Office of the Public Advocate and the Guardianship and Administration Board.

The Mental Health Act has been unclear about whether a person who has a guardian appointed under the Guardianship and Administration Board Act can be involuntarily admitted for treatment for a mental illness. Section 8 of the act will be amended to clarify that where involuntary admission is being considered, medical practitioners must consider the ability of the individual to consent to treatment, and not whether the guardian has consented.

This proposal follows lengthy and detailed consultation with the Guardianship and Administration Board and the Office of the Public Advocate.

 Guardians appointed by the Guardianship and Administration Board will continue to play an important role in making decisions about non-psychiatric treatment. The amendment means that patients who have such a guardian will be protected in the same way as other involuntary patients, through the review mechanisms already contained in the act such as the Mental Health Review Board.

A priority for a person requiring involuntary admission to hospital for treatment for mental illness is safe transport. Crisis assessment and treatment teams, known as CAT teams, sometimes encounter difficulties organising transport where a medical practitioner is not available, resulting in unnecessary delays.

Section 9 of the act will be amended to allow for mentally ill people to be taken to an approved mental health service for assessment by a medical practitioner. The power to authorise this transport will only be able to be exercised by a class of mental health practitioners. The prescribed class will comprise appropriately qualified CAT team staff.

The authority to transport will only be able to be used where all reasonable steps have been taken to secure the attendance of a medical practitioner, but one is not available. The implementation and use of these powers will be closely monitored.

The government has made a commitment to provide services to people with a severe personality disorder in the framework for service delivery. Most services to this group of people are provided in the community or on a voluntary basis. However, there is a small group of people who sometimes require involuntary treatment.

The government has recognised that the Mental Health Act should be amended to take the needs of this group into account. A number of comments by
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the coroner have also highlighted the need for legislative change. It is the intention of the government that the amendments will apply to a very small group of people with a severe mental disorder who aggressively self-mutilate.

The amendments to the act permit the continued detention of a person who is an involuntary patient in circumstances where they may not be considered mentally ill under section 8 of the act. Currently such patients would have to be discharged, even though their self-damaging behaviour would be considered by many to be symptoms of a mental illness.

The amendments will apply only where the person has a mental disorder and further treatment is necessary because the person would cause serious physical harm to himself or herself if discharged. The amendments will permit the authorised psychiatrist to apply to the chief psychiatrist for the continued detention of the person for up to three months.

When an application is made the secretary of the department will convene a panel of three psychiatrists, including the chief psychiatrist, to determine whether to grant the application. Detailed safeguards are attached to this provision to protect the rights of patients and all decisions to detain a person in this manner will be reviewable by the Mental Health Review Board within 14 days. As a further protection, the board will be required to notify the Office of the Public Advocate prior to any review.

The implementation and use of these new provisions will be closely monitored to ensure that all safeguards are applied and that the provisions are not used inappropriately.

Involuntary admission and treatment is often a difficult time for a person with a mental illness and his or her family. Section 18 of the act will now require that patients be given an oral explanation of their rights, in addition to the existing requirement for a printed statement of rights. Section 26 of the act will also be amended to ensure that patients who have a hearing before the Mental Health Review Board will have access to their files and other information which will be presented to the board at least 24 hours before the hearing. This amendment reflects the current practice of the board.

It is recognised that Mental Health Review Board hearings for people on community treatment orders should, wherever possible, be conducted in the community. To give the board greater flexibility and discretion about the place and style of hearing, schedule 2 of the act will be amended to allow a review of extensions of community treatment orders by one member. This is consistent with previous amendments to the act regarding the annual review of the detention of a patient.

Section 39 will be amended so that when a patient is transferred, only documents relevant to the patient's admission and future treatment are to be forwarded to the receiving hospital. This is consistent with current administrative practice in general hospitals. The requirement to notify the chief psychiatrist will be deleted as it is not necessary in a mainstreamed environment.

Section 51 allows the chief psychiatrist and the Mental Health Review Board to grant leave to a security patient. In practice the chief psychiatrist makes the initial decision, and this is reviewed by the board. Section 51 is to be amended to reflect this practice. The board will continue to hear appeals against the refusal of the chief psychiatrist to grant leave. This is consistent with the board's role as a review and appeal body.

The act contains separate provisions for determining whether a patient has given informed consent to psychosurgery, electroconvulsive therapy and non-psychiatric treatment. For each of those treatments, the criteria for determining informed consent are different. The act is to be amended to provide a single definition of informed consent for each of those treatments.

Psychosurgery is currently subject to detailed regulation under the act. However, contrary to the United Nations principles, psychosurgery may be performed without the informed consent of the patient. The act is to be amended to ensure that psychosurgery can be performed only where a patient gives informed consent.

Amendments are to be made to the provisions relating to electroconvulsive therapy — commonly known as ECT — to allow a person to consent to courses of treatments. The patient will still be able to withdraw consent at any time.

The criteria for ECT are also amended. Before the authorised psychiatrist allows ECT to be performed on an involuntary patient who cannot consent, the authorised psychiatrist must be satisfied that alternative treatments have been considered and
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That without ECT the patient is likely to suffer a significant deterioration in his or her physical or mental condition.

Consistent with the amendments to the role of the guardian in psychiatric treatment, the act will be amended so that the decision to give ECT will be a clinical one and the person's guardian or primary carer will be notified before the giving of non-consensual ECT. To ensure adequate monitoring of ECT, all licence-holders will now be required to report all instances of ECT to the chief psychiatrist on a monthly basis.

The act already contains detailed provisions regulating seclusion and restraint. The act will be amended to strengthen these existing provisions.

A clear definition of mechanical restraint will be introduced into section 81 of the act. A person who is restrained will be required to be observed continuously, and monitoring and the provision of care will also be required.

Section 82 of the act will be amended to provide that seclusion can be used only where it is necessary to protect the person or others from an immediate or imminent risk to their health or safety or to prevent the person from absconding. The amendments will require that all patients in seclusion receive the same level of monitoring.

The protection contained in the sections relating to seclusion and restraint will apply to all people receiving treatment for a mental disorder in an approved mental health service, regardless of their status under the act.

The act makes provision for non-psychiatric treatment of involuntary patients. The amendments will specify that for serious medical procedures the authorised psychiatrist must ensure that an involuntary patient has given informed consent under the amendments described earlier. These serious medical procedures will be specified in guidelines issued by the chief psychiatrist. Other medical treatment will require a patient to give informed consent currently provided for in section 83.

The office of chief psychiatrist has an important role in ensuring people with a mental disorder receive appropriate standards of treatment and care. It is widely recognised that the role of chief psychiatrist is valuable and protects the interests of patients.

While all psychiatric services were operated by the state, the act did not need to contain detailed provisions regarding how the chief psychiatrist must exercise his or her power. The mainstreaming of psychiatric services means that the Mental Health Act should clearly specify the powers of the chief psychiatrist and when they are to be exercised.

Hospitals and other organisations which provide psychiatric services should operate autonomously. The director of medical services and chief executive officer are responsible for the medical care and welfare of patients at individual services. The chief psychiatrist would become involved only following an investigation, if he or she had reason to believe any individual's medical care and welfare was at risk.

If an investigation is required the chief psychiatrist will consult with the director of clinical services and the executive officer. If no agreement can be reached the powers provided by the new sections 106AA and 106AB will allow the chief psychiatrist to give directions where he or she is satisfied following an investigation that the directions are necessary. The amendments will also permit the chief psychiatrist to direct that a patient or other person be admitted to an approved mental health service for treatment.

The community visitors program was established when mental health services were delivered by large residential institutions which provided 'whole of life' services. The functions of community visitors focus on inspection of facilities and service standards, in recognition that people in residential services are potentially vulnerable and may require assistance and advocacy.

The definition of 'mental health service' in section 107 of the act is to be amended to clarify that the functions of community visitors are focused on residential or bed-based services such as hospitals or community care units where 24-hour nursing care is provided.

Section 120A of the act currently allows an exemption to the strict confidentiality provisions of the act in relation to the giving of information about the condition of a patient. However, the wording of this exemption has caused confusion.

Section 120A(3) allows a hospital to provide general information to family members or friends when they contact the hospital to check on the condition of their relative or friend. This is consistent with current practice in general hospitals.
A new exemption clarifies that the release of information to a guardian, family member or primary carer is permitted where the person receiving the information will be involved in the ongoing care of the patient and the information is directly related to that ongoing care.

Section 120A is also amended to provide that the giving of information to the minister or secretary is not a breach of confidentiality. This clarifies the application of the confidentiality provisions with respect to administrative functions of the secretary and the minister in the performance of their duties.

A new provision will also permit an exemption to be granted by the minister for a particular class or type of information where the giving of the information is in the public interest. This clarifies the extent of a current exemption which permits the minister to approve the release of certain information in the public interest.

A number of other amendments are also contained in the bill. In preparing these amendments to the Mental Health Act, the government has taken great care to ensure that they are fully consistent with the principles and objects of the act. The proposals are essentially concerned with updating, clarifying and streamlining to ensure the act's continued relevance and effective operation.

Clearly, the Minister for Health and her colleague the parliamentary secretary assisting her have undertaken an enormous amount of work and consultation in bringing about this change to the law.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr BRACKS (Williamstown).

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

That the debate be adjourned until Thursday, 19 October.

Mr HAMILTON (Morwell) — On the question of time, Mr Speaker, given that this is a comprehensive and important bill, we ask that if further time is required for discussion and consultation it can be negotiated with the minister.

Mr GUDE (Minister for Industry and Employment) (By leave) — I am sure the Minister for Health will give every opportunity to the opposition for full consideration of the bill and that appropriate and proper briefings will be available. One hopes the two-week time frame will be enough, but I am sure a negotiated arrangement could be reached if necessary.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until Thursday, 19 October.

Remaining business postponed on motion of Mr GUDE (Minister for Industry and Employment).

ULA: Williamstown rifle range

Mr BRACKS (Williamstown) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Planning the Williamstown rifle range, which the Urban Land Authority purchased from the commonwealth government, and which has been developed as an excellent housing estate. It has all facilities on-site, such as a child-care centre, a future shopping centre, and walking tracks. It is an on-going exercise. It has been partly developed, but there is still more to come.

The minister has been supportive and has assured that the Urban Land Authority will take account of residents' needs. The issue I raise concerns the old rifle range headquarters building, which has been refurbished by the developer from a levy on each property purchased on the site. The residents understood from the prospectus and advertising literature provided by the Urban Land Authority when they purchased the land that they would have not only the facilities I have referred to but also the refurbished rifle range headquarters, which would be used as a community centre and form part of the amenity of the area.

I seek an assurance from the minister that the rifle range headquarters — now the proposed community centre — will be used for the purpose for which it was intended. The use of the building has been tendered out and the private sector has shown an interest in it. It is located next to the child-care centre. The major interest shown in the building appears to be that of a funeral parlour that is considering relocation to the building. This issue...
should be examined — not that anyone in Williamstown objects to that sort of use — because the residents purchased land in good faith on the basis that this facility would be available for use as a community centre as a result of the levy paid on their properties.

Rotary: farm aid

Mr TURNER (Bendigo West) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Agriculture through the Minister for Industry and Employment at the table what can be best described as a bad news story that has seen the community join together to try to assist their fellow Victorians. Most members would be aware that in central and northern Victoria, particularly in the western area, we have suffered badly from a period of drought, particularly at the end of last year and towards the start of this year.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr TURNER — Gippsland was not as bad! The Rotary Club of Bendigo came to me in May and pointed out the difficulties that some people in our community were suffering. I approached the Minister for Agriculture and the Minister for Community Services to see what we could do about the farming community, particularly those who had assets but no income and could not get social security benefits. After discussions with the Bendigo Rotary Club — I pay tribute to Kevin Reilly who coordinated the program — the following donations were made: Tooheys, $61 000; Minister for Agriculture, $20 000; Minister for Community Services, $20 000; Rotary district 9800 central fund, $15 000; Salvation Army, $10 000; and Lifeline, $2000.

Through an organisation in Bendigo known as Acts-care, under careful funding guidelines about 150 families throughout that western area, stretching from Kerang to Kyneton are receiving food packages and clothing assistance, particularly for school-age children.

The farming community is very proud, as most of us know. The difficulty was getting those people in need to put their hands up. That has happened. The fact that 150 families will receive food parcels and clothing assistance until January next year is a clear illustration of the community banding together to help those who have suffered through the effects of drought.

I ask the minister two questions. Firstly, can he do something about sending rain to central Victoria? We certainly need some now. Secondly, can he give the house his assessment of the current drought situation and pass on the thanks of the Parliament to those people and organisations that have banded together in bringing about the Rotary farm aid project, which was officially launched in Bendigo in May?

Housing: Braybrook eviction

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I ask the Minister for Industry and Employment, as the representative in this house of the Minister for Housing, to pass on the problems facing a Somali family and to ask him to intervene personally in a looming crisis in Braybrook.

Yesterday the acting Director of Housing and — depending on whose version is believed — between 8 and 15 police tried to evict from their house in Braybrook a Somali family of eight people, headed by Mrs Mariam Farah. Apparently, the eviction failed to proceed when the 70-year-old frail and ill grandmother, who occupies one of the rooms in the house, was discovered and the possibility of evicting her using an ambulance placed on stand-by was found to be too difficult.

The family of refugees from Somalia is officially classified as children and women at risk. The family had moved to Braybrook following an incident in Heidelberg West. One of the sons was stabbed during a neighbourhood dispute. The family initially shared that house in Carlton Street, Braybrook.

The Office of Housing has indicated that it will proceed with the eviction next Monday. The office has offered the family a five-room family house which is now under construction and which will be available in between three to six months, but it has said it wants the family to move into a listed-to-be-demolished three-bedroom house now, despite it being only a three-to-six month period before the new house will be available. The suitability of a soon-to-be-demolished concrete house in Braybrook to an eight-member family is in question.

I call on the minister to intervene personally and find some alternative to tossing those people out on the street. I appreciate that there are problems with the priority list and with the official status of those people, but the conclusion this scenario is heading towards would serve nobody's interests. There must be some other solution.
Cobram courthouse

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Attorney-General. I refer to a fire at the Cobram courthouse on the evening of Thursday, 3 August. The extensive damage to the courthouse meant other arrangements had to be made for the court to continue operating. I am pleased that the Shire of Moira has cooperated and provided accommodation for the court to continue operating in the township of Cobram.

I draw the matter to the attention of the Attorney-General because I seek confirmation from her that appropriate repairs will be undertaken to return the courthouse to its original condition. It is an old courthouse with great historical significance in the area and it is important that it be restored to its original condition. The courthouse also houses a large range of older-style furniture. I have had representations from both the Shire of Moira and the Historical Society of Cobram requesting repairs be undertaken and the furniture and the interior and exterior of the courthouse be returned to their original condition.

I also point out that the court operates in an important part of my electorate of Murray Valley, particularly the Shire of Moira. I remind the minister that a number of courts closed down through the 1980s in north-eastern Victoria. Courts at Yarrawonga and Numurkah have closed and the Cobram court provides a very valuable service in the Shire of Moira.

It has been suggested that the court may be closed because of the fire and that cases will in future be handled at either Wangaratta or Shepparton. We believe it is important not only that the courthouse be restored to its original condition, but that it continue to operate and provide an important service in the township of Cobram and within the Shire of Moira. I seek those assurances from the minister.

South Eastern Freeway: noise barriers

Mr HAMILTON (Morwell) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports in another place the urgent need for noise barriers to be constructed on the South Eastern Freeway in the vicinity of Therese Avenue, Mount Waverley. The matter was brought to my attention by Anne Barker, the ALP candidate for Oakleigh.

The residents of Therese Avenue have been suffering from extreme noise pollution from traffic on the South Eastern Freeway and it has now reached an unacceptable level. Although VicRoads carried out a noise level test in May of this year, it appears the results reported by VicRoads and those experienced by the residents in Therese Avenue are quite different. There are small plantations of trees and shrubs in the vicinity, which I drive past regularly, but they do not provide sufficient dampening of the noise. As a result, the residents are disturbed at all hours of the day and night by the heavy traffic along the freeway.

Honourable members who travel along the South Eastern Freeway in the vicinity of Therese Avenue will realise this area is not protected by noise barriers. Therese Avenue itself is fairly close to the freeway and I can appreciate the concern of the residents. In addition to concerns about the imminent introduction of tolls on this road, residents are quite upset about the level of noise.

I take this opportunity to ask the minister to require VicRoads to have a look at the acceptable standards for noise levels on freeways. The World Health Organisation recommends a level of 58 decibels as acceptable to communities and residents. VicRoads has accepted a level of 63 decibels. Those who are familiar with the logarithm scale of measuring noise will realise that is an exact doubling of the intensity of the World Health Organisation recommended levels. These are very serious matters.

Environmental pollution, including noise pollution, is something every resident living adjacent to a freeway suffers and we ought to take that into account when designing freeways. We should also improve existing freeways.

Rosebud Hospital

Mr HYAMS (Dromana) — I direct the attention of the Minister for Health to the ongoing problems facing the Rosebud campus of the Peninsula Health Care Network. It is well known to the minister that
emergency services at the Rosebud Hospital have been suspended. I ask the minister to give her most serious attention to this problem. Negotiations between the local doctors and the health care network had broken down by the beginning of the July. Doctors at the South Coast Medical Centre, who provided on-call emergency services in the past, were unwilling to provide them in the future. Local doctors have refused to make themselves available to provide the services on a rostered basis, and efforts to find other doctors to provide the emergency services have been unsuccessful.

Since then many discussions aimed at fixing the problem have been held, but to date they have been only partly successful. Meetings held at my office to attempt to conciliate the problem involved the local doctors, the chairman and the chief executive of the health care network, a representative of the minister and the Department of Health and a member of the local hospital action group. We were trying to find a way for the hospital to offer casualty services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

To his great credit, the new chairman of the hospital network, Mr Bob Polk, has been directly involved in the negotiations and has achieved significant success by finding a doctor to provide emergency treatment during working hours five days a week, Monday to Friday.

The minister is well informed about the Rosebud Hospital and I thank her for the significant support she has provided to it so far, especially through difficult times. The local community, which itself has done so much for the hospital, is fully behind my call on the minister for further assistance with the emergency services situation. I ask her to look again at our need for round-the-clock casualty services. I ask her to examine the rules and regulations concerning the payment of retainers for doctors to be on call to provide casualty services. I ask her to look at the reported shortage of doctors on the Mornington Peninsula and to provide support or to consider a solution that might involve declaring the peninsula an area of special needs. I also ask her to communicate with the federal Minister for Human Services and Health to find a cooperative way forward for Rosebud casualty services.

**Forests: policy strategy**

Mr THOMSON (Pascoe Vale) — I ask the minister at the table to direct a matter to the attention of the Minister for Conservation and Natural Resources. I have received advice that the government has instructed senior officers of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources who attended a recent meeting of the National Forests Advisory Forum to withhold primary data from commonwealth officers during the course of negotiations on the implementation of a national forests policy strategy.

I ask the minister to investigate the issue because it is certainly a matter of concern to me and it adds to the concern and feeling that many people in Victoria have that the states, including Victoria and a couple of the other conservative states, have thwarted the processes of the deferred forest assessments and the commonwealth government's genuine endeavours to provide an appropriate balance between timber industry needs and the need to protect areas of high conservation value.

Many people have been concerned that the number of communities used for the assessment process has varied markedly between regions. By way of example, in Victoria only 24 different forest types were identified, whereas in a similar region in the Eden management area of New South Wales, which is a bio region similar to East Gippsland and directly contiguous, of course, more than twice that number of different communities were identified. The identification of 24 different forest types for Victoria does not seem to be sufficient.

Furthermore it appears that Victorian and New South Wales agencies have manipulated data provided to the commonwealth and hidden the real extent of old growth forest. They have provided a narrow definition of old growth forest, which minimises the area requiring protection.

In addition, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has had its staff cut; it now refuses to even disclose the number of staff in the department's various regions, which sounds like something out of Yes, Minister.

It appears that the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is either unable or unwilling to provide the commonwealth with the sort of information it needs to go through a proper deferred forest assessment process, and its failure to cooperate with the commonwealth seriously jeopardises conservation outcomes in this state. I understand that Liberal governments in Tasmania and Western Australia have responded to the process with similar disregard, and that is a matter of greater concern. We have seen since the Kennett government came to office — —
Mr McLELLAN (Frankston East) - I raise with the Minister for Industry and Employment a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports in another place concerning long vehicles, better known as B-double trucks. When these vehicles first came onto the roads they were easy to recognise because they were longer than semitrailers and they had on the back of them a clear sign indicating it was a prime mover followed by two trailers. For some reason the signs have now disappeared and the words on the back of the vehicles are now simply 'long vehicle'.

Drivers of the B-double trucks say they are running into more trouble than ever with motorists overtaking them not knowing how long the vehicles are and forcing them to take evasive action because they have not allowed themselves enough time to overtake the vehicles. That is understandable when you get along the side of a semitrailer, which is normally 48 to 52 feet long, to realise all of a sudden you have got another 40 feet. The signage was changed some time ago. I do not know whether VicRoads was responsible, but the signage certainly has altered and it is certainly dangerous.

Drivers are concerned about the situation because a vehicle of a B-double truck length is a hard vehicle to quickly get off the road in order to get out of another motorist's way. Because there is no room for them to go the end result is the motorist being stuck between the length of the vehicle and oncoming traffic. There is not much the trailer driver can do, and somebody will be killed as a result.

I ask the minister to look at the situation to see whether he can reintroduce the original B-double truck signs or come up with a similar sort of sign to warn motorists that the vehicles are longer than they would normally anticipate. The signs would give them the sort of warning that the driver of that vehicle has an impediment and it would help to avoid dangerous situations. I refer in particular to when there are half a dozen of these trucks on the road all travelling at 100 kilometres per hour. As most honourable members know, getting past the trucks is difficult.

I ask the minister to look at the situation to see whether he can do something about it before someone's life is lost because of the stupidity of removing a simple sign from the back of a vehicle.

Mr LEIGHTON (Preston) - I ask the Minister for Community Services to direct to the attention of the Minister for Housing in the other place my concern about rent increases for public housing. I refer specifically to the 150 per cent increases for some members of families accommodated in public housing. I ask the Minister for Housing to abandon the increases.

At present, tenants in public housing pay up to 25 per cent of their incomes on rent; any members of their families aged over 18 pay an extra 10 per cent of their incomes. Those payments are indexed — for example, when a public housing tenant receives extra income, including increased social security benefits the amount of rent payable is increased so that the rent is still set at 25 per cent of income.

About three weeks ago, various social security benefits were increased in line with the CPI which meant public housing tenants will now pay extra rent. However, the state government has helped itself to an extra increase. The state government has announced that as from 22 October the rent payable by family members aged over 18 will be increased from 10 per cent to 15 per cent of income and it will again increase to 25 per cent in October next year — that is, a 150 per cent increase in only 12 months.

The effect will be to force many children aged more than 18 out of home. If that results in one parent remaining in the home, he or she may be forced out of that family home into a unit. That increase will have a damaging effect on battlers who do not have the capacity to pay.

Although the government runs its budget in surplus, funds the grand prix and helps mates through its consultancies, it has helped itself to an increase by slugging the battlers by up to 150 per cent. The Minister for Housing should get his hands out of the pockets of public tenants and stop forcing them out of their homes. Perhaps that is how he is trying to resolve the crisis caused by the lengthy public housing waiting lists. He should abandon the rent increases. After all, the state government automatically receives increases in rents when social security payments are indexed. That appears to be insufficient for this uncaring state government because it has also levied a 150 per cent increase on the rent payments for some family members.
Electorate offices: safety

Mr LUPTON (Knox) — I refer the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to an incident which occurred at my electorate office today as a result of activities of the ALP rent-a-crowd mob under the umbrella of the Public First campaign.

A mob attended my office and, after hanging banners and fixing stickers to the front windows, entered and harassed my female staff member who was alone in the office. Those unruly thugs abused and harassed her, accusing her of personal matters. It reached the stage where she called the police, who attended and removed the imbeciles from the office.

I am concerned about the safety of the lady involved and of those in other electorate offices. It is apparent that those thugs, under the ALP rent-a-crowd banner, intend to target marginal seats. Our electorate staff will not feel safe. I ask the minister if anything can be done. I regard the matter seriously.

Mr Leighton interjected.

Mr LUPTON — Pull your head in, we will get to you!

The SPEAKER — Order! This is a serious matter. Any discussion across the house is disorderly.

Mr LUPTON — Yesterday the honourable member for Mordialloc raised this matter and voiced his concerns. I understand you, Mr Speaker, intended to investigate the safety of our staff. The lady in my electorate office should not be forced to suffer that sort of crap — sorry, I mean, abuse —

The SPEAKER — Order! I take it the honourable member is withdrawing that unparliamentary expression?

Mr LUPTON — Yes, Mr Speaker. Electorate staff should not have to experience that sort of harassment by the ALP and its hangers-on. Our female staff should not have to face personal abuse by those mobs. It is un-Australian and inappropriate in our society. I ask the minister to investigate this matter.

Responses

Mr W. D. McGRA TH (Minister for Agriculture) — In response to the honourable member for Bendigo West, who referred to an assistance program for farming families who have been badly affected by the drought last year, it is very encouraging indeed to see what the program has provided to families in desperate need within a 150-kilometre radius of Bendigo.

It is worth recappping the history of the program. It started off when Barry McAllister and Brian Joyce representing Tooheys came to see me about how they might assist. They then linked up with Rotary, especially David Rosback, its district governor, and Kevin Reilly, the president of the Bendigo district — two prime movers in the Rotary organisation. Tooheys provided $61 000; the Rotary district 9800, $15 000; the Salvation Army, $10 000; Lifeline, $2000; the agriculture ministry, $20 000; and the Department of Health and Community Services provided $20 000.

The program was very well coordinated by the honourable member for Bendigo West and his other parliamentary colleagues from the region, the Honourables Barry Bishop and Ron Best. I pay tribute to the way the honourable member for Bendigo West has constantly worked with the project officer, Kevin Reilly, and other members of the community.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr W. D. McGRA TH — No. It is interesting that the honourable member for Morwell, who is always seen as an advocate of the underprivileged, made that interjection. There was a little bit of sarcasm in it, Mr Speaker. I would have thought the honourable member for Morwell to be above that sort of interjection.

Mr Gude interjected.

Mr W. D. McGRA TH — Yes, you would, but not from the honourable member for Morwell. However, the way the honourable member for Bendigo West provided leadership and linkage gives an indication of how communities are prepared to work to help themselves. The fact that 150 families have been provided with some assistance is a great reflection of how a corporate citizen, a service organisation, members of Parliament and local people can come together to provide not only moral support but also financial support to people in need.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr W. D. McGRA TH — Yes, there should be more of it, and probably there are families who should be helped more from time to time.
The honourable member for Bendigo West inquired whether I could bring some rain to his part of the country to help now that spring is with us. I have checked today's weather forecast: it is raining across the north-west of the state, so I expect that some useful rain will go through the Bendigo region this evening. If we can get an inch of rain across the north-west of the state in the next week to 10 days, it will be a big season and there will be some very good wheat, barley, legume and oilseed crops. If those crops come to full fruition they will help to heal many of the scars left by last year's drought. At this time it looks as though good prices will be realised in the marketplace, so rain would be of great assistance to the farming community. The area below the range probably needs 3 inches of rain between now and the middle of November. If it receives it, that area will also have a good season and agriculture in Victoria will once again be strong in providing the economic base that is so essential to the state.

I turn to the take-up of drought assistance. About 800 farmers have applied through the Rural Finance Corporation for subsidy under the state government drought package. At this stage 70 per cent of applications have been approved and farmers have received drought interest subsidies of $3.6 million on about $60 million of working capital and $100 million of existing debt. It is working out satisfactorily. Having said that, there has been a 70 per cent approval rate, I point out that about 15 per cent of those farms have been classified as not requiring help because they can cope from their own resources, but another 15 per cent no longer have a future in farming.

That is sad, but they are the families we are trying to support through programs like this and others within the rural adjustment area. We must assist them to leave farming with some dignity. It is not easy. If a farmer has had a lifetime in farming and the farm has been in the family for two, three or four generations and is no longer viable, he must be assisted by some means.

I commend the leadership that has been displayed by the honourable member for Bendigo West in linking corporate and service organisations with the community to provide what has been an excellent program in community support aid for those 150 or so families.

Mrs WADE (Attorney-General) — The honourable member for Murray Valley raised with me the future of the Cobram court, which recently suffered fire damage. I am pleased to advise the honourable member that both the Department of Justice and the Department of Planning and Development have acted promptly to examine the future of the court. The Department of Justice has arranged temporary quarters for court staff and the court is now carrying out its operations in a public hall. The Department of Justice and the Department of Planning and Development have assessed the damage and the cost of repairs. I understand the cost of repairs is in the vicinity of $120 000. The repairs will be carried out within the works and services budget of the Department of Justice as soon as possible.

The Cobram court is an historic court. It is important that we ensure that historic buildings under the management of the government are properly repaired where necessary.

On the question of historic furniture, which is also a feature of the Cobram court, I assure the honourable member for Murray Valley that I take a keen interest in ensuring that our courts are furnished with the appropriate furniture. Unfortunately, over the years some of the furniture has gone astray. Furniture is moved from one court to another and therefore some courts have inappropriate furniture. For example, in some of the Supreme Courts there is furniture that would be better located in the Ballarat court, which is a 1930s-style building. In some of the newer courts there is old furniture.

This is a difficult issue to deal with and I find that getting the right furniture into the right court takes longer than one would expect. On a number of occasions members have asked me about furniture being taken away from small country courts when they were closed down and the furniture being handed over to historical societies. In a couple of instances we have been able to restore appropriate furniture to those courts. I will be taking a keen interest in ensuring that the furniture in the Cobram court is appropriate to the age and history of the court.

Mr McNAMARA (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — The member for Knox raised an issue in response to the Public First campaign which his office fell victim to today. We all need to recognise this campaign for what it is — a Trades Hall-inspired issue of thuggery lead by a group of paid rabblerousers running around offices. And I think it is the same gang.
The advice I received from the member for Knox is that the group cannot stimulate any local support for its campaign so outsiders are brought in to terrorise staff members. The cowardly nature of this attack is evidenced by the fact that these attacks are occurring while members are sitting in this chamber. These people are not game enough to run around while members are actually in their offices, but they are prepared to run around and terrorise staff who are merely performing their jobs on behalf of the constituents in the electorate.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The crossfire across the chamber is too much. The honourable minister in silence.

Mr Leighton interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! It is not the first time I have crossed swords with the member for Keilor today. I hope it will be the last.

Mr McNAMARA — These sorts of Gestapo tactics are not what we are used to — raging gangs moving from electorate office to electorate office, terrorising and intimidating staff, and in some cases their children. I am sure we all regard this as very un-Victorian. I hope the opposition will join equally with the government in condemning these attacks. They are nothing short of organised thuggery. The sooner this campaign comes to an end, the better.

The protests are complaints made about the actions taken by the government to clean up the mess left by Labor. The great bulk of the Victorian public must acknowledge as necessary the measures the government has had to take as a result of Labor's decade of mismanagement.

I understand police were forced to attend the Knox electorate office following threats to a female staff member. I am awaiting advice to see if any charges have been laid. If any other measures are being taken I will advise the member accordingly.

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Health) — The member for Dromana raised with me the withdrawal of services by general practitioners in the emergency department at the Rosebud hospital — a matter he has raised with me on a number of occasions. It has also been raised by the member for Mornington and other local members interested in the matter.

I am sure all members will be agree that without the cooperation of our doctors we cannot run our hospitals. We certainly cannot run the old country-style casualty departments — now called emergency — in hospitals. The number of people coming in for casualty or emergency services is not enough to warrant full-time medics in those hospitals. Those departments once worked very effectively and very well with the cooperation of doctors, who in most instances were general practitioners.

An arrangement was entered into some years back at the Mornington Peninsula Hospital Rosebud campus whereby general practitioners working from a roster served in the casualty department of the Rosebud hospital on the basis that they charged clients under the Medicare fee. At that particular time additional funding was made available to them by the hospital.

Two things have happened in recent times. One is that that group of doctors, who form the South Coast Medical Centre, have demanded an additional $30,000 for providing their services to the hospital, but they continue to want to write out individual bills on Medicare. A legal opinion has suggested that such a practice is not only illegal but not sustainable. Therefore, quite rightly, the hospital indicated that the arrangement was not suitable and not effective in that Rosebud environment.

The honourable member for Dromana, Tony Hyams, and other members of Parliament in the area met with the general practitioners on a number of occasions and sought to find some way out. I am told there are 31 general practitioners on the Mornington Peninsula, and if they rostered their services the requirement for them to use the facilities of the hospital and charge their patients would be one day a month. That does not seem to me to be an unreasonable request of those doctors in that they have full rights to admit their patients at any time as in-patients to that campus of the Frankston hospital.

At this stage the doctors have not been able to find any way of serving the hospital as all other GPs in all other small hospitals seem to do, and I speak from personal experience of the Mansfield hospital, the Yea hospital and other small hospitals that cannot under any circumstances afford full-time practitioners. These other hospitals have a shared arrangement whereby they provide their services as needed in a casualty or emergency situation in exchange for all the other advantages of having a hospital in the country town.
The honourable member for Dromana has met regularly with Robert Polk, the new Chairman of the Peninsula Health Care Network, and I commend Robert Polk and the members of his health care network for the keen interest they have taken in this matter.

However, the matter is in the very capable hands of the Mornington Peninsula Hospital. The people there are responsible for providing services on the terms and arrangements as they see fit. Chris Fox is the new chief executive officer of the hospital. He and Sherene Deveneson, who was the acting CEO and who is now the medical director, are working hard to find a resolution.

Certainly the resolution is not to capitulate to the unreasonable demands of the South Coast medical practitioners. Not only would it not be good management practice but it would not be good financial practice and could well be outside the terms of the Medicare arrangements.

I remain confident that the hospital will come up with a solution. At the moment it has a practitioner working there from 9.00 a.m. until 5.00 p.m. Certainly in the peak periods of the summer when the hospital is in high demand, arrangements will be made, but in the meantime it behoves the practitioners on the Mornington Peninsula to look to their responsibilities and provide services as are provided throughout the rest of Victoria and Australia. I certainly hope that with good consultation between the hospital and the doctors some resolution can be found quickly.

Mr COLEMAN (Minister for Natural Resources) — The honourable member for Pascoe Vale raised an issue relating to the deferred forests assessment (DFA) process which has been run in conjunction with the commonwealth and the states. In particular he raised an accusation of withholding data on the part of the Victorian officials.

The development of these assessment processes has an interesting history but one thing is entirely clear: in the case of the material presented by Victoria to the commonwealth, right through this process of developing firstly the national forest policy statement and subsequently the early development of the regional forest agreement, and as a result of the incapacity on the part of the commonwealth to fund the regional forest agreement process and then take the short cut to the deferred forests assessment process, never at any time has the material presented by Victoria been questioned.

That was vindicated in a sense by a statement that was made when the proposals were released last week. The commonwealth was prepared to say that the process developed in Victoria was the best anywhere. That process has been running since 1970. It involved the Land Conservation Council, the development by the former Labor government of the timber industry strategy — which received bipartisan support — old growth studies in East Gippsland, and work with the Australian Heritage Commission in East Gippsland and the Central Highlands. All the material was developed in conjunction with the commonwealth and has been available throughout the process.

This is the first time that an accusation has been made that in some way Victoria has tried to obfuscate some of the information. I do not believe it is correct. The accusation is substantial, and I will have it checked out.

It is critical that the house understands all the work that has been done since 1970. The precursor was there when our government came to office because the coalition was party to the timber industry strategy and the contingent code of forest practice. However, a fortnight ago the Leader of the Opposition walked away from that view. He made a statement that was reported once only in the Age about a new forest policy for Victoria that sought to replicate the policy of the then Carr opposition in New South Wales.

If the opposition wants to walk away from a system that has developed since 1970 to a position where the commonwealth today is prepared to acknowledge it as the best anywhere, and through the DFA process to exclude two catchments from harvesting during the coming season — at Ellery Creek and Betka — it should explain its forest policy in the public arena.

From here on the process of a DFA will be put into place. The proposals have been in the public arena for one week and they have two weeks to run. It is anticipated that the 1996 export woodchip licences will be issued. The deferred areas will be excluded from harvesting until the regional forest assessment process is completed.

If the opposition does not see that as the ultimate way to handle the process, it is incumbent upon it to say so. An article appeared in the Age — obviously it was an interview — setting out a number of policy positions. But the opposition has not provided any
supporting material, a press release or anything else to establish the process that it wants to follow.

Victoria is in a privileged position which has been developed over a long period and which all commonwealth agencies are prepared to accept as an appropriate process. In fact, the commonwealth has adopted Victoria’s 'old growth' definition. All those things suggest that the accusation made tonight is not correct. It is a matter I take seriously and I will check it out, but in my view no instructions were given to any official to obfuscate in any way.

Mr GUDE (Minister for Industry and Employment) — The honourable members for Williamstown, Footscray, Morwell, Frankston East and Preston raised matters for various ministers, most of whom are in another place. I will direct these matters to the respective ministers’ attention.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 5.05 p.m. until Tuesday, 10 October.
Tuesday, 10 October 1995

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

ABSENCE OF MINISTER

The SPEAKER — Order! I advise the house that the Minister for Energy and Minerals will be absent from the house today due to illness. The Minister for Natural Resources will handle any matters relating to the energy and minerals portfolio.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Ambulance services: communications system

Mr Thwaites (Albert Park) — I refer the Minister for Energy and Minerals will be absent from the house today due to illness. The Minister for Natural Resources will handle any matters relating to the energy and minerals portfolio.

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Health) — The honourable member for Albert Park referred to the crisis in ambulance services. Will the minister explain why the logbook for the duty officer at the Intergraph control room shows that in early September the automatic vehicle location system and the computer-aided dispatch were not working properly on 8, 9, 10, 11 and 14 September this year?

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Health) — The honourable member for Albert Park referred to the crisis in ambulance services. Will the minister explain why the logbook for the duty officer at the Intergraph control room shows that in early September the automatic vehicle location system and the computer-aided dispatch were not working properly on 8, 9, 10, 11 and 14 September this year?

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Health) — The honourable member for Albert Park referred to the crisis in ambulance services. Will the minister explain why the logbook for the duty officer at the Intergraph control room shows that in early September the automatic vehicle location system and the computer-aided dispatch were not working properly on 8, 9, 10, 11 and 14 September this year?

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Health) — The honourable member for Albert Park referred to the crisis in ambulance services. Will the minister explain why the logbook for the duty officer at the Intergraph control room shows that in early September the automatic vehicle location system and the computer-aided dispatch were not working properly on 8, 9, 10, 11 and 14 September this year?

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Health) — The honourable member for Albert Park referred to the crisis in ambulance services. Will the minister explain why the logbook for the duty officer at the Intergraph control room shows that in early September the automatic vehicle location system and the computer-aided dispatch were not working properly on 8, 9, 10, 11 and 14 September this year?

There is no doubt that the bans on the computer-aided dispatch system were informally introduced some three to six months ago. I ask the honourable member for Albert Park: does he condone those measures?

Mr Thwaites — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I refer you to your earlier ruling regarding debating the question. The minister is not referring to the question, which relates to matters arising in September this year. She is trying to debate matters that arose in 1992 and that have arisen this week. She is doing everything except answering the question about the computer system, which has been shown not to work and which was not working in September of this year.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the house that the Chair cannot direct the minister how he or she should answer a question. At this stage the minister's answer is relevant, and I do not uphold the point of order.

Mrs TEHAN — This is the question for the house: does the honourable member for Albert Park condone the work bans that have been applied by the union? What does he want to see done?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the house that if the question is too hard for the house to handle, I will call the next question. The Minister for Health will conclude her answer.
Mrs TEHAN — The government is determined to ensure that the people of Victoria get an ambulance service with a computer-aided dispatch system that meets their needs now and into the future. It will do that regardless of the opposition of a small core of union officials who say openly that they want to go back to the old manual system and it will do that regardless of the views of opposition members, who are just labourers of the Trades Hall Council and who do not take the moral position of being absolutely against the actions of this union.

Police: communications system

Mr TRAYNOR (Ballarat East) — Will the Minister for Police and Emergency Services inform the house of what action the government will take in reference to allegations made on 3AW this morning that the Trades Hall Council has sought to interfere with the new computer-aided dispatch system of the Victoria Police?

Mr McNAMARA (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — Some serious allegations were made by two police officers this morning on radio. Both officers said they were aware of moves made by the Trades Hall Council to seek to interfere in the operations of the computer-aided dispatch system at the Victoria Police Centre. The allegations concern the Trades Hall Council seeking to manufacture a similar industrial dispute to that now being witnessed in the ambulance area. It is clear that the only motivation in encouraging such an industrial scene is to create political embarrassment.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr McNAMARA — The honourable member for Albert Park — —

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the honourable member for Albert Park to come to order. The minister will be heard in silence.

Mr McNAMARA — I must respond to the interjection of the honourable member for Albert Park. He sees people's misfortunes as just another opportunity for a photograph. That is all he is interested in. One would hope that the shadow Minister for Health would show a little more concern about ensuring that the system is operational rather than trying to sabotage it, which seems to be his only agenda.

Two serving police officers this morning blew the whistle on some disgraceful union tactics. Clearly, those officers are aware that there is a union agenda within the ambulance service to put people's lives at risk. For the benefit of the opposition, I will quote from this morning's transcript. The first officer, who identified himself as David, told Neil Mitchell:

There's no problem with the system. The system's a major improvement on what's been the case in the past.

He continued:

... the inefficiencies that exist in Russell Street with the old sort of quill and eye shades mentalities ... I mean a lot of these emergency services need to be computerised ... and enter the 21st century.

David then referred to the Trades Hall Council:

We've had a couple of circulars from and various officers have approached me, and been down to Trades Hall.

The Trades Hall Council is trying to whip up an industrial dispute.

Another officer, who identified himself as Robert and who is a serving officer with the Victoria Police with 17 years experience — —

Mr Micallef — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, it might help if the minister were to provide us with a recording of the transcript.

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

Mr McNAMARA — Just tick his name off as being here. I will be happy to give the opposition a transcript of the whole thing.

The second officer, who has had 17 years experience in the Victoria Police Force, said that he was concerned about the activities of the Trades Hall Council. Neil Mitchell asked:

Is Trades Hall Council trying to get the police to object to the Intergraph system?

The officer responded:

They're looking for people to stir up trouble about the Intergraph system.

Neil Mitchell asked:

What, to support the ambos?
The officer said:

To support the ambulance ... friends in the ambulance service say that they've absolutely told the union blokes where to go and jump off.

They are fed up with union leaders putting people's lives at risk.

Mr Batchelor — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, under standing order 127 — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the honourable member for Thomastown to pause until the house comes to order. I wish to hear what he has to say.

Mr Batchelor — I refer to standing order 127. The minister is clearly debating the question. He was not asked to read the transcript from this morning's radio program but was asked a question on that subject. In reading out the transcript and debating the question he is clearly flouting standing order 127. I ask you to bring him back to the point.

The SPEAKER — Order! I understood the minister was illustrating his answer by quoting from a document. In the view of the Chair he is not debating the question, but I ask the minister to conclude his answer.

Mr McNAMARA — The officer who identified himself as Robert made it quite clear that it was a deliberate attempt by the Trades Hall Council to sabotage the Intergraph system, particularly by not reporting when ambulances were free, which put further stress on the system.

I will certainly refer the transcript not only to other honourable members but also to police command to see whether any further action can be taken in this investigation. Rather than petty political point scoring what we need from Trades Hall is for it to do something about protecting people who are at risk. This has been a sinister development in the action taken by Trades Hall and I would be concerned if attempts were made by it to spread this to other emergency services.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The level of interjection is far too high. I ask the honourable member for Yan Yean to come to order and not interject in a persistent way.

Mr McNAMARA — In conclusion, I commend not only the Police Association of Victoria on its support for the Intergraph system but also police command on the way the two organisations have worked so cooperatively with Intergraph. I particularly commend Chief Superintendent David Triplow. We have seen the introduction of an excellent service that has been now operating for more than a month. It was commissioned on 5 September, and on Friday last D24 was fully closed. In fact, last Friday, in the first 12-hour shift using the Intergraph system alone, 3000 calls were taken. If there had been any minor glitches the officers concerned would have worked them out in house rather than use the process of political sabotage that we have seen led by the ambulance union.

I would hope that the opposition spokespersons for police and health would try to do something constructive by recognising that we are dealing with both lives and public safety. The action the ambulance union has taken is putting at risk not only public safety but also the lives of Victorians.

Hospitals: emergency departments

Mr THWAITES (Albert Park) — I ask the Minister for Health whether it is a fact that since the Rosebud hospital's emergency department was closed in July the emergency department at Kyneton hospital has closed, the emergency department at Heidelberg hospital has closed at night and the emergency department at Wodonga hospital is threatened with closure. What action will the minister take to ensure that these life-saving emergency departments are not closed?

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Health) — The member for Albert Park has asked about the possible closure of the emergency departments of four hospitals. The issue involving the Rosebud hospital is an important matter. It was raised in this house last week and it is apparent, but unfortunately true, that the doctors who had manned that emergency department at Rosebud have withdrawn their services. The hospital system, and especially small country hospitals, are totally dependent on the goodwill of doctors to man hospitals. There is no way we can man 136 hospitals, many of them as small as Rosebud hospital, without doctors working in those hospitals. The doctors are paid for their work in those hospitals under the Medicare system. There is no way we can man 136 hospitals, many of them as small as Rosebud hospital, without doctors working in those hospitals. The doctors are paid for their work in those hospitals under the Medicare system. However, unfortunately the 31 doctors currently on the Mornington Peninsula, especially the 12 who form the particular group at Rosebud — Dr Mark
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Smith, who made comments last week, is one of them — withdrew their services from that hospital some months ago.

The government does not intend to nor can it substitute in any way for those medical services unless those doctors on the Mornington Peninsula are willing to work under exactly the same terms and conditions as other doctors work throughout the Australian system. It is unfortunate that the previous Labor government entered into an arrangement with those doctors to pay them an additional $100 000. Those doctors were receiving not only —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! This is the last warning I shall give to the honourable member for Yan Yean. I have already asked him to remain silent. He has a very distinctive voice which the Chair finds irritating.

Mrs TEHAN — The former government entered into an arrangement with those doctors and paid them an additional $100 000. That has proven to be both illegal and against the spirit of Medicare. It is something this government will not do. I am hopeful some of the doctors on the Mornington Peninsula will restore their services because hospitals cannot run without doctors.

In relation to the other examples, the concern about Wodonga hospital is purely speculation and I have no facts on that matter. The Heidelberg repatriation campus is now part of the combined Austin Repatriation Hospital. There were two emergency services about 10 minutes apart and it was totally uneconomical and inappropriate to have two emergency services working at night 10 minutes away from one another.

The emergency departments in our hospitals do excellent and outstanding work, but certainly they are, particularly in the instance of Rosebud, dependent on the goodwill, cooperation and services provided by the medical profession.

Ambulance services: industrial dispute

Mr ASHLEY (Bayswater) — Will the Minister for Health inform the house of the progress in negotiations between the Metropolitan Ambulance Service and the ambulance union concerning the union’s claim for an 18 per cent wage increase?

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Health) — Some three weeks ago the government and the MAS entered into negotiations with the ambulance union concerning an enterprise bargaining arrangement. The government offered the officers of the ambulance union an amount of 10 per cent over two years on exactly the same terms in regard to timing as was offered and accepted by the nurses union.

In the course of the past 3 weeks and in the past 10 days we have been in and out of the industrial relations commission and on a number of occasions we have nearly come to settling that claim. It is worth between $70 to $80 a week to the average ambulance officer. On each occasion when we nearly came to settling the matter an additional requirement was demanded by the ambulance union. When you look at the timetable, the time frame and the type of requirements being asked, there is no doubt the union is being used by the Trades Hall Council for a political agenda.

The people down there regularly see Trades Hall people involved in negotiating more and more requirements from the enterprise bargaining arrangement. It is a suitable agenda for Trades Hall because it fills a political need for it to find some basis for its work in Victoria.

Since the negotiations started work bans have been applied by the union, and I repeat that that is part of a political agenda led by the Trades Hall Council. Those work bans are impacting on the ability of the service to provide the standards of response that one would normally expect from the Metropolitan Ambulance Service. Officers are refusing to wear pagers, refusing to answer secal calls, withdrawing overtime opportunities and ordering members to report in sick.

There is no doubt the work bans are affecting the service able to be provided. To hear Mr Morris suggest today that work bans are enhancing patient care gives us some idea of the absurdity of what is currently happening in this dispute.

There is a strong political agenda behind the industrial negotiations. The government’s offer remains open. It will pay those ambulance officers a 10 per cent wage increase provided all work bans are lifted indefinitely. The sooner the ambulance union realises that in the interests of its own members it should accept that offer, get back to doing the good work for which it is recognised and regarded and get away from the agenda that Trades Hall is holding it to and pulling it by the nose and
the sooner the system is put in place with the reforms that have been introduced to provide the level of services that the people of Victoria expect, the better.

**Crown Casino: expansion**

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — Does the Treasurer agree with the Premier’s statement that if the government were to postpone a decision on Crown’s application for an expansion of the new casino while fraud allegations are being investigated by the Victoria Police the effect of this would be, to quote the Premier, to stop the construction of the casino dead in the ground right now?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — Yes.

**Ambulance services: industrial dispute**

Mrs McGill (Oakleigh) — Will the Minister for Health inform the house how the current industrial action being taken by the Ambulance Employees Union is affecting patient care?

Mrs Tehan (Minister for Health) — The current industrial action being taken by the union is without doubt impacting on the ability of metropolitan and country ambulance services to provide optimum patient care. In Ballarat the situation has arisen that sabotage has taken place, which the police are investigating. There have been orders from the union that members call in on sick leave. Evidence has been given in the commission over the past couple of days that officers have not renewed the batteries in their pagers and have blamed the system for the paging system not working.

Not only are patients and the people of Victoria being put at risk but also there is an undermining of the confidence of the general public in our ambulance system. There is an agenda by some core people to bring down the CAD/AVL system to which I referred in answer to an earlier question. The government is determined that it will provide for the people of Victoria the most advanced computer-aided dispatch system and will ensure that it continues to grow with the resources that have been made available to it through the additional millions of dollars that have been provided over the past three years and with the additional 10 ambulances that have been placed in the system over the past year as well as the additional trained MICA staff and paramedics who are an integral part of the continual upgrading of and improvement to the system.

Hudson Conway: fraud allegations

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Treasurer to his comments in the house last week when he said that it was not appropriate for the government to seek access to documents which fully detail the fraud and blackmail allegations against Hudson Conway. Will he explain why it would not be appropriate to at least ask Hudson Conway to provide this information to the cabinet, given that the Treasurer says Hudson Conway has voluntarily made the information available to the Casino and Gaming Authority and the Victoria Police and that Mr Lloyd Williams says on the public record that he is committed to providing a full and frank disclosure of these matters to all relevant authorities?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — Lord knows how the Labor Party would do business if we ever have the misfortune to have another Labor government.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr STOCKDALE — What a pity it is illegal to bet on election outcomes — we could all get rich!

The Leader of the Opposition will recall that last week I said that the SECV shell proposed to make an application to the court to be released from the possible embargo on the release of documents discovered in the course of discovery proceedings and litigation for the purpose of conveying information to the police and to the Casino and Gaming Authority.

The police and the authority have the proper investigative powers — the statutory and other legal responsibility — for investigating such matters. They are investigating them.

I understand the material has been released to them and they are conducting their own inquiries in relation to the matter. They are the appropriate authorities, and it would be inappropriate for the government to launch into some collateral inquiry of its own.

**BLF: funds**

Dr Dean (Berwick) — Will the Minister for Industry and Employment inform the house of the government’s position in relation to the Prime Minister’s comments that the funds of the former
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

ASSEMBLY Tuesday, 10 October 1995

BLF should be handed over to the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU)?

Mr GUDE (Minister for Industry and Employment) — Some honourable members will recall that in 1985 this Parliament passed legislation for the derecognition of the Builders Labourers Federation. As the Deputy Premier says, the derecognition legislation was introduced by the then Labor government and supported by the then opposition. It was subsequently supported by the federal government in derecognition proceedings in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, and the Builders Labourers Federation was ultimately deregistered.

The government at the time appointed an administrator, Dr Ian Sharp, a former registrar of the federal industrial commission, a person who all honourable members would feel was not only adequate but a proper choice for the task of administering those funds.

On 24 August of this year there was an attempt by the CFMEU to gain access to the funds being held in trust for former members of the BLF. I make the point at the outset that the action taken by the two governments, state and federal, at the time was against the activities of a union that was effectively destroying the building and construction industry not only in Victoria but throughout Australia. The freezing of those funds was to prevent certain union officials from misusing them.

At that time there were accusations that, for example, Norm Gallagher had used the funds to build himself a house, and all sorts of other claims were made at that time. The funds were then held in trust for the former members of the union. Chief Justice Wilcox in a decision on 28 September said that he believed the cash side of the amount being held in trust should be transferred to the CFMEU. The union was, however, not to spend too much of it because the chief justice was aware that the government and former members of the BLF had sought a stay of action, and in the event that there was a successful outcome — he was already doubting his own decision — those moneys would need to be returned.

There must be elections in the wind because only a day or so ago the Prime Minister discovered blue-collar workers in this country and decided to wade into this exercise. He said he will do all he can to ensure that the CFMEU receives not only the cash but also the property.

I find that an intriguing situation because at this very point the CFMEU is breaching accord mark-8 with its 15 to 25 per cent wage claim and so-called pattern bargaining program going on at the national level. I believe that what the Prime Minister was saying was Keating-speak for ‘Give me your votes and give me your money’. One has to question whether the Prime Minister is trying to assist in the transfer of those funds to the union as a political payback.

It seems that perhaps corporate dollars have not been coming into the ALP coffers. That is hardly surprising when one considers the damage that has been done by the Prime Minister and his government to the people of Australia and corporate Australia. Of course they will not donate. So back he trots to his trade union mates — never mind the fact that they are breaching the accord, that he sought to deregister the union and that he professes to have a strong building industry — and says in Keating-speak, ‘No, give me your votes and give me the money’.

Hudson Conway: fraud allegations

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Treasurer to his comments in the house last week when he said the government had received certain advice that it would be inappropriate for members of cabinet to see documents that detail fraud and blackmail allegations against Hudson Conway. Will the Treasurer make a copy of this advice available to the house, and, if not, why not?

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — The Leader of the Opposition again misrepresents the advice I have given to the house. I said there were certain documents that had been revealed in the course of discovery in the legal proceedings and that those documents are subject to a requirement that they not be used for any purpose other than the proceedings of the case.

Mr Brumby — You referred to advice on that matter.

Mr STOCKDALE — Do you want to give the answer, too?

Mr Kennett — He always does!

Mr STOCKDALE — Advice has been conveyed to me by the administrator of the shell and orally by the counsel advising him to confirm that fact and to
indicate that, in the absence of consent of the owner, it would not be appropriate for the administrator of the shell to disclose to anybody who was not the subject of a court order, freeing the administrator from the constraint imposed by the documents having been unearthed in the course of discovery.

Community Support Fund: distribution

Mr TREASURE (Gippsland East) — Will the Minister for Community Services inform the house of new specific Community Support Fund initiatives for Victorian families that are at risk?

Mr JOHN (Minister for Community Services) — I am very pleased to announce this afternoon significant funding initiatives from the Community Support Fund to help Victorian families in crisis. The government will provide $21.479 million — almost $21.5 million — from the fund over the next three years to assist families in crisis.

I emphasise that this money is being made available in addition to the $27 million already allocated from the Community Support Fund since this government came to office. It is also in addition to the $780 million that is spent as part of the recurrent budget in community and welfare services. This is a very significant announcement and commitment by the Kennett government. I hope the decent and honourable members opposite will support this allocation of funding.

An amount of $16.2 million will go for family counselling. It will go towards computer and information referral networks and services to the very important section of our community who come from non-English-speaking backgrounds. A total of $2.9 million will go for financial counselling, and there will be $1.5 million for problem gambling services. In addition, $840 000 will be allocated for a parent help line for families in crisis.

This is a huge boost to funding. Most of it will be provided and distributed through the non-government community and church agencies that will be asked to be involved in providing the various services I have outlined. This significant announcement shows the huge commitment of the Kennett government to people in need. As I have said, a significant proportion of it will go towards problem gambling services.

Previously, $5.9 million was part of the $27 million package to support services for families with children under 18 years of age to deal with parenting and family crises. An amount of $5.5 million was previously supplied for support and respite care for families with young children under six years with severe disabilities, and $3.7 million for support services for victims of child abuse and neglect.

The government has made a considerable commitment to providing problem gambling services. Not much is known around the world about problem gambling and its incidence. International research indicates that about 1 per cent of the population is affected by problem gambling. It is a very small proportion of people, but nevertheless it is a very important proportion because those individuals and families are damaged and we need to assist them by having the services in place so they can get the counselling and referral services they need. The funding being announced will enhance problem gambling services as well as supplying support and other services for families in crisis.

At a recent conference in London a few weeks ago Professor Mark Dickerson, who was the keynote speaker, said that Victoria, Australia, was leading the way with its problem gambling services. One of the most distinguished academics in this area in the world says Victoria is leading the way!

In conclusion, as part of this additional money, $1.5 million is allocated to research, which is a very important part of the problem gambling issue. We hope to track the cases and do the research. The Premier met with church leaders yesterday and they agreed to become involved in the research project and assist in setting the terms of reference for the project and provide any other information to assist the government and the community in solving some of these problems. The government is pleased to have the churches and the community involved. As I said, the funding for the programs I have outlined today will be made to non-government community and church agencies to help with these problems.

Crown Casino: expansion

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — Will the Treasurer give the house a guarantee that during the past three months there have been no changes to the plans for the design and construction of the permanent casino and that all construction currently taking place is fully consistent with the plans referred to in the Casino (Management Agreement) Act?
Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — The casino licensee has a responsibility to construct the casino building in accordance with the approved plans. It is not my responsibility to go down there and measure every brick that is put in place. I am not in a position to give the guarantee the Leader of the Opposition requests.

Office of Public Prosecutions

Mr PATERSON (South Barwon) — I refer the Attorney-General to recent comments made by the former Premier John Cain that criminals will escape prosecution because of the changes to the Office of Public Prosecutions. Will she advise the house of the effectiveness and efficiency of the Office of Public Prosecutions since the new legislation came into operation?

Mrs WADE (Attorney-General) — The Honourable John Cain made a number of dire predictions about the outcome of the public prosecutions legislation. I take this opportunity to ensure that everyone is in full possession of the facts. John Cain suggested that as a result of the new legislation we will have crooks cheering from the sidelines. I would not like to give that sort of comfort to any crooks and I advise them to restrain themselves because Mr Cain's predictions are far from the truth.

There is no doubt that the Public Prosecutions Act 1994 has brought real benefits to the criminal justice system in the interests of the people of Victoria. Prosecutions are now being carried out more efficiently and effectively than they were in the past and at a much reduced cost. I stress that that is not because of a reduced budget. The budget of the Office of Public Prosecutions has not been reduced, but the cost of running the office has been significantly reduced.

The enormous payments that were being made to outside barristers were at the heart of the financial difficulties experienced by the office prior to the 1994 legislation. As a result of reducing the cost, we have been able to redirect those savings in a way that has made the office more efficient. I shall come back to that in a moment.

The way in which the costs have been reduced is by recruiting some additional Crown prosecutors. The office advertised for more Crown prosecutors at both junior and senior levels.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mrs WADE — You might like to apply for a job! You'd do better down there than you're doing up here! The response to the advertisements were overwhelming and we now have — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The level of interjections on both sides of the house is too high.

Mrs WADE — There was an overwhelming response to the advertisements and we now have 19 Crown prosecutors who are prosecuting a large number of cases now taken by the office. We are no longer paying up to $4000 a day — day in, day out and in many cases over months or years — to support members of the private bar. As a result we have had a reduction of approximately 18 per cent in the cost of cases prosecuted. I assure honourable members that there has been no deterioration in the outcome of those cases. The record this year shows an equal highest number of convictions recorded of any year in the past nine years.

I shall mention where the savings have gone. Some have gone into acquiring additional computer equipment costing $600 000. The Solicitor for Public Prosecutions, who came from the commonwealth DPP's office, was horrified at the level of computer support available to prosecutors. The old system is now being replaced by an up-to-date system. Better library materials have been obtained and there is a better staffing structure.

The Office of Public Prosecutions has now taken over all committals at the Melbourne Magistrates Court which is something the government has wanted to do for some time but the money was not available in the past to do that without a transfer from the police budget. That is being done as a result of the savings generated by the new prosecution system.

In conclusion, we have also set up a witness assistance scheme at the Office of Public Prosecutions to assist victims and other witnesses who come before the court, to explain court processes, sentencing, charges and to offer support and link up with other support agencies.

Assisting people who come before the criminal justice system through no fault of their own is a step in the right direction. I am happy to invite the Honourable John Cain to come down to see what I believe is the greatest step forward in the public
prosecutions system since he established the office of the DPP in 1982.

PETITION

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

Scallop dredging in Port Phillip Bay

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

The petition of the undersigned citizens of Victoria respectfully showeth that we object to scallop dredging in Port Phillip Bay

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

By Mrs Wilson (128 signatures)

Laid on table.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Governor's pleasure detainees

Mr LEIGH (Mordialloc) presented report on review of legislation under which persons are detained at the Governor's pleasure, together with appendices, minority report, extracts from proceedings and minutes of evidence.

Laid on table.

Ordered that report, appendices, minority report and extracts from proceedings be printed.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 11

Mr PERTON (Doncaster) presented Alert Digest No. 11 of 1995 on:

- Road Transport (Dangerous Goods) Bill
- Government Employee Housing Authority (Repeal) Bill
- Dangerous Goods (Amendment) Bill
- Vocational Education and Training (Amendment) Bill

PAPERS

Laid on table by Acting Clerk:

- Architects Registration Board — Report for the year 1994-95
- Building Act 1993 — Building Code of Australia 1990 — Amendment No. 8
- Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 — Orders pursuant to sections 17D and 17DA giving approval to the granting of leases (two papers)
- Land Conservation Council — Report for the year 1994-95
- Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978 — Summary of Variations notified between 1 June and 30 September 1995 — Ordered to be printed
- Planning and Environment Act 1987 — Notices of approval of amendments to the following planning schemes:
  - Benalla City Planning Scheme — No. L32
  - Benalla Shire Planning Scheme — No. L15
  - Cranbourne Planning Scheme — Nos L121, L124
  - Diamond Valley Planning Scheme — No. L56
  - Flinders Planning Scheme — No. L111
  - Hastings Planning Scheme — No. L84 Part 1
  - Lillydale Planning Scheme — No. L120
  - Melbourne Planning Scheme — No. L160
  - Moe Planning Scheme — No. L33
  - Mornington Planning Scheme — No. L59
  - Morwell Planning Scheme — No. L47
  - Ringwood Planning Scheme — No. L46
  - Yarra Planning Scheme — No. L2
- Rural Finance Corporation — Report for the year 1994-95
Statutory Rules under the following acts:

- Legal Profession Practice Act 1958 — S.R No. 127
- Road Safety Act 1986 — S.R No. 128
- Supreme Court Act 1986 — S.R No. 129

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 —

- Minister's exemption certificate in relation to Amendment 8 of the Building Code of Australia 1990

The following proclamation fixing an operative date was laid upon the table by the Acting Clerk pursuant to an order of the house dated 27 October 1992:


**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Program**

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, 12 October 1995:

- Appropriation (1995-96, No. 1) Bill
- Appropriation (Parliament 1995-96, No. 1) Bill
- Competition Policy Reform (Victoria) Bill
- Local Government (Elections) Bill.

Motion agreed to.

**APPROPRIATION (1995-96, No. 1) BILL**

Second reading

Debate resumed from 5 October; motion of Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer).
Tuesday, 10 October 1995

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confidence. With my background I don't have a deep understanding of those sorts of contractual relationships, so when the opportunity was available to me recently to ask the head of the National Crime Authority, Mr Tom Sherman, how this matter should be approached in terms of public policy, I was intrigued and fascinated to find that he did not defend the concept of commercial-in-confidence contracts and drew my attention to the provisions of the Californian legislation where there is no such thing as commercial in confidence when it comes to contracts between the state of California and its various providers of services and goods and its employees.

It is worth having a look at the California Public Records Act which makes secret terms and contracts, including employment contracts, illegal. Indeed the opening paragraph — paragraph 6250 — of this chapter of the Californian public code, known as the California Public Records Act, states:

In enacting this chapter, the legislature, mindful of the rights of individuals to privacy, finds and declares that access to information concerning the conduct of the people's business is a fundamental and necessary right of every person in this state.

That is, the state of California. Only trade secrets are protected, and then in only very narrow categories are they protected. They are very carefully defined to prevent the improper use of the protection of trade secrets.

The protections I have been able to identify in the Californian code relate to pesticides — and one can understand why it is important to protect pesticide production techniques and formulations — and air pollution, where there is a quite detailed definition of the trade secrets that are subject to protection. However, that narrow protection in itself confirms that only a very narrow category of information in contracts between the Californian government and its contractors is protected.

I shall refer to one section of the Californian code in this respect. Section 6254.7(d) states in part:

(a) 'Trade secrets', as used in this section, may include, but are not limited to, any formula, plan, pattern, process, tool, mechanism, compound, procedure, production data, or compilation of information which is not patented, which is known only to certain individuals within a commercial concern who are using it to fabricate, produce, or compound an article of trade or a service having commercial value and which gives its user an opportunity to obtain a business advantage over competitors who do not know or use it.

Having regard to the fact that that section relates only to air pollution, one can see that there is a very narrow limitation of the information which is protected from public disclosure under the California Public Records Act. The protection does not extend to the rates of payment except that they are quarantined for relatively short periods — in some cases 12 months; in other cases 3 years. But in Victoria these matters could be kept secret forever; there is no obligation, no legal requirement and no principle of government which allows these matters to be viewed by the public or to be scrutinised by Parliament to ensure that they are open and above board. In fact, a huge range of Victorian government contracts including many employment contracts for highly paid personnel appointed by ministers, contracts for the grand prix, contracts for the management of the state's veterinary laboratories, media services and a host of other services, are termed 'commercial in confidence' and hidden from public view.

I refer honourable members to the comments of the honourable members for Northcote and Footscray who outlined a large number of examples, and I shall refresh our memory on a few of them. One is the contract which existed between KNF Advertising and the Urban Land Authority and others in association with that authority. As a matter of fundamental public importance that contract raised a whole host of issues in addition to its simple terms, and yet it is not available for public scrutiny.

It is worth refreshing our memories of just how extraordinary the powers are in the Australian Grand Prix Act 1994 so far as they protect the contracts relating to the grand prix. Section 49 states:

(1) Despite anything to the contrary in the Freedom of Information Act 1982, that Act does not apply to a document, whether created before, on or after the commencement of this section, to the extent that the document is, or discloses information about a contract between the Corporation —

that is, the Grand Prix Corporation — or a company referred to in sub-section (2) and one or more of —

(a) the bodies, whether corporate or unincorporate, partnerships or trusts —
(i) granting the right to hold a round of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile Formula One World Championship; or

(ii) responsible for the organisation of, or granting the right to hold, an approved motor sport event;

(b) bodies, whether corporate or unincorporate, partnerships or trusts owned by, or associates of, a body, partnership or trust referred to in paragraph (a);

(c) a person not ordinarily resident in Australia in concert with whom a body, partnership or trust referred to in paragraph (a) or (b) is acting in relation to that contract.

Subsection (2) identifies the companies as Melbourne Grand Prix Promotions Pty Ltd, ACN 059 230 278 and Melbourne Major Events Company Ltd, ACN 050 270 089. Those powers are absolutely extraordinary. They prevent the Victorian public knowing anything about the contracts between the state of Victoria and the people actually involved in the conduct of the Australian Grand Prix, and this is an area where government funds are being used for the construction of facilities and where there is apparently some sort of government underwriting or guarantee as to the success of the event. There can be no rational basis for restricting this information from public knowledge. It has been asserted that if this information were available it would jeopardise the capacity of not only Victoria but the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) to negotiate other grand prix venues around the world. We know now that that is not the case.

Last week the honourable member gave the example of Hungary where, although the contract figure was disclosed, it did not cause Hungary to lose the grand prix venue. We must recognise that by being party to such secrecy we are entering into a conspiracy between the FIA in the person of Bernie Eccleston and communities around the world, every one of which was potentially disadvantaged if Victoria agreed to abide by this unnecessary restriction on information about the contractual arrangements between the state of Victoria and the FIA. There can be no rational basis for denying that information to the public and the effect of its denial here and in other places is simply to give an unfair bargaining advantage to the FIA, to take advantage of taxpayers in every country in which it successfully negotiates for a formula one event to be conducted.

We have other examples of similar secret contracts which cannot be defended on any public interest argument. We have the Vicroads plant and equipment sale and lease back. There can be no rational basis for keeping that information secret. We also now know of the secret agreements concerning the casino. Again, it has never been explained how it is in the public interest that this information should be denied to the people of Victoria. The general term 'commercially confidential' is thrown around but, as the Chairman of the National Crime Authority pointed out, there is no proper basis for that. Every time such a secret agreement exists it gives rise to the opportunity for corruption, as we have seen in Queensland,Western Australia and other parts of the world.

That sort of secrecy is not confined to specific legislation such as the Australian Grand Prix Act. There is a general provision in the Victorian Freedom of Information Act and I refer to section 34, which states:

(1) A document is an exempt document if its disclosure under this Act would disclose information acquired by an agency or a Minister from a business, commercial or financial undertaking, and —

(a) the information relates to trade secrets or other matters of a business, commercial or financial nature; or

(b) the disclosure of the information under this Act would be likely to expose the undertaking to disadvantage.

(2) In deciding whether disclosure of information would expose an undertaking to disadvantage, for the purposes of paragraph (b) of subsection (1) —

this relates only to paragraph (b) of subsection (1) —

an agency or minister may take account of any of the following considerations ...

The point I make is that that qualification does not apply to paragraph (a) of subsection (1) so that virtually any information which is of a business, commercial or financial nature is automatically protected without right of review under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. Again, where is the rational basis for that? It is in stark contrast to the provisions of the Californian legislation and one cannot imagine why there should be such a difference between Victoria and California — the land of the free, the home of the brave and the home of free enterprise.

In California, these contracts would all be open to public scrutiny and, indeed, it is worth recalling that
the Republic of California, as it is technically known, is one of the biggest state economies of the USA. It proudly boasts that the regional economy of California alone is the sixth largest economy in the world. So we are discussing a significant entity, a vibrant economic entity that finds no need for commercial confidential secrecy of contracts between the government of the state and the people who provide goods and services and who are employed by it.

All honourable members would acknowledge the United States as the home of free enterprise. If free enterprise can flourish there with virtually all contract terms open to public scrutiny, it could do so in Victoria. What would be the disadvantage to Victoria? I know of no disadvantage. I have not heard anyone argue that there is a disadvantage. The advantage would be that Victorians could rest comfortably knowing that Victoria’s contracts were open, frank and honest and did not provide the opportunity for the festering of corrupt practices as seen in other states of Australia but which fortunately has been relatively rare in Victoria.

Victoria should heed the lessons of the royal commissions into corruption in Queensland and Western Australia, which have highlighted the importance of open processes to clean government. That can be achieved in Victoria if there is a move towards a general, absolute right of public access to contracts between the state and its various suppliers and employees.

My second point also concerns the way Victoria accounts for its commercial activities. A totally inadequate level of information is available in budget papers, such as those for 1995-96, regarding the effect on the total Victorian economy of major projects, whether it be the grand prix, City Link, the privatisation of rail services or the restructuring of the electricity industry, to give a few examples.

There is a generally good understanding that the grand prix will be of net benefit to Victoria and the Victorian economy even though there may be a net cost to the budget. But that information is not readily available to the house and certainly not generally. The total impact on Victoria rather than only the cost to the budget of major government decisions should be disclosed to the public. Victorians have a right to know whether they will save by paying less in taxes than they will pay in charges for privatised projects such as City Link. Nothing in the budget papers throws light on the overall cost to the people and the economy.

Many Victorians accept that there will be a net gain from the grand prix even though there is a substantial cost to the state budget. Most people would expect a full analysis to reveal a job creation and tourism benefit. The same principle should be applied to all major projects so that the community can see whether it would pay more for a project if it were carried out by the government rather than the private sector.

In the case of City Link, it has to be proven that the private construction and operation of a toll road will be at less cost to the Victorian economy than if the same transport needs were met in the tried and true manner used throughout advanced nations in modern times. Mr Acting Speaker, with your background you would understand that the capital investment will have to be serviced whether City Link is privately or publicly constructed and operated and whether it is funded from borrowings or equity. In any of those cases, a return will be expected sufficient to meet the cost of borrowings or dividends. The difference between those two is often not great. Even publicly sourced equity funds would be expected to return a net benefit to the total Victorian economy.

Knowing that the cost of collecting the West Gate Bridge toll was 43 per cent of revenue, Victorians need to know what the cost of collection and other possible City Link inefficiencies will be. So far those crucial facts have been withheld from those who will be asked to pay for the project through tolls, hidden taxes and whatever compensation provisions are in the contracts they have not been allowed to see.

The limited analyses of such projects falsely treat the public and private sectors as being distinct, but the public sector economy is not a totally divorced economy that acts in isolation from the private sector. The public sector is integral to the total Victorian economy and social structure. The public sector is central to the way Victorian society regulates its economic and other activities, yet City Link and other projects are treated as though there were a total divorce between the public and the private sectors — as though they were totally disconnected, as though one were not relevant to the other and as though in all cases the private sector were able to do things better than the public sector. That is certainly not the case.

There is an opportunity for further reform in economic analysis and for reform in the way budget information is presented, not only to the Parliament but to the people of Victoria. That would encourage
better decision making by the government, the Parliament and ultimately the public of Victoria.

If the public knows the total cost of a project and its total benefits, it may well be prepared to pay higher taxes rather than pay even higher charges by way of tolls, for example. The public may decide an evenly distributed tax burden is preferable to an unevenly, inequitably distributed range of private sector goods and services charges. But with the budget information available at the moment the complete picture cannot be seen. The public cannot know whether the transport needs City Link is supposed to address would be better addressed by a public sector system or whether operating through the private sector will have genuine advantages for the total Victorian economy.

There will be those who would argue that the private sector is more efficient, but that has not proven to be the case in all or even the majority of cases. In some cases private sector enterprises have been more efficient than public sector enterprises. However, the failure of some private sector enterprises shows that some of them can be less efficient and less effective than the best public sector enterprises. It is not an absolute distinction, and those who suggest there is a total dichotomy between the public and the private sector fail to look at the evidence and to accept the realities of life in this country and other countries.

Whole-of-state budgeting must be introduced for projects such as City Link, the Australian grand prix and the restructuring of the electricity industry, to give a few examples, so Victorians can truly know who will pay, how much will be paid and who will benefit from each project. As I said, that information will give the opportunity for better decision making by government, the Parliament and ultimately the public on the quality of public administration in Victoria.

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — I am pleased to support the Appropriation (1995-96 No. 1) Bill. At the outset I draw attention to Terry McCrann's article in the Herald Sun today. The heading at page 2 reads, 'The real question of our destiny', and the article raises a number of fundamental issues which may serve to impact upon the longer term welfare and destiny of Australians. The federal Labor government has ignored a number of the more important issues that presently confront and affect the national and Victorian economies, and I refer to the recent merger between CRA and RTZ. There is also the overseas sale of a number of national icons such as Nylex and Petersville, which are national brand names.

Earlier this year Geoffrey Blainey remarked that Australia was currently in a process of economic decline. That is corroborated in part by other commentators who have suggested that we lack a manufacturing inventory. There is the example of a country such as Sweden, which has a population of some 7 million to 8 million people. It has been successful in marketing international brand names such as Ericsson, Saab, Volvo and Orrefors. Australia, which has a population of some 18 million people, does not have the breadth of marketing exposure or market penetration that a country the size of Sweden has. What are the reasons behind it? One could relate it to distance, and other factors would include Australia's manufacturing environment. However, it is in this particular context that the Victorian budget needs to be considered and evaluated further.

At a state level and within the domain of my own electorate we have had the example of a number of significant state companies, some with national markets, being sold to overseas interests. Boral Elevators, the successor in name to Johns and Perry Lifts, was recently sold to an American company. Boral Elevators and its predecessor entities were Australian owned, had been operating for more than 140 years and the profits of their activities, operating in a market controlled by a few companies, were to remain within Australia. Although there will be some reinvestment in research and development and other activity, profits from here on will be repatriated overseas.

There is the further example of Spring Valley Fruit Juices. That company started a generation or so ago and was sold a couple of years ago to Campbell soups. Earlier this year there was the example of the company Ronstan, the company which makes sailing hardware and rigging for boats. That technology is also used in the building industry and its products have penetrated into international markets, but early this year it was bought out by a United Kingdom company, Chemring.

Although there may be some positive aspects to that transfer of ownership in terms of investment in Australian capital and plant, at the end of the day it will result in a repatriation of profit out of Australia toward overseas shareholders.

There are broader examples, and one need only look at Edgell-Birdseye in Tasmania, which was sold to
the Simplot group in the United States. There is the example of Petersville being sold to Nestlé, and of Herbert Adams, another icon, being sold to the Simplot group. At the end of the day, there go the profits. Once there has been a conclusion to the investment in Australian plant and equipment to capitalise upon domestic markets, the profits will be repatriated overseas. That is the magnitude of the problem we are currently confronted with.

What has the Victorian government been doing about these wider circumstances? We can look at the public sector reforms that have taken place in local government, Workcover and the electricity industry. There has been much protest from the opposition benches about the privatisation of the SEC. However, the opposition has failed to acknowledge that the move has received the support of the federal government.

Within recent weeks the Public First campaign has been waged outside electorate offices of coalition members — not all that well patronised, I understand. Nonetheless, the commonwealth government has proposed to sell or has sold such entities as the Commonwealth Bank, Qantas, CSL Ltd, the Housing Loans Insurance Corporation, ANL Limited, the Macleod hospital, the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation and Brisbane Airport land. I point out that the Labor Party has already sold the defence services home loan scheme, the Williamstown Dockyards, the lease on Chifley Square, the Tokyo Embassy, the commonwealth government’s centre in Melbourne, the commonwealth’s phosphate rock stockpile, the commonwealth’s accommodation and catering services and a range of other government-owned assets or assets owned by statutory corporations. Where have the protests been in relation to those particular transactions? They have been nowhere to be seen.

The Victorian government has had a wide responsibility to implement a range of reforms to try to redress some of the problems people such as Terry McCrann and Geoffrey Blainey have argued will impact on Australia’s long-term destiny to the extent that government sector reform can produce long-term changes.

In the past three years there have been a number of landmark reforms. Unemployment has dropped from 11.8 per cent at the time the government came to office to around 8.7 per cent in June. There has been an increase in private sector employment at a rate of 11 per cent compared to 1 per cent for the rest of Australia. Productivity has increased 6 per cent in Victoria compared to 3 per cent for the rest of Australia. Business investment in Victoria currently leads the rest of Australia. As a state and a community we can take a great deal of pride in the reforms brought about by the Victorian government to attract overseas investment to this state, which in turn will provide jobs in the longer term.

For the first time in years the budget has achieved a sustainable surplus. Capital expenditure has increased and the debt spiral has ceased. Victoria’s credit rating has been upgraded on a number of occasions and there has been a demonstrable improvement in a range of government services.

In more specific terms what has the current budget achieved? For the first time since budget statistics commenced in 1961 the state government has recorded a surplus on both the current account and the overall budget in the same year. The surplus on the current account is some $932 million and the surplus on the overall budget amounts to some $215 million. This represents the attainment of the first objective of the government — that is, the budget being in a position of sustainable surplus.

In terms of the challenge ahead for 1995-96, the projection is that there will be an overall deficit of some $344 million. The estimated current account surplus is projected to be some $706 million. The Treasurer stated that at last the people of Victoria have seen the end of the haemorrhaging of the state finances, but more work needs to be done.

An overview of 1995-96 shows that we are in the fortunate position where no new taxes will introduced and no taxes will be increased. That will continue to help businesses compete as a consequence of being able to maintain their overheads at a steady level. Some 41 300 jobs are projected to be established in Victoria in the 1995-96 financial period.

The unemployment rate is projected to drop further from 8.7 per cent in June. One must remember that the unemployment rate was 11.8 per cent when we came to office and rose to 12.6 per cent within 12 months, but now it is around 8.7 per cent and is expected to go even lower during the next financial year to about 8.25 per cent. These are real jobs in industry and will make a significant difference for people because they offer a sustainable future.

There is also the removal of the lower cap applying to land tax assessments, a concession of some
$7 million to business. These are the businesses competing in a global economy. Already in my electorate alone companies such as Boral and Spring Valley, and household brand names such as Petersville, Birds Eye and Herbert Adams are being sold off overseas at the present time. But the Victorian government is committed to reducing the tax burden on those companies that are struggling to compete effectively in overseas markets. The government should be congratulated on its clear vision and objective.

During the next financial period there is a projected economic growth rate of some 3.5 per cent, which is much healthier than in 1991-92. The state deficit levy was abolished from 1 July 1995 as a consequence of the reversal of the current account deficit where more than $2 billion was required in borrowings to fund the day-to-day operating expenses of the government.

We have the example in Canberra where the federal government has spent some $70 billion more over the past five to eight years than it has earned through taxation. How has it made up the shortfall? Through the sale of assets such as Qantas and the Commonwealth Bank. That is an absolute disgrace! The Victorian government in the longer term has the economic rigour and discipline to achieve a current account surplus so that what we earn in tax revenue will meet what we are paying the Victorian public service to provide a range of services to benefit Victorians.

The total funding for concessions in the 1995-96 period rises 5.5 per cent from a base level of $197.5 million to $208.4 million as part of the government’s budget commitment to providing extra support for low-income earners. There is $66 million available for electricity and gas concessions, $46 million for public transport concessions and $96.4 million for municipal rates, water and sewerage concessions.

These are just a number of the more important points in relation to the Victorian budget, but it is important to emphasise that there are ongoing concerns that the government must continue to address. These problems include the state debt, which increased in the 10-year period of the Labor government from $11 billion to some $33 billion. It is being reduced through a range of stringent economic measures and the proceeds of electricity privatisation.

I turn to Victoria’s comparative competitive position with states such Queensland and New South Wales. We have a higher level of taxation which in turn acts as a disincentive to business in this state. I have in my electorate a company that has been asked to move interstate because it is one of the fastest growing private companies in Australia. A couple of years ago it was ranked 89th among the fastest growing private companies in Australia and was one of only six such companies in the top 100 engaged in manufacturing, and one of only two such companies engaged in manufacturing in Victoria. It had offers to move interstate where there are comparative cost advantages because it is competing in international markets. That company must look at how it can keep its costs under control to enable its product to have a greater prospect of selling overseas. The Victorian government has provided strong support to that company, which I will outline in greater detail shortly.

One must understand the difficulties that exist in a marketplace that provides real jobs for Victorians. A further problem that the government must address as a consequence of having such a high debt is the exposure of the state to interest rate increases. At this point one might draw a comparison such as the one that has been made between public and private sector debt in Australia and overseas and realise the pressure that has been placed upon interest rates, which has been clearly acknowledged by advisers to the Labor government. Mr Fitzgerald, I understand, recently verified the correlation between debt and high interest rates. It is something that the federal Treasurer has yet to acknowledge publicly.

The budget will provide strong assistance in my electorate over the next 12 months in particular. Drainage works are being undertaken in the southern end of the electorate to alleviate flooding problems, and $10 million of capital expenditure has been committed. Some $1.4 million of major maintenance money is being directed towards the Sandringham Secondary College; that is long overdue. The money had not been provided during the decade of Labor rule but is now being provided to upgrade classrooms to bring them up to an acceptable standard.

Some $920 000 is being committed for redevelopment and reconstruction of the Beaumaris Primary School, which was damaged by fire last year. The tender process is reaching finality, and construction work is due to commence on a number of new classrooms, a staff room and other school facilities as well as computer wiring in the
not-too-distant future. This involves the expenditure of significant government funds raised through taxation, but at another level of expenditure there are a range of other government grants that will assist and benefit people in my electorate, such as the $5000 that has been allocated for the Black Rock Life Saving Club. The club will use the funds to acquire a boat and develop water programs that will assist both the lifesaving club and young people who may be at risk in the wider community.

The club is managed magnificently by the president, Mr Terry Peterson. It is one of the strongest lifesaving clubs in Victoria today due to the commitment of a group of volunteers who spend many hours directing the activities of the club, providing training programs and training people for beach patrol work during the summer.

Money has also been provided for local libraries. A special funding grant was given to the Bayside library to enable staff to be trained in the use of the Internet and to keep abreast of developments in technology that are taking place at the present time. A local company in Sandringham has earned $15 million worth of export income, which has underpinned a lot of the work of the Directorate of School Education in the provision of computer facilities to schools as part of the Schools of the Future program, and more recently has become involved in the innovative satellite program utilising the Internet, which was recently launched by the Minister for Education and the Premier.

Under the Labor government a range of services at the Sandringham Hospital was mooted for closure, and more recently the hospital was the subject of internal health department work which tended to suggest that the hospital faced an uncertain future. Following the Metropolitan Hospitals Planning Board’s report which had as an objective the better utilisation of the health dollar, and the appointment of the Southern Network Board, the chairman of the board recently announced at a public meeting at the Monash Medical Centre that he was confident about the future provision of accident and emergency services at the Sandringham Hospital.

This was magnificent news for the people of Sandringham, as was the announcement that there would be an allied role for the use of the hospital’s infrastructure for the provision of medical and surgical services down the track, but these are issues being worked through at present. It is hoped the benefit of the network will be a better use and distribution of resources to meet the health needs of the wider community in a fairly diverse geographic region.

In the area of transport government funding has been committed to upgrading the Sandringham rail line, which now provides one of the best services in Victoria. On average trains leave for the city every 15 minutes. The station will be marketed as a premium station — that campaign will shortly be launched by the Minister for Public Transport. Lighting and the waiting room area have improved. The very reliable service to the city is generating a higher level of patronage, which is a magnificent return for the great work that has been undertaken on that line in recent days.

I should mention also the Nightrider bus service, an innovative service introduced by the Minister for Public Transport that has operated over the past couple of years. It is flexible and responsive to community needs. The program is committed to further addressing transport needs in a cost-effective manner rather than conforming to any ideological or historical pattern that has applied in the past. Bearing in mind the developments that have taken place, a number of significant achievements will be delivered to the Sandringham electorate during the current financial year.

I turn now to two local companies that have received recognition for their capacity to compete in the wider marketplace. Last week the Governor of Victoria presented a number of export awards. The winner of the Ausindustry New Exporter Award was Gale Australia Pty Ltd. I have directed attention to that company on many occasions in the past couple of years. In 1976 it pioneered a unique technology for extruding high tensile resin fibres and knitted those fibres to create durable outdoor fabrics. Today the company is a recognised world leader in the research, development and manufacture of the knitted resin fibre fabrics and holds a significant number of design and intellectual patents for fabric-based products that provide innovative screening protection in outdoor environments.

The Gale company’s revenues from export activity grew by a massive 283 per cent in the financial year ending June 1995, with export sales revenues anticipated to again more than double in the current financial year. Companies like Gale Australia will be the beneficiaries of the government’s reforms in reducing the costs of electricity, local government, Workcover and so on to enable them to better compete in the international market.
In Japan Gale Australia has been awarded membership of the prestigious Japan DIY Industry Association, representing 2500 home centre stores. According to the company, it is the first overseas company of its type to be awarded that level of accreditation.

Another company based in Sandringham that received an export award last week is Ronstan International Pty Ltd, which manufactures and markets premium sailboat hardware, including rigging products, to the leisure marine and construction industry. Approximately 50 per cent of Ronstan products are exported, with 95 per cent of the materials used in the manufacturing process locally sourced. Through the versatility and aesthetic appearance of its rigging product range, Ronstan has been able to market its product in a range of overseas markets.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr THOMPSON — It is a fine product, as the honourable member for Morwell says. However, the tragedy is that it was bought out by an overseas company. I must add that the advantage of that acquisition is that the company will have the capacity to market its products to more than 140 countries throughout the world with a greater level of backing. In addition, significant capital has been invested in equipment at the Ronstan factory in Sandringham, and that will assist in its ability to continue to provide jobs locally. The downside of the situation is that at the end of the day in a number of years there will be a repatriation of profits overseas.

I conclude where I began. There is a real question about the future economic destiny of Australia. A number of our national icons have been sold overseas. The work of the Victorian government has been to create a manufacturing and economic environment that will enable Victorian companies to prosper and succeed in the international marketplace. If that does not occur we will have the sober words of Geoffrey Blainey ringing throughout this chamber for the next 15 years: that this nation is in economic decline. More work needs to be done. The Victorian government is on course. All we need is an Australian government with the intellectual merit and political will to embark on the reforms necessary to provide for the longer term future of all Victorians and Australians.

Mr DOLLIS (Richmond) — Just wait until we come to the gospel according to Jeff Kennett! When introducing the appropriation bill the Treasurer reported to Parliament that after last year's current account surplus of $332 million and an overall surplus of $215 million, the budget for 1995-96 will see a current account surplus of about $706 million, but will come in deficit overall to the tune of some $344 million.

This set of figures has been achieved at a great cost that has been borne by the Victorian community. The Premier says there is no relief in sight. The screws are still to be tightened: more jobs are to be lost and more cutbacks to take place. The Victorian public is questioning the Kennett government's priorities because a recovery is a matter of priorities.

The Treasurer's famous words, 'Read my lips: there are no new taxes', are an absolute joke. Victoria is already the highest taxed state in Australia. Since 1992 — these are fairly important figures — taxes have increased by $2 million annually, or up to $2000 a Victorian family a year. Since 1992 real expenditure on health and community services, education and transport has been cut back massively. There have been massive cutbacks in health and community services which, in real terms, have amounted to about $500 million annually. No wonder we have a crisis with ambulances and hospitals! No wonder there are hospital bed closures.

Mr W. D. McGrath interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — Which world do you live in, Minister? There is a constant and continuous health crisis because of the priorities that you and your government have placed on services to the community.

Bringing down a budget is an exercise in social responsibility. It is about the government being accountable to the community for the taxes it raises and for what it spends. It is about how and for whom it raises revenue and in what proportions it spends it.

I shall spend some time on the gospel according to Jeff Kennett! When he was overseas he made an extraordinary attack on the churches. You would have thought that while he was overseas it would have been advisable for him to keep quiet. The Premier launched a stinging attack on the church representatives who felt it necessary to speak out on issues of social responsibility, particularly their concerns about the privatisation of electricity, gambling and new taxes and charges. An article in the Herald Sun of 19 September quoted the Premier:
For church leaders ... getting involved in the political field is almost to me an indication of an acknowledgment of failure of their primary purpose ... It's why they're partly asking government for so much more all the time, because their flock doesn't provide the resources themselves — their flock has flown, they're not there.

The Premier singled out the Uniting Church when he said:

I've had a number of people who have come to me who have left the Uniting Church after some more outlandish comments that were made in terms of electricity reform.

The Premier's remarks were totally lacking in judgment. They are a sign of his poor understanding of the long history of the church. The church always has and will continue to make social and political comment. The Premier's remarks reflect his ignorance about the churches. Since the Second World War the churches have considered their task is to care for people as whole human beings. They have sought to protect and improve the living standards of the poorest and the most vulnerable in our society. Father Mark Coleridge from the Catholic Church expressed his comments in this way:

Mr Kennett shows a feeble grasp of the link between spiritual and temporal concerns ... the attempt to drive the church back into the sanctuary has never worked in the past and it will not work now. This is a government which has not always shown itself insensitive to all voices in the community, perhaps this is the fate of governments with a dangerously large majority.

The Catholic Church told the Premier that the fact that the coalition government achieved a large majority does not give him the right to try to silence those who defend the rights of those in need — the poorer sections of our society and those who do not belong to the wealthy classes. It has been the traditional role of the church to defend those people. For the Premier to criticise the role of the church is not only outrageous it also brings Parliament into disrepute.

The unfortunate remarks made by the Premier show his fundamental confusion. I point out that the struggle between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities dates back to the Middle Ages. Prior to that there was no such separation between the powers. But that struggle has no place in today's society.

The Premier's remarks are unwarranted. Since the Middle Ages the struggle between the state and the church has been essentially to preserve the church from the domination of secular powers. That struggle has been resolved. The government does not seem to understand the doctrine of the separation of powers, which has allowed religious freedom and tolerance as well as the emergence of other freedoms in a civil society. The doctrine must be understood by those who govern.

The Declaration of Religious Freedom made by the Second Vatican Council is of great significance to this issue. It states:

It follows that a wrong is done when government imposes upon its people, by force or other means, the profession or repudiation of any religion, or when it hinders men from joining or leaving a religious community.

That is a fundamental factor when governing a state and that is why the Premier should not attempt to silence the churches when they are exercising their fundamental rights. I remind the government of the Christian concept of the church and state relationship which stems from the words of Christ. If the Premier bothered to read the Bible — in the past he often suggested it as the book to read — he would find that Mark says:

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

However, the Premier is unable to understand this fundamental separation. Michael Davie interviewed the Premier and his article was reported on 21 January. In the article the Premier, to the surprise of a considerable number of people, said that the two leaders he had studied were Gandhi and Stalin. One can understand why he saw Indira Gandhi as a figure to be admired because she was a person of considerable repute, but it was amazing that, out of the blue, the Premier referred to Stalin. In examining the old encyclopaedia and history books to try to find out why the Premier found Stalin so appealing I assumed the Premier's admiration was for his strong leadership qualities, and that is precisely what I find pathetic and dangerous. It is pathetic because there are better examples of strong leadership and it is dangerous because of the type of regime Stalin led. The Premier should not be allowed to get away with remarks of that sort. The Premier spat those words around with a total disregard and lack of understanding for what they represent. In some ways Stalin was the most powerful leader we have...
had this century and I suppose the Premier in his wildest dreams would like to be equally as powerful, but he forgets that Stalin was a most violent and ruthless leader who launched a campaign of bloody terror during the mid-1930s when the world saw him purge, arrest and deport Soviet citizens to labour camps. He filled the lives of every Soviet citizen with fear. That was the weapon he used to the fullest.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I imagine you have not had the honour of attending one of the cabinet meetings to see the method the Premier uses. If fear is not a weapon, I don’t know what is! If the people of Victoria, for some unknown reason, were to give the Premier another term, he too would touch the life of every Victorian — and he will touch it in the most remarkable, ugly way. Dissent is not something — —

Mr W. D. McGrath interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — Now the agrarian socialist minister wants to talk about socialism. We can go back to your party platform, Minister, if you want to compare policies. Would you like me to pull out a few passages of your own party platform and compare it with some of the so-called socialists’ platforms?

Mr W. D. McGrath interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The Minister for Agriculture is being provocative with his interjections across the table. We seem to have strayed somewhat from the appropriation debate. Prior to the last exchange I was having some difficulty relating the remarks of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to the appropriation debate, but because of the integrity of the honourable member I was sure he was painting a background picture which was going to illuminate the house. I hope the illumination is not too far away!

Mr DOLLIS — Mr Deputy Speaker, you cannot say that the words of Mark 12:17, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’, don’t relate to taxation! If you don’t understand that this is a direct relation to taxation, let me refer you back to the Bible where you will find before this statement the title ‘Paying taxes to Caesar’. My comments relate very much to the appropriation bill. Of course, Caesar wants only things that belong to Caesar but he does not want to give to God the things that are God’s.

I return to comments that were made by Archbishop Rayner of the Anglican Church in replying to the Premier’s comments in the media. He said:

In fact, some of the less glorious episodes in the history of the church occurred when church leaders weakly buckled under tyrannical governments and curried favour by going soft on their Christian principles ...

So if the church is to be true to its gospel, it must do what it can to uphold and preserve human dignity.

Human dignity is what the Premier is trying to take away. If human rights and dignity are threatened, the church is bound to speak.

Today I am defending the very right of the church to express an opinion. Historically it has had the right, but also it has earned that right. No person, whether it be the Premier of Victoria or anybody else, should be allowed to take that right away from the churches because that is the first step towards tyranny. The house must uphold this fundamental right if we are to see society moving forward.

The response by the churches has been to unanimously defend their right to speak out. They stand united on this issue and the issue of social relevance being part of their mission. The Uniting Church even strengthened its position after the Premier made those comments about the churches. If the Premier had bothered to listen to statements made during the church’s last synod and a number of decisions it made he would have discovered that the church’s resolve is even stronger. The social responsibility of the churches is based on worldliness.

Mr W. D. McGrath interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — If the minister wants some reference to biblical passages that demonstrate God’s presence within the economic and material dimensions of human life, which may take care of any concerns that this issue does not fall within the boundaries of the bill, I refer him to Matthew 25:31-46, where again — —

Mr W. D. McGrath interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I think the minister has created enough havoc in the house. He ought to remain silent.

Mr DOLLIS — In that passage Jesus describes a divine judge who assembles all the nations and
separates them from one another. The judge places
the righteous at the right and grants to them the
blessings of his kingdom. It then goes on to say:

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty
and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you
welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was
sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came
to see me.

I do not think the churches are against wealth
generation or against public utilities operating
efficiently. They are questioning the outcome of
policies in the marketplace. As Archbishop Rayner
said:

It is not that money is evil, but if it becomes an end in
itself, if material values swamp spiritual values, if the
profit motive is allowed to become the guiding light for
the community, our humanity is really threatened.

It is that very humanity that this Parliament must
preserve. The philosophy of social responsibility
argues that people are communal beings and share
responsibility for one another. This responsibility
forms the basis of a social contract, the social wage
or the rights of citizenship. It is through the social
wage that governments implement their social
responsibility to redistribute the revenue obtained
through taxation for those in need. You collect your
taxes in order to distribute them to those in need.
Never forget that, Minister! In that way
governments retain an ability to redress
irregularities that develop within the market
economy. In this view the government acts as a
buffer between the individual and the market where
required. Governments that disarm this
responsibility abdicate their legitimate role in social
policy. I say to you, Minister: your Premier has
abdicated this responsibility for quite some time.

The objective of social policy and the wellbeing of
the society or the common good is rightly put by
Father Mark Coleridge as follows:

Governing the state and running a business are not the
same thing. The overriding responsibility of the
government is service all Victorians. You have an overriding
responsibility to provide ambulances if they are
required. You have an overriding responsibility to
provide hospital beds if they are required. You have
an overriding responsibility to keep schools open if
they are required.

Mr Finn — On a point of order, Mr Deputy
Speaker, I have been listening to the honourable
member, with varying degrees of interest, for the
past 5 minutes, and in that time he has frequently
and at length addressed the minister directly across
the table. That clearly is against the standing orders
and I ask you to make him abide by the standing
orders and to address his remarks through the Chair.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I uphold the
point of order raised by the honourable member for
Tullamarine. I ask the Deputy Leader of the
Opposition to address his comments through the
Chair, and encourage those who are distracting him
to desist.

Mr DOLLIS — It is fundamental that unless the
government understands its responsibility it cannot
claim to govern on behalf of all Victorians. It cannot
govern only on behalf of the interests of a small elite.
It was given the task of governing by the people of
Victoria and they expect something in return.

I shall concentrate the remaining part of my
contribution on the privatisation of the electricity
system. I remind honourable members of what is
happening in the United Kingdom at this very
moment after more than a decade of privatised
utilities. What are the Tories doing now? The Times
reports:

Customers fear electricity and water will not mix.

Consumers of water and electricity fear that by
joining forces the two companies will create a
natural monopoly that will mean increased hardship
for them. One unfortunate situation is that during
the current English drought 25 per cent of water in
Yorkshire has been leaking from pipes before it
reaches peoples’ taps. Power generating companies
in the Midlands are considering merging and saving
billions of pounds by create the first company in the
industry capable of the bulk generation and supply
of power.

A number of assurances and justifications have been
given to this house by the government. Competition
is terrific when it comes to the electricity industry
but competition is not allowed when it comes to the
casino. The government believes gambling should be a natural monopoly, supported and protected by government. However, electricity, something people require for their daily existence, is to be open to the forces of privatisation and competition. I cannot work out the logic behind this regime, but I remind the government of some things it said previously.

Victoria is one of the few places in the world where casino gambling or gambling of that sort relies on the majority of its income coming from the local population — not from visitors or from people who live outside the state but from the very people who live in the state. The government must take that into consideration so that we do not face an epidemic some time in the near future when the effects on the people concerned will be such that it will be too late for us to do anything.

Mr W. D. McGrath interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — The minister interjected that the Labor Party did all this. We can talk about the casino paying for one licence and getting one for free and about its getting its gaming tables as a priority from a government that does not consider health to be a priority. It is an absolute disgrace and it has nothing to do with the previous Labor government. If the minister goes back to the findings of the Connor commission before the legislation was enacted he will find the commission warned the government about the serious consequences of this legislation, the consequences we now see happening.

We see a total capitulation by the government in the interests of a small group of people. The government should start defining its social responsibility because in reality the people of Victoria expect it to govern on their behalf, to make sure that ambulances run on time, that schools are properly funded and that hospitals are given the resources they require. Instead of recognising its social responsibility the government's priority is to provide the casino with even more tables — not a small number but a huge number of tables — so that more Victorians can go in and lose more money.

The experience of privatisation in the UK is that companies that privatised in the past and bought small components of the utilities are beginning to merge and create huge monopolies. One could perhaps argue for public monopolies because they at least would have some common good at the end of the day with their profits, relatively speaking, going back to the people. Instead of that, they are private monopolies increasing the number of disconnections and making certain that people live without the vital resources they require: electricity and water. With private monopolies record profits go to the shareholders, prices go up and disconnections increase by the day.

If the government were serious about its social responsibility it would stop diverting attention by attacking the churches in relation to privatisation and the unions in relation to the ambulance service and it would face its responsibility and govern this state on behalf of every single Victorian and, more importantly, on behalf of those who are in need, the very people from whom the government collects taxes and the very people the government has forgotten.

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — It is always a pleasure to follow the honourable member for Richmond. At first today I thought I was listening to one of the new prophets, St Demetri the Martyr, but as he went on and became more florid towards the end of his speech it was obvious that this was not a new prophet but one of the false prophets, St Demetri the Misguided!

I take up some of the points he made about the church, predictable enough as those rabid defences were. I do not know whether the honourable member for Richmond has attended any of the meetings he described in such florid detail but I have done so in my electorate. He spoke about how the church is bound to speak out, as if it had some sort of God-given social responsibility. I do not disagree with that. I think churches have a role in speaking out and I do not think anyone on this side of the house would dispute that — certainly the Premier, the cabinet and those backbenchers to whom I have spoken would not dispute that. However, one thing we do not think appropriate — —

Mr Cole interjected.

Mr DOYLE — I take up the interjection. It is not about disagreement. We only draw the line when the churches start to barrack. If both sides of the argument are put and people are allowed to make up their own minds, that is open debate. I am all for disagreement in any informed debate but when the Uniting Church, for instance, allies itself in Geelong with a discredited group, Public First, that is not about disagreement or debate, that is pure and simple opposition.
When the honourable member for Richmond talked about the church in a holistic way, it was not representative of the church but of a small group which has captured the synod to the discomfiture of the rest of the church.

Mr Cole — Rubbish!

Mr Doyle — I shall explain my acquaintanceship with the argument, and 'rubbish' is not an appropriate objection. I actually had members of the Uniting Church speak to me during and after a meeting in a church in my electorate to say that they disagreed with the position put by Mr Robert Johnstone, the secretary of synod. His own parishioners stood up and told him they thought their church had no role in the debate. I would not go that far. The church has a role — and I will come back to that in a moment — but his own parishioners said that the church had no role whatsoever. He does not speak for the entirety of the church; I shall give two examples of positions that irritated me. My recollection is that on that night the secretary of the synod explained to the congregation that he felt the synod had spoken out because 'they had read the mind of God on this'.

Mr Dollis — I will be back.

Mr Doyle — Is that a threat?

I took exception to Mr Johnstone's comment. If his was an interpretation of the mind of God I would be surprised. Let us say so, but let us not have any claptrap from church leaders that they somehow have a conduit to the Almighty, who has told them to speak out against the Victorian government's privatisation plans. An appropriate disagreement might well be that the government's responsibility — if I could paraphrase what I think the synod's disagreement could be — is to take care of the poor and vulnerable. Honourable members would agree with that. If the argument were that many people are not able to pay their electricity bills, that argument could be taken up directly with the government. But that is not per se an argument against privatisation.

The Uniting Church has deliberately and wilfully misrepresented community service obligations as though those obligations were paid by the SEC directly to the poor and most vulnerable. As the government has tried to explain to the Uniting Church, they are paid directly from the budget through the government.

If the argument is that not enough people are taken care of, the synod's argument is with the government, the Treasurer and the budgetary allocation to community service obligations, but that is not the way the Uniting Church went. From the outset it was against privatisation. That is what I would say is the difference between the right to speak out, which we would all agree with, and simply barracking for one political side. A distinction has to be drawn between those two arguments. The Uniting Church synod has not drawn that distinction, and is properly attracting criticism from within its own ranks. That criticism will continue, and the church will make itself irrelevant to the debate if it does not properly engage in debate and attempt to present both sides.

It is not enough for the honourable member for Richmond to quote selectively from Archbishops Rayner and Little or anybody else and then to predicate that as the view of the entirety of all churches when we know it is a section of the Uniting Church wilfully leading and misrepresenting the debate.

The honourable member for Richmond got a little overexcited, but at the end he came to what is in essence the difference between those on the two sides of the political fence. He accused the government of not governing for all Victorians. That depends on how that is seen to be done.

Government members say that before that can be done the first step is getting one's financial house in order. Our Treasurer, our Premier and our cabinet have had to be receiver managers for three years because they know that if this state is not operating on a sound financial basis any appearance of government for all Victorians is rhetoric. It is worse than rhetoric; it is a cruel hoax because promises so easily made in such a debate by the likes of the honourable member for Richmond cannot be fulfilled.

My view is that opposition members should ask the people of Victoria about social responsibility. They should ask them whether in the dying days of the Cain-Kerner government they felt that its social responsibility was any more than lip service. People will reply, 'No'. They will say that some things have been very hard financially for their families and businesses over the past three years, but any indication of public feeling in Victoria shows the populace's great support for this government. Why is that so? The answer is that people know the government is doing the right thing.
If a government wants to meet its social obligations — I agree with the honourable member for Richmond that we are here to offer service to the community — the first step is to have a sound financial basis. If that cornerstone is not in place, everything else is rhetoric and a cruel hoax on the people. That is the philosophical divide between us. The honourable member for Richmond threatened he would be back later. I would say the same thing to him if he returned to the chamber. Until that first step is in place, the rest will not work.

I spent a little longer on the speech of the honourable member for Richmond than I intended, but I felt a couple of points required a response. I will now make a couple of points on how the government and the budget have affected my electorate. My first heading is local government. Much bleating has been heard from the other side on the reorganisation of local government. My area operates under the City of Stonnington.

Mr Mildenhall interjected.

Mr DOYLE — I am delighted to take up the interjection of the honourable member for Footscray because I am about to praise Greg Maddock, our chief executive officer. I know the honourable member will take a particular interest in that, understanding what an excellent public servant Greg Maddock is.

Mr Cole interjected.

Mr DOYLE — The honourable member for Melbourne reminds me that I wanted to mention our commissioners, two with some sadness. Reg Weller, a commissioner at the start of the process, unfortunately died during his period of office. I publicly put on record our thanks to Reg Weller for his hard work, particularly in the early days of marrying many of the financial systems of Prahran and Malvern, which were remarkably different. The amount of work Reg did in putting together two disparate systems and services which were a couple of kilometres apart deserves recognition in this forum.

Neil Smith, the chief commissioner, has been very ill. He, too, has done a sterling job. He has not yet returned to service, but we are well served by Anne Murphy and recently Des Bethke, who has joined the team. I most want to praise Greg Maddock, the former CEO of Prahran. He has helped the commissioners enormously and, I would say, is the driving force of Stonnington’s success.

The first point I want to make about local government reform in my area is that people are about to get rate reductions of unprecedented levels. The rates, including the garbage charge, will reduce from $38.1 million in 1994-95 to $26.67 million in 1995-96 — a 30 per cent reduction in rates. I will shortly give some examples of rate reductions. In addition, loans totalling $6.3 million have been repaid, making Stonnington a debt-free authority. Spending on capital works has increased from $13.5 million in 1993-94 to $15.2 million in 1995-96. Also a sorely needed $2 million upgrade for Prahran market has been recently announced.

In my electorate of Malvern there are a number of real-life stories that illustrate what happens when services are maintained at current levels and spending is maintained or increased but rates are reduced. Three years ago someone looking down Glenferrie Road would have seen a forest of ‘For sale’ and ‘For lease’ signs over shops, as businesses came and went with depressing regularity. Now the government is doing its bit to help those small shopkeepers stay in business. A person with a small shop in Glenferrie Road in 1994-95 would have paid rates and garbage charge of $1574.60; in 1995-96 that charge will be $1031.28, a 34.5 per cent reduction. A person with an office in High Street, Armadale, would have paid $1122.40 in 1994-95; in 1995-96 that charge will be $736.20, again a reduction of 34.5 per cent. On a subject dear to my heart, a person with a house in Armadale would have paid $1559.95 in rates in 1994-95; in 1995-96 that charge will be $1275.48, a reduction of 18.2 per cent, and gratefully received.

Mr Mildenhall interjected.

Mr DOYLE — Regardless of what the house is worth, yes, it is, but then that is also part of the disposable income of a family that it can now count on. Although I was talking about High Street and Glenferrie Road, two of our great shopping strips, my near neighbours at the Prahran Market and Chapel Street will be even more pleased. If you have a shop in the Prahran Market you would pay rates of $1077.87. You now pay $646.72, which is a reduction of 40 per cent. If you had a shop in Chapel Street — and all honourable members would agree that Chapel Street is one of the great shopping strips not just in Melbourne but in fact the world — the rates have decreased from $1679.70 to $1007.82, which again is a reduction of 40 per cent.

If you mention local government to people the first thing they think of is garbage, and for quite proper
reasons. As most people see it, that is the central task of local government. The opposition has been critical of compulsory competitive tendering. Stonnington has recently tendered the garbage services under compulsory competitive tendering, and the contract has gone to the in-house tender.

On 25 September the commissioners accepted the evaluation panel's recommendation and the contract for waste collection transportation and disposal has been awarded to the Stonnington in-house team. Four tenders comprising the in-house team and three others from large and very well-known companies were received but the in-house team scored the highest in tender price and customer focus and transition. The tender was put in after performing trials of different service-delivery methods and considerable thought into detail. It was an innovative bid. The staff will work 9½ hours a day in a four-day week, but they will perform the household refuse service over a five-day period, which is a substantial change to the current practice. But this is the interesting part: extra services will be provided. We will have a green-waste disposal, which is a service that did not previously exist. We will have a choice of different bins as we move to smaller bins. They will be cheaper than similar bins provided by the former councils of Prahran and Malvern.

The current cost of the service to the city is $2.355 million. The savings generated by the acceptance of the in-house tender is $741 264, which is 31.5 per cent of the 1995-96 budget. That is a shining example in two particular areas: firstly, in rate reduction and, secondly, in that crucial service operated by local government — that is, garbage disposal. It shows how Roger Hallam, the Minister for Local Government in another place, has driven through reforms which the opposition could only dream about in 1986. Remember Morris, QC, in his attempts? Nothing happened and now we have reforms in two of the most contentious areas. Opposition members have been bleating about. The government has delivered the reforms.

It is also interesting to note that this is not a sham process. The competitive tender for the Harold Holt pool did not go to the in-house group; it went to RAMS Management. It manages 6 indoor aquatic facilities, 13 outdoor pool complexes, and 3 general leisure facilities. RAMS scored more highly in all areas of the selection criteria, offering a greater financial return to council, regular evacuation drills, a larger range of programs and special events and a head-office structure capable of networking all of the centres managed. We will get a better service at the Harold Holt pool and the savings generated will amount to $176 000 a year.

RAMS Management has also already commenced operation of the facility; it has been a smooth and professional transition with many of the existing staff moving over to RAMS to further their careers with that professional group. Local government reforms have been a breath of fresh air to Stonnington.

I shall move briefly to education. I make no bones about the fact that my seat is a safe Liberal seat, and in the past it is with some shame that the Labor Party should look at the neglect of maintenance of schools in my area. In the past 18 months to 2 years all five primary schools in my electorate have received maintenance funding.

Mr Mildenhall — Buildings are more important than kids!

Mr DOYLE — I suggest to the honourable member for Footscray that if you can put kids into buildings that are properly maintained, purpose-built for teaching, dedicated to educational purposes and technologically sound and if you can staff them with professional teachers then, yes, buildings are important to kids and they are important to education. The honourable member can decry that if he likes, but when you do not spend money on maintenance then the whole building runs into disrepair and kids are disadvantaged. The best example of that is Lloyd Street school, which is a beautiful example of 1920s architecture in East Malvern. However, the school had had nothing done to it in over 10 years. It has been subjected to absolute neglect.

The school has great teaching staff and a wonderful new principal in Mrs Heather Littlejohn, but it is pretty hard for teachers to work when they are working in rooms that have ratty old lime-green, shag-pile carpets that are worn through, when paint is peeling off walls, when water is coming down the walls, when putty falling out of the windows — —

Mr Mildenhall interjected.

Mr DOYLE — Wrong. The staff are happy. In fact, the union representative is bringing the children to Parliament next week and is happy with the work the government has done. It has spent $549 000 just doing the basic things such as painting, plastering, carpeting, rewiring and updating the
lavatories which were an absolute disgrace. They have updated all those things that make a school environment pleasant to learn in and therefore more effective to learn in.

Recently Malvern Central School celebrated 120 years of operation. It is a great school in Spring Road, Malvern. The Minister for Education had a very warm and genuine welcome from Malvern Central parents and council. A former Minister for Education and former Premier of the state, the Honourable Lindsay Thompson, my predecessor in the seat of Malvern, was also there. He revealed that he had taught at Malvern Central in the three years before I was born, but I was not so unkind as to point that out to him at the time. That school is in a wonderful old Edwardian building, but when repairs such as fixing the leaking roof are not done, you cannot do any painting and the building becomes damp and unsafe.

The roof at Malvern Central was at a point where $100 000 was needed to make it good because it was no good just painting over it or doing minor repairs, it had to be replaced.

Armadale Primary School has wonderful old buildings, but they had been sadly neglected. The worst room that needed an upgrade was the staff room. The government spent $30 000 upgrading the staff room, and $150 000 was spent upgrading the school facilities.

Chadstone Park Primary School was in good nick; it was one of those 1960s-type schools, but it too had poor administration and staff facilities. It only needed $5500, but that money provided facilities which made it a workable place for the staff and the administration staff and it is now a much more pleasant and efficient place in which to work.

Why had that money not been spent in the 10 years previously? It is not a huge amount but it made a difference to the lives of the people who worked at Chadstone Park Primary School.

The government has now combined the magnificent Edwardian buildings of Tooronga Primary School and the wonderful Victorian buildings of Malvern Girl's High School. That combination now forms Malvern Primary School in Tooronga Road. Extensive renovations were required to the old Victorian high school to make them pleasant learning environments for primary school children, and that has been achieved as well.

The Minister for Education has done a first-rate job in providing such facilities. The minister, and the principals involved — Heather Littlerjohn from Lloyd Street, Mary Waddis from Malvern Central, Kevin Ryan from Tooronga, Neil Johnstone from Chadstone, and Bill Pedrina from Armadale Primary — are all working with the government to make sure the schools offer the best service possible to the staff and to the students and parents.

I shall now turn to transport.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr DOYLE — I will resist the temptation to take up the interjection, tempting though it is because I love a soft lob, but I will move on given that I have 8 minutes left. In my area there is a premium station: East Malvern station. It is one of those stations that has an enclosed waiting room area, a booking office, improved lighting, closed-circuit TV, automatic passenger information, a public address system, and better security in the car park area. It will become a hub for people who wish to drive to East Malvern and leave their cars at the station knowing they are perfectly safe personally. They will then travel into the city on a safe and quick rail system.

Without such initiatives people will not travel on the public transport system. The station I travel from into Parliament is Armadale. Under the previous government the Armadale railway station was a disgrace; it was a threatening station covered with graffiti, and nothing was ever done to improve it. The Department of Transport and local residents have transformed that station into a showpiece. Not only do staff take great pride in the station itself, but the community takes pride in its surroundings and now ensures there are regular plantings. Armadale station is now the centrepiece of the commercial area that has been reinvigorated with new shops opening up. That has been the result of this government's efforts.

Another local major project announced by the Minister for Roads and Ports is the City Link project. Recently $67 million has been allocated for grade separations, first at Warrigal Road and now at Burke, Tooronga and Toorak roads.

Mr Cooper interjected.

Mr DOYLE — I shall not go over the jokes about the South Eastern Arterial car park. There are signs along the arterial road apologising to motorists for delays and telling them that the car park will soon
be on the move. One can see motorists smile in recognition of what should never have been there: traffic lights on the freeway. That was farsightedness by the former Labor government! It was frustrating not only for motorists but also for residents of the Kooyong valley and the City of Stonnington because of the noise and pollution created by the traffic snarl, which made people's lives intolerable.

The upgrading of the arterial's grade separations will be finished next year and the traffic will flow freely. It should have been a freeway in the first place, but that would have been too difficult for the Labor government! If four major intersections cross the freeway one can only conclude that they will hold up traffic. Can one blame the former Labor government for not having the foresight to build a freeway that flowed straight into the city? Of course! Those intersections will be removed and it will become a true freeway.

Mr Mildenhall interjected.

Mr DOYLE — The honourable member for Footscray says that there will be a toll. There have been public meetings with Vicroads and Leightons as well as a public information fair day and letter drops. Members of the Stonnington freeway committee and the Kooyong valley residents' association and numerous interested residents have been in my office meeting with representatives of City Link and Transurban. Not once have tolls been mentioned.

Mr Cooper interjected.

Mr DOYLE — I thank the honourable member for Mornington for his invaluable help. We all remember Honourable Jim's contribution! The residents were not concerned about tolls, because they recognised that two 80 cent tolls would not matter if there were a $2.50 saving from Warrigal Road to Punt Road, which is what the predicated figures are. They realise that they will be better off, whether it be through saving on wear and tear on vehicles, fuel consumption or travel time. They are not silly: they can actually add up, as can businessespeople in the area. They were concerned about noise attenuation.

The groups have had excellent hearings with representatives of Vicroads, Leightons, City Link and Transurban, and recently with the Minister for Roads and Ports. They are happy to work with the government on this historic project. The Minister for Roads and Ports has said he would be happy to come out so as not to rely on readings from a report, but to experience noise levels, to stand in someone's back garden and listen to the freeway noise and talk to residents, on the spot, about what their needs are and how one might go about fulfilling them.

Ms Marple — Come down to Laverton.

Mr DOYLE — I suggest that Laverton is about to be out of the honourable member's electorate. Although that is the case, I suggest the honourable member for Altona follow the same procedure we have used: go through fruitful discussions with the relevant authorities and have productive input instead of carping, whingeing and whining about one of the great projects in this state.

I turn to a good-news story. When we had to rationalise certain primary schools in my electorate we had to close the Gardiner Primary School. We have one of the alumni of that school in the honourable member for Sandringham. I was concerned that the school not be sold off to development. The Malvern Elderly Citizens Welfare Association was able to buy the land from the Urban Land Authority. Their association, which takes care of the elderly, has entered into a partnership which has meant that on the site will be erected 13 independent living units and a 55-bed hostel, leaving the majority of the land as open space for the many flat-dwellers in the area.

The Minister for the Aged, the Honourable Rob Knowles, in another place came to the electorate on 2 June to officially turn the sod for the start of that project, and commented on what a great story it was. As the demographics of the area have changed and the young families and children are no longer in the area it has been transformed into a wonderful facility for the aged.

Because of the reform strategy of this government — be it financial restoration, improved public sector management, greater emphasis on service provision, economic reform to encourage business investment and employment, major rebuilding of civic infrastructure — whatever one points to, one would have to say that this is not only the state on the move but, to steal another state slogan, a state of excitement.

To see that one has only to look at what happened over the weekend when tens of thousands of Victorians visited these major projects. Along with thousands of others I went to the Alfred Hospital — —
The points that the churches are making are well taken and the Premier, who has just arrived in the chamber, was in the wrong to criticise them for exercising their right to make a statement. It is one thing to say you do not agree with them but it is another to say they had no right to say what they did, because clearly they are also accountable to the media and the public, just like anybody else. If the archbishop or a bishop wants to speak out in opposition to this government that is his or her right to do so.

Mr Doyle — They are not allowed to barrack.

Mr COLE — They are allowed to barrack if they wish. If they are seeing what is happening to the downtrodden in this society because of this government they can barrack as long and as loudly as they like. They are entitled to do so. And if some people do not like it they do not have to go to the church.

It is very important, though, to note there has been quite a radical change in the church’s position on these matters, and it should be applauded. More importantly, because of the right-wing reactionary government we have had, the churches will have to stand up and be counted on behalf of those on low incomes, the poor and the weak.

Mr Doyle — They have to have their facts right before they disagree.

Mr COLE — It was not about facts. The issue was about their right to make a statement, the right to barrack, and they have that right.

If the honourable member for Malvern disagrees he can stand up in this chamber and say they have the facts wrong, but he and other people have no right to say these church leaders do not have a right to speak out. That is just not true, and historically they have done it. Let us take the example of IVF. Why are they not allowed to speak out on privatisation but are consulted extensively about the in-vitro fertilisation program? That is a very important issue to the churches, and they play a very important role.

This budget yet again highlights the ideological obsession of basically a fairly uncaring regime. In Victoria now you can have humanity, but only if you compulsorily tender for it. It is not there for nothing: you actually have to compete to get it.

This government is committed to very radical change and we have seen much of it. The Premier is
like a tornado: he is not in one place for long and he causes a hell of a lot of damage. Our health and community services, even our garbage collection and now our libraries have been challenged and put under threat. It is not, as has been pointed out by others, to benefit state finances but simply because of an ideological obsession, a commitment to competition. I saw what happened in New Zealand when I went there to study the health system, and again in England. It was a Tory's dream: competition at all costs and a winner-takes-all mentality. What we are delivering in this state now is a large pool of unemployed with no regard for where jobs are going to come from.

I shall talk about a number of planning issues, but I must say that at least the Minister for Planning is consistent: he is prepared to hurt his own people. In regard to a six-storey building going up on the Sorrento foreshore, he said recently that the people objecting to the proposal were the weekend nobility. I do not know whether he is the week-long nobility. It is disgraceful for him to say that about people who have quite a legitimate objection to what is proposed there. That example again highlights this planning minister's proposals, which are to deliver decisions on development by administrative edict without going through the proper processes.

We have seen also the alienation of parkland with the development of Albert Park for a grand prix, which was purloined from South Australia. That highlights this ridiculous concept that states will compete against states for things that really should be seen as being in the national interest. It is good that the motorcycle race has returned, although it is questionable which is worse — riding a motorcycle or smoking a cigarette. But the point remains that we should never have gotten into that debate and it should never have gone up to New South Wales. The people of New South Wales are reaping the cost of holding the race at Eastern Creek. We have learned from that experience that enormous problems arise when you get into these ridiculous competitions between states. So, the grand prix will take place at Albert Park. The bottom line is that a motor car race is replacing parkland. Trees have been knocked down. We are alienating our parkland, and we cannot get it back.

We also have alienation of parkland in my electorate with the development of the Carlton football ground at Princes Park. It is not Optus Oval — they have no right to call it that. It is called Princes Park, even if it is a bit of a monarchist name. The Minister for Planning recently amended the planning scheme to allow the development of the grandstand to go ahead. That will take 15 metres of parkland at Princes Park, which is a well used area with 1500 people a day running around it. The minister's decision to amend the planning scheme was totally at odds with the views of his own independent panel, which was against the alienation of parkland. The minister set up his own panel; the panel decided to go one way, but the minister decided the opposite.

The Melbourne city council proposals that have been forwarded in support of the football club are also at odds with the panel. It is an undemocratic council. Even a council that was elected under an undemocratic, gerrymandered voting system would not have supported Princes Park being alienated and developed in that way. Melbourne city councillors always opposed this type of development prior to commissioners being put in those positions. With no democratic or legal mechanism available for the residents in Carlton and around Melbourne generally and with no opportunity for the community to truly object, this decision is devastating for all the people of Melbourne. The chief commissioner, Kevan Gosper, head of the jockstrap economy, is so closely aligned with the sporting bodies that it is hard to imagine that somebody like him, who has an allegiance to everything bar Melbourne — that 'everything' is called the Olympic committee — could possibly have made an objective decision. He is totally at one with the owners of the Carlton football team. His attachment to the Liberal Party is well known and, of course, we know the President of the Carlton Football Club is John Elliott.

It is not hard to see in that context how the head of the jockstrap economy, Kevan Gosper, who is more often overseas than here and who is over there looking after his Olympic interests, not the residents of Melbourne, makes a decision totally at odds with what the residents want. That is typical. This is not what amalgamations are all about. They are about efficiency, not decisions that elected councils would not make. I also believe the special legislation which is required and which will be introduced into the upper house by the Minister for Conservation and Environment at some stage of the bunfight should not be introduced. It should be delayed pending the re-election of the council next March.

A democratically elected council should make the decision on whether or not land should be alienated. If it decides that way, so be it. If a democratically elected council decides it should not be alienated, so be it. But the decision should not be left to a
commissioner like Kevan Gosper, who is more concerned about the sporting interests and groups in this state and country. Before proceeding with anything at Princes Park which will make it a venue for 35 000 people, we also need to know what are the intentions of the Australian Football League.

Let us not forget what happened when Parliament introduced special legislation at the behest of the Collingwood Football Club to overcome the demands that Collingwood council made about the lease price for Victoria Park. No sooner was the legislation passed and the ink dry than the Australian Football League moved Collingwood Football Club from Victoria Park. They now play only three home games a year there. That is what the AFL is about and these are the problems we have to confront. We should not be making decisions about Princes Park. I am sure that a crowd of 35 000 is not enough for a home game when Carlton Football Club is playing, particularly if it is intended to reduce the number of Victorian teams to six in the not-too-distant future. There is no way a Carlton Football Club home game would be played before an audience of 35 000 people.

This is another example of the Carlton Football Club's war of attrition with the residents and community. It needs a venue that takes 70 000 people, with lights for grand finals and other entertainment proposals. We will see Princes Park, one of the most used sporting and recreation venues in the state, taken over by a football club that is basically privately owned by a group of business people. I strongly oppose the alienation of parkland. We must all be conscious of this issue. I urge the government to engage in a little more public consultation, or at least wait until elected councils are put in place. What are the AFL's proposals for Princes Park? Viccode 2 should also be examined; its name should be changed to Developers Dream 1! It encourages a mentality of development at any cost. The tragedy is that when a planning decision is made, especially when it is a bad one, it has an effect for a long time. Some shockers have been made!

The government has gone overboard ideologically! I am speaking about the ambulance service. I have some involvement because my brother is an ambulance officer, which will probably be used against me! The service has been decimated by the government. The reds-under-the-beds, McCarthyist complaints we have heard over the past week are absolutely outrageous and a nonsense! They will not overcome the simple unequivocal fact that the government has reduced the number of people working in the ambulance service and also the number of ambulances. It has made changes in procedures, based yet again on an accounting exercise. This has had the devastating effect on the provision of emergency services that we are seeing today.

I have spoken to my brother about this many times. On a number of occasions he has said, 'Last night when out on the job we were told we were the only ambulance available to cover 500 000 people in the north-western suburbs'. It was only a matter of time before my brother or another ambulance officer got two emergency calls at the same time. It has happened more than once. I knew it would be only a matter of time before this would become an extremely serious and important issue.

The Minister for Health has blamed union work bans for the delays, but what about the delays that occurred before the work bans were imposed? The bans have been put in place only recently, but the delays have been going on for some time. The delays are caused by a lack of resources. It is not good enough for the minister or the Premier to say that 90 per cent efficiency is not a bad strike rate. That is not good enough.

Jack Firman was sacked. He had become an embarrassment because he was so hopeless. We also know the government is privatising the ambulance transport system. The shadow Minister for Health has made the point many times that enormous problems have been caused because there were no backups. What more do we have to say to get the point across to the Minister for Health that this is not a Trades Hall issue? It is not the union or the bans; it is simply that the government removed the emergency people who worked in transport and who provided the necessary backup. They are not there any more. It was a simple arithmetical proposition. When officers go out they have no-one behind them as backup. There is no transport to cover emergencies because they have been privatised.

The government has an ideological obsession with privatisation! The transport people are working in private industry, but they cannot cover the emergencies. When officers like my brother attend emergencies, they have no backup. That is why delays are occurring. That is why lives are being lost and people are suffering. The ambulance service is a microcosm of the many problems of the government. These problems are seen nowhere else as readily and as acutely as they are seen in the...
ambulance service. This reflects the ideological commitment of the government to privatisation at any cost. It sees it as a wonderful alternative but it has had devastating effects on our community.

It appears that we may have to pay for our library services and if we do not those services will diminish considerably. The government is interfering with a fundamental right that has developed over centuries — that is, for people to be able to go to libraries and borrow books. The government has interfered with this service because of its ideological obsession, which is totally unnecessary. Compulsory competitive tendering is not needed by libraries.

The kindergarten my children attend held a stop-work meeting on Friday afternoon to discuss CCT. The bottom line for the staff is that they will have to compete and take salary reductions. I do not know why it is necessary for them to take salary reductions because they are doing a great job. The introduction of CCT sets worker against worker. That is the role of this Tory government. It will destroy the wage structure and remove conditions. A lesser service will be provided. The problems in the ambulance service might bring the government to its knees and show it for the disgrace it is, coupled with the scurrilous activities regarding Crown Casino, its mates and the rorting of the system.

I notice the honourable member for Mornington is not in the chamber, but the other day he referred to the controlled-use-of-heroin program, although he did not call it that. I am disgusted and ashamed that the Minister for Health is not prepared to participate in the program based in Canberra, which compares methadone treatment to heroin treatment. The problem is so great and vast that we need a properly coordinated program to find a solution to it.

Most important of all — and this is typical of this government’s ideological stance — we have extensive research supported by the Liberal leader in the ACT, Sir John Gorton and other people to at least investigate the possibility of this program being introduced. Yet this government’s ideological bent cannot cope with the thought that people will establish a medical program and be given heroin as a means to overcome their addiction problem.

From the way the honourable member for Mornington was talking you would think we would all be up the back behind the Speaker’s chair shooting up or something. That is the standard of debate generated by government members. These are the people who tell us about their great economic rationalism and their rational approach to just about everything. They talk about how bright they are and about the fact that we aren’t and that we just don’t understand.

The second biggest industry in the world is illicit drug dealing — the biggest of course being arms or weapons dealing. It is a vast problem in our community. Large numbers of people overdose on heroin and many crimes relate simply to people acquiring these drugs. We have so many problems with people who are unable to stop taking drugs because there is no valid or legitimate program to help them. The only thing this government offers is something that vaguely resembles community education people telling everybody out there that they should not be on drugs.

The lesson for and the message to this government, the Premier — who does not even know what he is talking about when marijuana legislation is mentioned because he said he would oppose what we currently have — and the Minister for Health is that nobody is listening to that education message and that we have a massive problem. The minister’s solution is not to even consider supporting the proposal in Canberra — you don’t even have to have them doing it here — to research whether people on methadone programs are getting off the habit. It is not, as suggested by the honourable member for Mornington, that you could go behind the Speaker’s chair and snort methadone; the people on the program go to the pharmacy, take little cups of methadone and sip it. It is a substitute for heroin. All we are saying is that we should perhaps introduce an equivalent system with heroin.

Let’s research the matter to see whether it will reduce the harm in such a way that there would be no need to supply the drug illegally. It could be supplied by prescription through doctors so people don’t have to go up the back alleyways of my electorate and get it from taxidrivers or from the nightclubs in King Street. They would be able to do it under and within a properly structured medical model. Honourable members may not believe it works, but when I visited England I saw the program in Liverpool — and it works. People can be put on to heroin and it can be a very effective method of harm minimisation. Because they don’t desire it any more the supply problem is resolved. They don’t have to become involved in criminal trading in drugs because they don’t need it or desire it. We are perpetuating that need and desire.
I am so disappointed that the minister will not open her mind and possibly her heart to consider that that would be a much better resolution of this problem — the scourge of our society — than putting up the shutters and saying, 'We want community education'. The fact is that the problem is there. It's real, people are dying and something has to be done about it.

When it talks about social change in our society this government is very good on its radical economic agenda but absolutely hopeless on anything else. Government members have no compassion. They don't understand there is such a thing as the need for a disadvantaged child, who might be a Down syndrome child, to get proper care in a school. They don't understand that. They do an accounting mechanism on the Treasurer's abacus to ascertain what these people need.

We have seen it in such a real way with the ambulance service. The bean counters took it much too far, so what does the government do now? It resorts to the age-old trick of kicking the communist can. Government members are looking for reds under the bed and in the back of the ambulance. They have gone on the attack and said, 'The ambulance union is causing these problems. They have gone on the attack and said, 'The ambulance union is causing these problems. It is putting bars on. It is undermining the computer system'.

I say to the health minister: I have never known my brother to be militant about anything other than barracking for Richmond, which is a problem. I have never known him to put forth his views strongly or to try to undermine people. Most of the ambulance officers — and I have met lots of them — are just like that. The nature of the job is the antithesis of militancy, as the minister describes it. They are not like that. They have to be cool, calm, collected and, most importantly, dedicated — and they are. They have to pick up the body on one side of the track, the head on the other. The bean counters don't understand that.

Don't blame Trades Hall for it, Minister! The Premier can't just go on carping about the Trades Hall Council and the union putting on the bans. The problem is that resources have been cut. You have stretched them too far. They can't do the job they so much want to do in an effective and dedicated fashion. If you don't know that, get into the back of an ambulance one night and go out with them and see what it is like. If you did that, you wouldn't be coming in with the stupid, inane, commie-bashing rubbish that the government has been going on with. It might be good stuff for a week but it will not save any lives. If the government keeps going down that path it will cost a significant number of lives.

Mr Ryan (Gippsland South) — I wish to divide my comments on the bill into three broad bases: a commentary on the general position which applies to the state at large; some comments on matters affecting my electorate; and some general comments regarding the opposition's approach to the budget, most particularly some of the issues raised by the Leader of the Opposition.

Firstly, I shall compare where we are as a state as opposed to where we were when the government took office in 1992. It is pertinent to do that because it gives us a measuring stick as to outcomes. I think it is justifiable to look at this third budget of the Treasurer and the government on the basis of judgments dealing with outcomes.

When we assumed the reins in 1992 the state was in a terrible and parlous financial condition. I shall not address those matters at large — they are historical fact. Suffice it to say that over the past three years we have been able to reduce the losses and have now undertaken the task of hauling Victoria up the scale again. Congratulations must go not only to the Premier, the Treasurer and the government at large but also to Victorians generally because collectively we all had to share the burden of the task before us. It is fair to say we have been successful in that role, and subject to our being able to pursue the aims and intentions that have been set out in the budget papers and in our policy directions generally I am sure Victoria's status will continue to improve as will the lot of the people of this wonderful state.

I shall refer briefly to some of the leading features derived from the current budget. The sustainable current account surplus for 1994-95 has been achieved one year ahead of its target. I understand this is the first time in some 31 years that Victoria has actually traded in the black. In addition we have reduced our unfunded superannuation liabilities by some $4 billion; made a radical improvement in our economy in that our business investment is up 45 per cent compared with the national figure of 35 per cent; increased employee output by about 12 per cent compared with the national rate of some 7 per cent; and achieved total employment growth of 8 per cent, and in the private sector 13 per cent,
compared with a national figure of 10 per cent. Importantly the unemployment rate has declined from the 1992 figure of 12.6 per cent to 8.6 per cent.

Some major initiatives are being undertaken with recurrent expenditure: $112 million has been added to acute-care hospitals; $8 million for the unified computer-aided call-taking system for emergency service organisations — I am sure it will function well if it is allowed to; a further $9.4 million for mandatory reporting and child protection programs; $5.8 million for industry incentive programs; and a $4.9 million one-off library grant for municipalities. An allocation of $400 000 has been made for dredging operations at Lakes Entrance, a little east of my electorate, and Queenscliff.

Among the major capital initiatives are $88.9 million for the improvement of educational facilities and a broad range of other initiatives referred to in the budget papers. There are no new taxes or tax increases. We have at last been able to remove the state deficit levy. I know that within my electorate and all other electorates that will be of enormous relief to those we represent.

All those advances need to be preserved by persevering with the current policy because we have a debt and interest burden that is too high. Tax reductions must be sustained over the coming years. Our infrastructure investment has been too low in the past and it is important to persist with the structural reform that is under way. One compelling statistic in the budget papers shows that we are spending about $1 billion a year more than New South Wales on our interest bill.

Our four long-term budget objectives are: to reduce the state debt to levels consistent with the AAA rating we want to regain; to bring Victoria’s tax effort closer to the average of other Australian states; to establish sufficient infrastructure to contribute towards a more productive economy for our country at large and our state in particular; and, finally, to deliver quality government services at the least cost.

As part of that process the stated intention of the government is to direct all privatisation proceeds to the reduction of debt. We have set out to achieve those general principles and I am proud to say, looking at the state as a whole, they are on the way to being achieved.

With regard to the rural position, the government has contributed more than $30 million in drought assistance to the farmers of Victoria when the federal Labor government chose to turn its back on them and provide nothing. We have also provided $22 million under the agriculture and food initiative to help boost the agricultural sector’s productivity and export performance. That is an area close to my heart. In the electorate I represent the hope is that that initiative will return $230 million a year to the community.

Stamp duty on the transfer of farms between family members has been abolished, saving the farming community an average of $25 000 a family and providing a $15 million concession over 12 months. A review of the leasing and licensing of Crown land has been undertaken and that will assist our rural land-holders. The Better Roads program is continuing to spend millions of dollars for the betterment of Victoria’s country road system. By the end of this decade some $400 million will have been spent under that program. Since the coalition took office no country police stations have been closed. That includes all the one-man stations in country areas that were under threat from the previous government.

I could keep going through the various general headings of advances that have been made to rural Victoria but I want to apply some of my time to running through initiatives that have occurred in my electorate since I won the seat in 1992. I do so in no specific order of priority. These issues have about them the common factor of a government acting as a catalyst to enable them to occur.

Sunwood Timber Industries has recently established a mill in the township of Yarram, a delightful centre of 2000 people in the southern part of my electorate. This company came to Yarram for a variety of reasons. The Yarram community was intent on winning the company and bringing it to the town to assist future development. The Victorian Plantations Corporation, ably run by its local officer, Mr Ian Hemphill, assisted in securing the venture. The result is that over the next 12 or 18 months approximately 300 000 cubic metres of pine from the hills near Yarram will be made available for processing. The forest that was first planted in the 1960s will come on stream and it is a completely sustainable resource that we will see ever after.

Sunwood already has an impressive facility in Dandenong, and in 1993 it won the Premier’s award as the fastest growing and most successful small business in Victoria. It is a tremendously progressive company under its general manager Mr David Westbrook. It was planning on expanding its operation and the local council was keen on the
company coming to Yarram. The predecessor of the Shire of Wellington was the Shire of Alberton which, to its credit, went about the process of earmarking land for this form of activity. Without doubt the amalgamation of the Shire of Alberton into the larger mass of the Shire of Wellington enabled that to be carried through. It could not have been achieved — in the sense that it was ultimately achieved — without the significant resources behind it in the form of the enlarged municipality.

Finally in all this we had a state government anxious to make its contribution through the Minister for Regional Development, who was keen to ensure that the government developed a package that would assist in getting Sunwood down to the community of Yarram, to make the best use of the resources available through the corporation and for the betterment of the community at large. Sunwood has spent $6 million in six weeks taking a fair block of land and establishing a mill. It has already started processing logs. It has taken on its first 21 employees and will double the size of the mill before Christmas. That will mean employing the same number of employees again. Sunwood intends to expand the mill again in the new year. One must also bear in mind that for every employee in the mill a like number is required for felling timber and carting it to the mill. The multiplier effect for this new initiative for Yarram is enormous.

The common thread running through these initiatives is the government’s involvement. It is acting as a catalyst, not only in the practical application of finance to assist in the industry’s establishment but also to bring together all the appropriate forces and to coordinate the different processes required to enable necessary permission to be obtained. The government has been there all the way along to ensure the right outcome is achieved.

South Gippsland is investigating the development of an aquiculture industry, again through the Minister for Regional Development, whose assistance I have engaged in obtaining funding for initial studies undertaken by the Victorian Institute of Marine Sciences. I called a public meeting in the township of Foster in September last year. Out of that, dare I say, the committee was formed and it has done an enormous amount of work to develop an aquiculture industry in this part of the state.

Aquiculture is a huge contributor to the economies of states such as Tasmania, South Australia and New South Wales. Victoria does not have a developed industry. The work of the South Gippsland Aquiculture Industry Committee will be of lasting significance. In Tasmania that industry has a turnover of around $80 million a year having come from a standing start about 12 years ago. Victoria has every opportunity of being able to do the same. Such an industry could be located within my electorate in Corner Inlet and Nouramunga. Their pristine waters would be completely appropriate and it would be a marvellous development.

It is important to reflect that, whereas some forms of development can be said to derogate the natural resource, such is not the case of aquiculture. By definition, it needs pristine water. If anything, the establishment of this industry will better the environment of South Gippsland. As I have emphasised to all concerned in the community, there is no intention to interrupt existing usages such as commercial fishing and environmental and recreational uses. The aquiculture industry can be established without causing such problems.

Since the government assumed its important role, there have been magnificent education developments within my electorate. In the City of Sale, for example, the Minister for Education has recently made available some $100 000 to enable planning to proceed on the amalgamation of Sale High School and McAlister Secondary College. People have had this plan in mind for more than 10 years, yet it is only under the governance of the Kennett government that this has been able to happen. The development will be wonderful not only for Sale but for the entire region. This consolidated facility will be magnificent in its delivery of education to our students.

I hope a science and technology centre will also be established, and I have had discussions with the minister on that subject. There is plenty of scope in and around Sale to work with the ultimate employers — for example, the oil and gas, aeronautics and agriculture industries — ensuring they have a meaningful part to play in guiding the sort of education we want to give to our students.

As I have often said, it is no use training our students to hop if at the end of the day employers want them to be able to skip. It is important that we match education with what employers ultimately want from our students. The work being undertaken in Sale will achieve that end, particularly in concert with the development of a science and technology centre.
The primary school at Leongatha is almost being rebuilt at a cost of around $800 000. At Mirboo North a superb scheme is under way, and I hope it is successful. It is in its formative stages. The secondary college and the primary school are doing wonderful work in developing master plans. Val Wearne, the principal of the secondary college, and Harry Forrester, the principal of the primary school, their staff and the school community at large are to be congratulated because this outcome will be something Mirboo North can be proud of, not only for the purpose of delivering education to students in time to come but also in the sense of establishing its rightful part in the administration of education in the district. Although the scheme is in its formative stages, I would like to think the plan will have its genesis over the next few months.

From memory there are about 41 government schools in my electorate, many of them being small, rural schools. One after the other they have been the beneficiaries of funding grants through the minister. That has transformed them for the better. Tens of thousands of dollars have been allocated and that has greatly assisted their development. I am proud to say that when I visit these schools I am able to see the tremendous results of the work undertaken as a result of the government's input.

Recently at the Sale 545 Primary School I opened the new library. The government has contributed some $80 000, with $20 000 being raised through the community's efforts. That is yet another example of what the government has been able to auspice and be actively involved in for the purpose of the advancement of its students. The government has contributed some $4 million to $5 million to education capital works in my electorate. I am delighted to say that there is much more of the same to come.

Regarding the allocation of funds to road works, country Victoria has never had it so good as under this government. In my area the Rosedale Bridge is a $15 million project under the Better Roads program. The bridge was built in about 1934 and since then, touch wood, we have avoided the disaster of any major accident. The bridge is the carriageway for all traffic passing up and down the east coast of Australia and necessarily conveys an enormous amount of traffic on a daily basis, much of it commercial.

As a result of the enlightened decision of the Minister for Roads and Ports in another place, this large funding allocation has been made. The bridge work is under way, and much work is being done within the township of Rosedale. More work is being done on the approaches to Rosedale. After all those years, that work stands as a monument to the magnificence of the government's contribution to the road system in country Victoria and in my electorate in particular. Another $10 million is being spent on roads in my electorate, so altogether some $25-odd million is being spent on roads.

Regarding health delivery, the Small Rural Hospitals Task Force has done some terrific work in bringing about appropriate outcomes for our hospitals. The hospitals at Foster, Yarram, and Maffra took part in that process.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health, the honourable member for Portland, visited the Yarram and District Community Health Service and noted its tremendous work. The minister has also seen it. Some $400 000 has been allocated to capital works to assist in the development of further programs at the Yarram health service. It is a great example of the way the government has been able to focus on rural health issues, ensuring a range of services can be delivered to people at their local community health centre. On Friday last week I was in Yarram looking at that work with the CEO, Peter Craighead. That work is a great tribute to the people working in that area.

Some $621 000 from the Community Support Fund has been spent on the Sale Regional Art Gallery. It is sited at the former Esso office, which a couple of years ago was purchased by the municipality. The Sale gallery is a remarkable regional achievement. The opening by the Minister for the Arts in another place was a tremendous event, a gala occasion for Sale and for the region generally. The gallery will enable local works and all sorts of travelling exhibitions to be exhibited.

I am informed by those who have a knowledge of the state of galleries in country and provincial Victoria that Sale gallery can be bettered by none. It is an outstanding example, fitted with the latest technology - fire alarms and the like - and offering a magnificent display area. That is a direct outcome of the efforts of the government.

I hope that by the conclusion of the parliamentary session the all-important issue of the provision of natural gas will have been tackled by the government. I will not refer to that subject in detail because notice was given today of legislation that will be debated before the session is over.
We need to achieve the availability of natural gas for our rural centres. The Murray Goulburn factory in Leongatha employs 420 people. It is now producing about $260 million of product annually and some $160 million goes offshore. I am certain that natural gas in the area will attract attendant industries based upon the dairying industry in particular. We need to have available a cheap form of energy, and if this government can do something about making that available it will be a great outcome.

It is one resource that has been sought eagerly by the people of South Gippsland for a long time. If it can be directed to Leongatha in the first instance it will mean from there on we will be able to extend it in due course through the rest of South Gippsland. I see the Minister for Public Transport, the honourable member for Gippsland West, is at the table. I am sure he has Korumburra in mind when I speak about the issue because great opportunities are on offer right around the area running across that southern coastal strip and they will be advanced no end if the government can arrange for natural gas in that area.

Our timber industry, which I have already referred to, is flourishing. We will see in the not-too-distant future the release of a considerable amount of plantation hardwood. I hope that will mean that we may see the development of yet another hardwood timber mill in the Gippsland region offering more employment for the people in our area.

Over the past few days a panel appointed by the Minister for Planning has approved the Lochsands development. It is a $45 million resort proposed to be constructed outside Lochsport in the area adjoining Lake Reeve and the Ninety Mile Beach. This is particularly pertinent to my point about the assistance this government has provided by being a catalyst. In 1989 the then planning minister, the Honourable Tom Roper, saw fit to bury the project. He called it in and he did not even give it the chance to be subjected to the public process.

Since the government was elected Mr and Mrs Vincent Rizza have seen fit to regenerate their application for the project and I am pleased and proud to say that it has passed through the process of an appropriate planning amendment and an environmental effects statement being developed. The amendment and statement have been displayed.

I point out that a consultative committee was appointed a panel. The panel held hearings for three days in my area and reported to the municipality that it approves of the development. There you have it in one. The process has been allowed to take its course and there is a $45 million project on offer that our predecessors had buried without giving it a chance to see the light of day.

I shall turn to the government's private prison development, which has been announced and for which the contracts are about to be let. That is a $70 million project about 12 kilometres outside Sale which will generate income into our local community for time ever after of some $15 million to $20 million.

I shall refer to the tannery development at Rosedale. Again the Minister for Planning has been able to take the appropriate steps, and what may have been opposition from some people in the marketplace has been circumvented. That tannery will now be developed under the auspice of Australian Leather Holdings, which will provide employment for about 60 people. More importantly, however, is the fact that the project is the beneficiary of funding assistance through the Office of Regional Development of the Department of Business and Employment. That assistance has made the project possible.

There are numerous other areas that I could go on about — namely, the oil and gas industry and the dairying industry. I shall dwell on the latter to the extent of referring to the fact that Bonlac recently announced a $160 million project at Warrigal. That project and many others are part and parcel of what is happening in and around my electorate. I know they exemplify similar such developments in other parts of country Victoria.

I listened to the comments of the Leader of the Opposition with much interest — I'm sorry, I cannot tell the house a lie, I did not listen to them with much interest. In all honesty I started the week hard because I sat down the other night and read his speech. For my sins, I am due a just reward, but as I read his comments I noticed that his first complaint was that the government is making far more money than forecast. I cannot help but reflect on the time only a few years ago when condemnation was cast upon the former government because it was losing far more money than ever forecast. Here we have a complete turn around.

The Leader of the Opposition also said the government is taxing the people too much.
Honourable members can only have regard to the summary I gave at the outset as to why the government is having to tax as it is — that is, to get the state out of the hole the then government dropped us into. As the budget papers have already explained, the government has in place a clear idea as to how it will go about getting out of the hole and ensuring that we continue to improve this wonderful state.

I say this by way of a parting comment about the opposition’s view of the world: the former government comprises people who are not only economic vandals but economic recidivists. If we let them in to run the show again we will be in exactly the same circumstances we were in when the government took office three years ago. It is important therefore to ensure that the initiatives outlined by the Treasurer in the budget, which are represented by this bill, are put into place and given effect. From my travels around my electorate, which consists of some 6000 square kilometres of the best part of Victoria, I know there is a renewed sense of community spirit, and it is wonderful to see it happening. It is a tremendous thing to see that above all else when you go interstate no-one laughs any more when you say you are from Victoria. The fact is that the people of this state are better off and are making things better for themselves and this state at large.

This government not only sees what it is that people want to achieve but is prepared to get out there and enable them to do it. The government is doing what it can to enhance the prospects not only of today’s people but also the prospects and future of the children of tomorrow.

Mrs WILSON (Dandenong North) — Most Victorians would have expected that in what is likely to be the last budget before the next election we might have seen some relaxation of the very high taxing policy of this government, a policy that has hurt many thousands of Victorians. Unfortunately the budget offers little encouragement for ordinary working men and women. There certainly appears to be little relief in sight.

In the real world out there, the real world that many politicians unfortunately seem to have little access to these days, there is a growing realisation that the average wage and salary earners have borne a disproportionate share of the economic recovery of this state. Of course the recovery is quite evident from the budget surplus, but these people realise that their hard-earned money has gone to support the get-rich-quick mentality of this government and its many friends. As a result the government has created a divided society since it came to office, and the gap between those who have and those who have not has widened considerably.

Since October 1992 most government taxes and charges have risen substantially. We were told that the average family is now paying $11 500 a year more. For the next financial year those taxes will total almost $2 billion more than was the case when this government first came to office. In fact, in the past three years almost $3.7 billion in additional taxes have been levied from the people of Victoria.

To those who thought the pain might be over after three years of this government the Premier has since indicated that he wants to find another $600 million in spending cuts. No doubt those cuts will include more job losses and certainly include higher taxes. In fact, the budget shows clearly that there is provision for more job losses. We have already seen a massive dismantling of the public service with more than 50 000 jobs lost in that particular sector alone. There has been a flow-on effect from all those job losses.

I was absolutely amazed last Tuesday when I opened the Age to see that it had reported the Premier telling a dinner for members of the Liberal Party that the greatest achievement of his government was to slash 50 000 jobs from the public sector. I find that an absolutely astounding statement because to me there is something totally immoral about any person who delights in the fact that he has got rid of jobs, regardless of whether it is 50 000 or 50 jobs and regardless of the reason.

If this is the Premier’s greatest achievement, I feel very sorry for him. Firstly, I feel sorry for him because I wonder what kind of individual could glory in this sort of achievement. Secondly, I feel sorry for the honourable members of his party because if the standard they embrace is the result of his leadership, as individuals each one of them is considerably diminished. Thirdly, and perhaps more importantly, I feel sorry for the people who have lost their livelihoods and, lastly, I feel sorry for Victoria. This does not mean that our party did not recognise there was waste, because there was some waste within the public service. In fact during the last years of the Labor government we had been addressing it, but mainly through natural attrition.

When one considers the effect of all those job losses one realises that they have come at a considerable cost not only to the individuals who lost their jobs
but to the state as a whole. For example, our education system is much poorer as a result of the many fine, experienced teachers who either were forced into accepting what they call voluntary departure packages or were sidelined as a result of organisational restructures within schools. In most schools class sizes are now larger than they have been for the past decade. Teachers are more stressed than they have ever been, and as a result many parents are now electing to send their children to private schools. It does not matter what school one goes into these days, all the teachers will tell you that they have a far greater workload than they can actually carry. Parents sending their children to private schools might suit this government to a tee because we know that much of the cost of private schools is paid for by the federal government and by the parents.

Irrespective of the bleatings of the current Minister for Education, I believe that during the years of the Labor government state schools were great schools and we were achieving very high standards of education. Now retention rates — mainly in secondary colleges — are falling dramatically and, unfortunately, this government seems to have no policy to counteract the decline that is occurring, or perhaps no inclination to tackle it. Truancy is becoming a large problem in many schools. There seems to be no will within the government to address this important matter.

Because of the new global budget provisions introduced into all schools in Victoria, parents are now constantly being asked to find money for a whole range of items and maintenance that should be and traditionally has been the responsibility of government.

On a number of occasions I have spoken about the Waverley Park Primary School in my electorate — a school where one could not find a better or harder working group of parents. The principal and staff address their roles with great enthusiasm. The parents and staff at the school are gradually being worn down by the enormous burden of urgent maintenance work that needs to be addressed.

Two months ago I wrote to the Minister for Education telling him about this problem and asking for his assistance. The school provided a series of photographs showing graphically the work that is required to be done, but my letter has not been answered and the letter from the school council has yet to be answered.

The school desperately needs urgent maintenance work to be carried out because of the potentially unsafe conditions of many of the classrooms. For example, the roofs leak in a number of the rooms and the window frames are so rotten that if any of the students fall or push against them the windows fall out. During times of heavy rain buckets are unearthed from a closet and placed at strategic positions around the school to collect the water that flows from the roof.

Electrical wiring has had to be replaced on a number of occasions because of water damage from the roof. The carpets are water damaged and full of mould and mildew, which surely is an unhealthy environment for young students, particularly in an area where there are high levels of asthma and respiratory complaints. Also there are holes in the carpets that have been covered with masking tape to prevent staff and students from tripping.

The parents at the school have worked as hard as they possibly can to provide the many extras the school requires. They are aware of the benefits to students of the technology that is available in schools these days. Over the past year they have raised about $20 000 locally for repairs and replacement of doors, windows and carpets and for internal painting rather than spending the money on some of the high technology equipment.

It is well beyond the resources of any school council to provide funds for the most urgent repairs required at some of the schools, particularly the big-ticket items such as the repair of roofs, windows and doors. I hope that when the Minister for Education gets around to answering my correspondence and that of the school council he will have good news for those people. They deserve some good news because both the staff and the parents work extremely hard.

In recent months the Department of Education has again been encouraging school councils and their school communities to form cooperatives to provide money for a range of buildings and other facilities required in schools. That proves once again the strange priorities of this government, because there seem to be stacks of money for the circuses, monuments and help to the big end of town but no money for some of the basics in education.

Many of the parents in my electorate are finding it extremely difficult to provide funds for the extras required at the schools. School budgets are now expected to cover many items that were not
previously included and parents are constantly being asked to give more and more money or to raise additional funds for specific projects. This obviously advantages children from the wealthier areas but disadvantages those who live in the poorer areas. A system that was once based on equity is now very inequitable.

The effect of passing over all the responsibility to principals to balance school budgets has been to turn principals into accountants rather than educators. In many schools that I have visited recently principals have regretted the burden of their new responsibilities, which prevent them from being involved in so much of the education and curriculum of the schools, and the fact that they are now administrators and accountants.

I am deeply concerned that our education system is in such a state of decline. This has been acknowledged by the allocation of $52 million that the minister announced recently for the Keys to Life program. This is virtually an admission that in many cases the reduction of staff in our schools, particularly primary schools, has had a great effect on the ability of many students to read and write, and with no special needs teachers to carry out remedial work this funding is urgently needed.

I am not surprised that the majority of my colleagues on this side of the house have elected to mention the Community Support Fund in their contributions to the debate. I like to call it the ministerial slush fund because if anything portrays the difference in priorities and philosophy between this government and the opposition it is the distribution of funds from this particular source.

Let me say in fairness that many of the projects and organisations that have received funding from the Community Support Fund are indeed worthy recipients. However, I have some concern that the original main purpose of the fund has been overlooked to a great extent. It needs to be understood that a large amount of the money that flows into the fund is drawn from some of the lowest income areas in the state. I believe a large proportion of gaming machine revenue comes from the western suburbs. I know much of it comes from areas like Dandenong, but very little of that money actually seems to come back to those areas in the form of either project or capital funding.

Indeed, the priorities of the fund seem to be centred mainly on the big-ticket items and the high-profile organisations. It seems to me that people who need help in these low-income areas are often not assisted in the way they need to be assisted and money is often spent on the more elitist-type projects.

It is appropriate to give credit where it is due, and I admit I was very pleased to hear the announcement by the Minister for Community Services this afternoon that an additional $21.479 million will be provided to support families where one or other of the breadwinners happens to have a gambling problem. I understand from what the minister said that the money will be used for family counselling, research and support. I admit this is a good step. It means the government has acknowledged there is a big problem with people who are addicted to gambling.

The problem is certainly evident in my electorate. For instance, the work of all the welfare groups in cities like Dandenong has increased dramatically. The Dandenong Benevolent Society, with which I have had a long association, tells me that it is now handling hundreds more cases than it did previously. When members of the society visit families with assistance in the form of food parcels and the like, they often find the fridge is bare and the only article in the food cupboard is a packet of breakfast cereal. There really is a problem, and I am pleased to acknowledge the government is trying to address it by providing the assistance it announced today.

The Dandenong Benevolent Society helps hundreds of families every year. Many of those have family members with compulsive gambling problems. Unfortunately, in areas where people have very low incomes they have so little else in their lives that they are often the ones seduced by the slick advertising of the casino and the gaming machine operators. All the advertising for gambling shows glamorous people having a wonderful time, a great night out, and always winning. None of the advertisements show that a person loses.

We know it is definitely not the case that everyone wins. But the advertisements for both the casino and gaming machines portray a very wrong image. This is why I believe it is necessary to have advertising that puts the position honestly and shows that although some people win sometimes, unfortunately the majority of people lose, and some of them lose all the time.

In the same way that we now have warnings on cigarette packets and the excellent TAC warnings against speeding and drink-driving, there needs to
be some very specific warnings to people who participate in any form of gambling that if they gamble they will probably lose their money. I know that is certainly not a popular concept with people who are making a lot of money at the expense of others.

Until today's announcement the total amount allocated for problem gambling programs, including support, counselling, advertising and education programs, was only $6.6 million statewide. It was certainly not enough and it is hoped the additional $21.479 million will reduce the problem considerably. When one considers that $1 million every week flows into the Community Support Fund from the 1 per cent of turnover from gaming machines in hotels, it is not difficult to understand that more than $1 billion per annum is swelling the Treasury coffers from all gambling sources.

Community Support Fund money has been spent on the new sports and aquatic centre at Albert Park. It has been spent on the museum project and the Exhibition Building and has provided additional funding for Victorian Institute of Sport programs and Tennis Victoria. I have no problem with funding being provided for these purposes, although they are not necessarily the same priorities that the opposition may have designated.

However, I have some problems with the $1.5 million that was allocated to the America's Cup challenge, irrespective of the fact that the yacht actually went to the bottom of the ocean. I also have a problem with the money provided for a theatrette at the Rialto, particularly when an excellent organisation, Vicsrapid, which provides mainstream sporting opportunities for intellectually handicapped people, has been trying very hard to have its funding renewed either through the community services or the sports and recreation department but has failed to do so. This is probably one of the most miserable situations I have encountered in recent years, where a group of very dedicated people, many of whom work in a voluntary capacity with hundreds of intellectually handicapped young men and women, are denied $40 000 to continue their superb work.

Funding could have been provided from the pool of more than $1 billion a year that comes from all forms of gambling. The message is: if you are young and glamorous and you can provide a big event or a circus your funding by the government will be guaranteed, but if you are physically or intellectually handicapped your chances of funding are much reduced.

I turn briefly to the area of health, which concerns us all. Much has been said in this place about all aspects of health care needed by the wider community. Dandenong Hospital, like other public hospitals, has been hard hit by the enormous funding cuts imposed over the past three years by the government. Many beds at the hospital remain closed despite the fact that the hospital services a large growth area. The area is expanding on a monthly basis as a result of the new houses being built in Cranbourne, Pakenham and Berwick, but despite that beds remain closed.

One of the greatest tragedies resulting from cuts to health funding has been the changed relationship between nursing staff and patients in public hospitals. Nurses, doctors and ancillary staff say that in the past they had time to talk to their patients to find out about any problems they had that were not health related but were slowing patient recovery. However, nurses are so stressed and overworked because of staff cuts they have time to concentrate only on their main nursing duties. The friendly chat, kind words and small amount of time spent fussing over sick patients are things of the past.

Hygiene standards in our hospitals are of concern to most of us. Recently, a number of letters appeared in the daily press referring to the lower standards of cleaning and hygiene that are so evident in public hospitals. Staph infection continues to be a problem in a number of hospitals because of its deadly effect on extremely ill patients. Our hospitals should not be operating under substandard conditions. To achieve high standards of hygiene adequate resourcing is required; but that is not being provided by the government.

I shall briefly comment on the ambulance service although I do not intend to specifically talk about any of the recent deaths that were the result of the delays in ambulance attendance other than to say my heart goes out to the families concerned. In the 10½ years I have been in Parliament I do not remember a time when there was more comment, more complaints or more unrest about the delays in our ambulance services. The Victorian community has always been realistic about the possibility of ambulance services being overburdened with cases and unable to get to emergency situations as quickly as they would like, but recently the complaints have been coming in fast and furious. When one analyses the situation one finds there are far too few
ambulance officers to handle the calls that come into the system. Individual ambulance officers have commented that they are often required to work more than 60 hours a week and, like the rest of the community, they get tired and worn out. They want to spend some of their days off with their families. The system has been cut back to the bone and it is haemorrhaging. The minister must act quickly to restore faith in what was once an excellent ambulance service. She must establish clear lines of communication between herself and the representatives of ambulance officers. It is inappropriate to blame various sections of the organisation.

During the past week we have heard the minister blame the ambulance union and the Trades Hall Council. Perhaps the next group she will blame will be the patients who require the ambulances! They are the only people who have not incurred her wrath.

Public housing waiting lists in my area have now reached a serious level. People wanting public housing, particularly families that need three or four bedrooms, are being told they must wait at least seven years for houses. That indicates the government has failed to provide housing for low-income earners within a reasonable period. Many of these people are in desperate need to move into public housing. They need to be rescued because their lifestyles are diminished because they lack disposable funds. Some people in my area are paying $150 a week out of pensions of little more than $220 a week, which creates misery for the families involved.

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

Sitting suspended 6.27 p.m. until 8.03 p.m.

Mr PERTON (Doncaster) — It is with great pleasure that I join this debate on the appropriation bill. In Victoria there is a new spirit, a good feeling. It is not a gloom-and-doom mentality. It is not the mentality of the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is not the gloom and doom that we read about in the newspapers and hear about on the television. There is a spirit of regeneration in the state of Victoria.

After listening to the speeches of opposition members one would think that the education system in this state had suffered under this government, but the opposite is true. As proof of that I mention that my parliamentary colleagues and I, in conjunction with my local council, the City of Manningham, sponsored the first Doncaster public speaking competition. If any honourable members had been there, as the editors of the local newspapers were, they would have been amazed by the talent. They would have been proud of the product of our Victorian education system because in the very formal environment provided by the council these young people — a bracket of 16-year-olds and 12-year-olds — gave speeches that would have done credit to any of the members of the house.

The ultimate winner of the secondary school competition, Kristy Pinkerton of the Doncaster Secondary College, made a speech about our changing society. Honourable members would have been moved by a speech that managed to relate personal experience to good policy and sound management. Although on the previous Saturday I had heard a professor of politics give his views on the changing nature of Australian society, I suggest Kristy Pinkerton and the other participants had more to offer than professors of politics and the like.

Again the house would have been amazed at the quality of the speeches of the 12-year-old entrants. The winner, Amy Quirk of St Peter’s and St Paul’s Primary School, gave a terrific insight into the nature of politics and her vision for Australia. The judges — the chief commissioner, Adam Kempton, the federal member, Kevin Andrews, and my upper house colleague Bruce Skeggs — in their judgments paid tribute to the leadership potential of the young people who took part in the competition. I believe one or two of those people will end up in leadership positions in federal, state or local politics. The fact that those young people spoke so well and gave such a wonderful portrayal of the product of our education system is a great tribute to the schools, teachers and administration in the Doncaster area.

For many years during the term of the Labor government my schools were left bereft of additional grants. Schools had no maintenance money and were becoming run down. Under this government we now have the money available to undertake the necessary construction works on school sites, assist with refurbishment and provide new programs that are bringing a new spirit of confidence to the schools. This evening Adam Kempton visited Parliament and we discussed some of the needs of the schools. One of the things we will be building in the Doncaster electorate is a city of the future based on the knowledge, industries and library facilities that a community needs in the 1990s. Through good negotiations between the commissioners and the Westfield corporation the
arrangements to extend Westfield in Doncaster will provide a $4.6 million community contribution to building a library of the future, and that will be a magnificent facility: it will provide education for young people and modern communication facilities for the community, driving the business community forward into the 1990s. This is very good news.

The leadership in the schools is seizing these opportunities. It would be easy for me just to list headmasters in the area: I shall not do that, but leaders in a school community like Vicki Mackrell, the principal of the Doncaster Primary School; Juris Hyrenko, the principal of the Doncaster Secondary College, Robbie Burns; the principal of the Millgate Primary School ——

Mrs Wilson — Good names!

Mr PERTON — As the honourable member for Dandenong North says, they are great names. They are terrific leaders of their school communities. When you visit those schools and talk to the students you find a depth of knowledge that is most unexpected.

Recently during the Australia Remembers ceremonies I attended the Millgate Primary School where young people read poetry and talked of the experiences of their grandparents and parents. I see the honourable member for Glen Waverley in the chamber. He too shared in the experience in Vietnam of the parents of many of these young children.

It amazed me that when I went to that school to talk to those young people about war and what we remember of it the teachers had provided the children, right down to the five-year-olds, with an incredible insight into the history of their country, their community and their own families. The Labor Party may carp and the radical unionists may decry the product of our education system but what I see every week in my local community is a fantastic education system, as good as anything in the world producing a product that is even better than anything in the world. When I consider these young people going out and trading in Asia, learning Indonesian and Mandarin languages and Malaysian customs and dealing with Japanese students on exchange I think of the marvellous world we are moving into and I know the education system, especially as it operates in my electorate, is meeting the challenge.

Not only has the government improved the education system but, with the cooperation of commissioners, it is also improving the environment of the City of Manningham. Over many years members of Parliament and councillors have pressed for improvement to the Doncaster gardens and for upgrading of the Mullum Mullum Creek parklands. This year more than $200,000 has been provided by the state government for the construction of the Ruffey Creek lake and recreational area and the Mullum Mullum Creek area. I often walk in the mornings in East Doncaster and I have noticed koalas in the area again, and platypuses have been seen in the Mullum Mullum Creek. If one took notice of the complaints heard and even read the Age two weeks ago one would think those areas were dead and polluted; yet the platypus has been re-established in the middle of the eastern suburbs.

The government is not just providing money for forests and parklands that improve the environment. In the Doncaster area since the early 1980s we have been suffering the problems of pollution, traffic congestion and diminution of lifestyle as a result of too much traffic forcing its way through our streets. When the Labor Party came to power in 1982 the first thing it did in the Doncaster area was subdivide the heavy rail line reservation to East Doncaster, and some 35 protesters received front-page coverage in support of a railway to Doncaster. The Labor Party made that impossible.

With the privatisation and reconstruction of the bus system through the good works of the National Bus Company we now have 400 additional bus services each week in my area. Those services are not just from Doncaster to the city or from Doncaster to Box Hill; the services run in suburban streets and allow people to catch buses from outside their front doors to their local shopping centres. It is a far more convenient way for older people and mothers with young children to shop. Young mothers do not have to worry about parking cars or struggling with parcels, children and pushers. I congratulate not only the National Bus Company but even more so the Minister for Public Transport for undertaking these fantastic reforms.

In the 1990s the coalition government in Victoria was firstly forced to set about the basic housekeeping task of balancing the budget. We have done it on both the current account and the capital account. It should be noted that this is the first time in more than 30 years that this has been achieved in this state. However, these are accountant’s terms,
they are not the stuff that will impassion or inspire the community. The community regards it as important that we balance the budget, undertake responsible financial management and make sure that Victoria, which still has the highest debt and taxes in the country, is brought back into a state of prosperity where those figures are no longer an embarrassment and where we can hold our heads high in financial terms.

Apart from that the culture and spirit of the state are important. By his confident and strong leadership the Premier has managed to inspire the community. Although not everyone agrees with his style it is interesting that when I am interstate taxi drivers say, 'How is that Jeff Kennett going? Gosh, he's terrific. We'd like to rid ourselves of that Goss or that Carr'. In comparing the New South Wales Premier and our Premier, the New South Wales Premier has broken almost every major promise he made at the last election. Just as the Labor Party in Victoria did, he made some rash promises about the abolition of toll roads. That was the first broken promise. He worked out that the toll roads were popular and that the roads the Greiner government had constructed were what the New South Wales voters wanted and demanded.

We can read opinion polls and listen to talk-back radio but for me one of the best ways of getting the mood of the community is to go to local facilities. One of the facilities I use — and I do not use it often enough — is the Doncaster Aquarena, a local gymnasium and leisure centre. When using the exercise room or the swimming pool 18 or 19-year-olds come up and say, 'Isn't the grand prix something terrific? Isn't it a great thing you are doing at Albert Park. We have gone to look at it and you are right, Mr Perton, it does look better'. They then go on to talk about their confidence about obtaining jobs and careers. In fact at 7 o'clock this morning I was talking to a young woman who had been a public servant but had given it away and set up her own business as a physical fitness trainer. That is confidence for you, a 23-year-old saying she will strike out from the bureaucracy and have her own business. It is all about empowerment and liberalism, and we are seeing it today. It is not all attributable to the government; we have a fantastic community made up of talented, well-educated and confident people.

In Doncaster, especially in East Doncaster, we have one of the highest concentrations of people of ethnic Chinese origin, be they from Hong Kong or Taiwan, and they are fantastic. They are natural entrepreneurs and contributors to the community. As honourable members know, the Liberal Party recently called for candidates for preselection. One of my referees, Mr Jeffrey Tan, is a good example of this breed of Australian. He comes from Malaysia, was educated in England and has set up house in Doncaster. He is engaged in the air transport of top-quality Australian food to top-quality Asian establishments — five-star hotels from India to Taiwan, from Shanghai to Kuala Lumpur. He sells not just high-value products — would you believe he sells two containers of Victorian lettuce a week to Hong Kong? That is an entrepreneur; that is someone with the skills and talent this country needs. He calls himself Australian; his children talk with Australian accents; he runs his business in Heidelberg; and he participates in the local Doncaster Church of Christ. There is an Australian, and there is a contributor.

In the City of Manningham a new section of the library has been built providing Chinese language books to our elderly Chinese community. It is fascinating that that is the most borrowed section of the library. Through the efforts of Jack Wu, a developer from Taiwan, the Chinese community was called upon to donate books. He managed also to get donations of books from Taiwan. The state government has contributed to the process by providing the money needed to bring a librarian from Taiwan to catalogue the books so they will be even more useful to the Chinese community in my area.

Those in the Parliament who have enjoyed the food of Plume Chinese Restaurant or Zen's Chinese Restaurant, two of the best restaurants in Melbourne, would know that Andrew Ng and the Ng family are natural entrepreneurs. They specialise in providing the best quality service to their community and they then contribute their profit to the community. Whether it is the football club, Doncare or the social club that need assistance, those people help to provide that assistance.

There are many characters in my electorate. Members would know Yoland Lim from his television advertisements, but do they know that he exports traditional Chinese medicines from Australia to China? That is a staggering achievement. That is an entrepreneurial spirit, and it is very much an Australian spirit.

What else is happening in my electorate that is good news? New businesses are being opened. Just a few weeks ago I was visiting some shops and met
Arthur and Kerry Athanassiou. They have started a new business. On Saturday night at 8 o'clock in the evening their business was still open and customers were coming in. They were providing a high level of service. I asked, 'How are things going?'. They said, 'It's hard work but it's fantastic. It's our own business, and it's thriving'. The couple and their children were in the shop and friends had come to visit. That is a good example in my electorate of the way small businesses develop.

There have been hard times in the building industry over the past decade, yet in my area quality businessmen are still producing quality products. Ron Englehart, who builds houses in your electorate as well mine, Mr Acting Speaker, has survived the recession by building a top-quality product. That is a tribute to quality and to his hard work and dedication. People like Ian Farrer and Gary Hutchens of Darnley Developments are taking the hard block of land and not taking the easy solution of just building a shopping centre. They are ensuring the development includes top-quality housing to complement the rest of the area. People such as Glen Eagle and Barry Plant are still working hard in the subdivision and building area.

Ms Marple interjected.

Mr PERTON — The honourable member for Altona is a cynic. Having lost preselection, it would be hard to be positive. I am glad she is in the chamber and smiling. It is not just commerce that makes a community. For many people, the churches are still a centre of community life. In the past year I visited the Doncaster Church of Christ, which has completely rebuilt its church. It is a fascinating congregation, having a history over a century old and having received the orchardists, the ethnic Anglo-Celts and an influx of people from China, Malaysia and elsewhere. The spirit in that church is dominated by its minister, Paul Cameron, who you may have seen mentioned in the newspapers recently as the minister for the Richmond Football Club. It is a tough job but one he does with a genuine sincerity.

Although I am not a member of that congregation, I have to say it is one of the greatest pleasures of my political life to visit the Doncaster Church of Christ — not only to participate in their singing and ceremonies but just to hear a sermon from Paul Cameron. I am sure the players of the Richmond Football Club, who basically came from last to third on the ladder this year, would pay some small tribute to him.

It is not just that sort of ministry that has developed in Doncaster. Father John Dupuche of St Peter's and St Paul's has built a fantastic ministry, developing a relationship between Catholicism and Buddhism. He has travelled to India on several occasions to develop his knowledge of Hinduism and Buddhism. His concern is to build links between the two communities based on the ethical and moral values the two share.

It is fantastic for the children who attend the parish primary school attached to Father Dupuche's parish to learn something of the customs of the east; they are learning about meditation and other techniques to enhance their worship and education. It is a great tribute to an interesting man. Again, it is not just economics that make a community.

It has been fascinating over the past year, with a spirit of confidence, to deal with local business people in my area who are concerned about civil and human rights. Some two weeks ago Eric Grigorich of Donvale travel agency came to me with a fascinating civil rights issue relating to immigration and the problems of a family in which one member in Australia was in poor health and needed the support of relatives from Croatia. Through working with Mr Grigorich in an active and cooperative way we managed to remove the obstacles that prevented this relative coming from Croatia on a tourist visa, enabling the family to come together in a time of crisis.

Whenever I have a hard case, I find that one of the solicitors in my area, such as Jennifer Mairs, is prepared to take the case on, often at no cost or on limited legal aid. It gives a spirit of confidence when dealing with the hard cases to live in a community where people really care.

The 1990s are a time of new technology, including communications technology. People think of Doncaster as just a dormitory suburb, but it is more than that. Those members of Parliament who look at their pay slips will see the name Hansen Corporation on them.

The Hansen Corporation, a high-tech company, not only processes our salaries but processes international accounts from as far afield as the United Kingdom instantaneously on-line. That corporation is based in Doncaster. The people who work with the super computers, the technicians and the experts in short-wave design all work in the old Shell building in Doncaster just off Doncaster Road, so we are part of it.
Ken Hansen is an experienced businessman, but in recent times people such as Simon Kriss have been setting up small businesses to compete and cooperate with major multi-national corporations that form our communication industry.

Many people in my electorate are producing quality products, for example, the Lezzi brothers. People come all over Melbourne to visit their fruit shop in East Doncaster. For gaming facilities there is the Doncaster Inn, a terrific venue providing the services that people want. It is managed by a man with the exquisite name of Brett Melbourne. There are people such as Peter Moore, who runs the pharmacy, and David Bayes, who runs McDonalds—all those people are doing fantastic jobs for their communities. Ted Strapp, who has been around for what seems like 100 years selling cars, and Kevin Benade, who set up a new BMW dealership that services a large portion of Melbourne are other examples.

The reason I mentioned those names is because there is no doubt that the Victorian Liberal government has restored confidence in this state, which is important. The fact is we have a terrific population. We have wonderful people who are not only good business people and good educators but concerned about their environment, their fellowman and building a better community.

I have the honour to represent a fantastic electorate. It has been well served by the election of a Liberal government and it appreciates the changes that have been brought into effect. Doncaster is the first community that experienced the privatisation of electricity, and it has been a good experience. We are a community that is being served by the new $250 million extension of the Eastern Freeway: the biggest road project currently undertaken in Victoria, although of course, it is soon to be dwarfed by the City Link project. Nevertheless, this is a good thing for a community that deserved better during the time of the Labor government but which did not receive it. It needed the election of a Liberal government to deliver fairness, equity and leadership. The government has provided leadership and the Doncaster community is certainly one that has responded to it by delivering in the 1990s environment.

Mr MICALLEF (Springvale) — I believe the speech of the honourable member for Doncaster to be unusual. Normally he gives me plenty of ammunition to fire at him, but tonight his speech was a total parish-pump type contribution. He must be coming up to preselection!

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr MICALLEF — All I can say is that he must have prepared the speech in anticipation of being opposed, therefore he is unpopular. He felt that because he had put so much time into preparing it he might as well present it, so I will give him 9 out of 10 for innovation in this time of adversity.

Having spent sometime in Doncaster years ago, I point out that it is an interesting place, but no matter what the honourable member for Doncaster says, it is still fairly boring compared with places such as Springvale which has 112 different ethnic groups, much more vitality and much more vibrant day-to-day activities.

I bet if you, Mr Acting Speaker, came down I could show you a good time, a good meal and some good quality time at a fraction of the cost to what you would pay in Doncaster. I would suggest the food and the presentation would be well above what is presented in Doncaster. If anybody wants to come and see an excellent community in action, come down to Springvale.

As I said, I will give a sample of 112 different ethnic communities who live together in excellent harmony in a way that has become a model for the rest of the world. Earlier this year global diversity delegates came to Australia to attend a conference in New South Wales. They visited Springvale as one of the areas to look at and took back some of their experiences of living in a multicultural society like Australia. The Prime Minister said at the opening of the conference that we do not present ourselves to be a model for the rest of the world to look at but that there are many experiences that the rest of the world can learn from us.

Getting back to the real world and looking at the honourable member for Doncaster in an objective way, I say that he is nowhere near the standard of the previous member for Doncaster was. He was not a pseudo-presenter being concerned about the community; he was a real person. Morrie Williams was head and shoulders above the current member, who has a long way to go before he fills his shoes. This whole house respected Morrie for his contribution, his sincerity and his ability to get up and call a spade a spade when it was not comfortable to do so, even in his own party.
Mr Perton interjected.

Mr MICALLEF — You’ve got a long way to go, Sonny, in that regard, so stick to it and you may well eventually come up to his standards.

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr MICALLEF — You have made your contribution so leave the house and let things go on because you are only going to present yourself as a nuisance and undo a lot of the good work of every Doncaster person you listed. They will now be in your Hansard greens, so you better make sure that their names are spelt correctly!

That is enough about the honourable member of Doncaster. Before I get on to the main thrust of my speech I must respond to another speech made by the honourable member for Mornington. I am getting a little sick of his snide remarks about the only policy the Labor Party in government being the legalisation of drugs. It is sad and sick that somebody becomes absolutely paranoid and preoccupied about those issues when this government is doing so much to wreck the fabric of society in this state.

The Premier is concerned about the violence down in King Street at night. There is a bit of a raucous and the Premier goes on the radio, with Neil Mitchell and his mates, is reported in the Age and is reported by all the other media people who support this current government right or wrong. The Premier has received a lot of publicity about this matter. I live in the City of Greater Dandenong. In the past 18 months 12 drug-related deaths have been discovered in municipal facilities in that region. It is a disgrace when government members attack people who are trying to deal with the problem and when they have produced remedies.

Government members come out with suggestions, such as decriminalisation of drugs, and, as a lawyer, the honourable member for Doncaster should understand the difference between decriminalisation and legalisation. He should also understand that people should try to work through the problems. The honourable member for Doncaster might have the courtesy to make a proposal for more resources to fight the drug problem. We can fight the problems of alcohol abuse or whatever in King Street, which upsets the facade of the King Street night circuit, but there are many more real problems.

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr MICALLEF — 12 people have died in one suburb. What are you doing about it? Nothing!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr E. R. Smith) — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster has had his go. The honourable member for Springvale has the right to be heard in silence, and I demand that he receive that courtesy.

Mr MICALLEF — What I as a local member have done is to suggest that we have a summit of all the organisations that have funding left.

Mr Perton interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster should remain silent. If he does not do so I shall take action.

Mr MICALLEF — I have suggested that a summit of all those organisations that have funding left get together to work through the problem. What has the honourable member for Doncaster done? He is part of the government that has cut funding to the organisations. I would hide my ugly face behind the bench and get out of the way. It is a disgrace that the government is responding selectively in a knee-jerk way to get publicity but does not deal with the real problems in the suburbs.

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Springvale should address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr MICALLEF — I am sorry, Mr Acting Speaker; I have been watching the Premier too much. The Premier boasts about his achievements, but recently one of his greatest achievements was the sacking of 50 000 public servants and witnessing the destruction of community and health services. It is making it difficult for us who are trying to achieve some quality of life and support for ordinary people in the suburbs.

What is the role of the media? It is about time the media stood up and questioned the government. We are heading down the same road as happened in Queensland over many years when there was a strong Premier, and look how Queensland finished up — there was corruption because of the inability of the media to question a Premier who, because he was a bully, was able to get away with it. It should not happen. Where there is stench there is corruption. We are beginning to see that in relation to the casino, with the Premier and the cabinet looking after their mates.
The media should stand up and be counted. They should question the government and make it accountable. We all remember the Insight articles in the Age many years ago, as the honourable member for Sunshine would recall, which took on governments irrespective of how powerful they were. They took on the Henry Boltes, Dick Hamers and other Premiers. It did not matter who was running the state; the issue was how they were running the state. It is about time we had a media that stood up to the government.

Another disgraceful action taken by the government is the expansion of gaming in the state. I was a member of a committee that helped to introduce gaming machines and the casino. It was never meant to be a focal point to relieve every Victorian of the income needed for everyday living. Now we are witnessing the enormous consequences, as the honourable member for Coburg pointed out in his excellent contribution, of what the casino is doing, particularly to the Asian community. That community represents about 3 per cent of the Victorian population but makes up about 40 per cent of the customers at Crown Casino. The Minister for Community Services should be ashamed of being part of a government that encourages the Asian community onto the gambling scene in Victoria, because that is wreaking havoc on ordinary householders in suburbs such as mine. Asian members of the community in my electorate have lost their jobs, houses and cars; marriages have broken up and there is domestic violence. It will be left up to the next generation to pick up the pieces. The government should hang its head in shame!

The impact of gaming machines and the casino is a growing problem — one that was never intended to occur. I accept that the previous government set the project in train, but it was never intended to be attractive to the ordinary person in the community: it was meant as a tourist attraction to siphon off some of the international tourist trade dollars that come to this country. It is being used instead to live off the earnings of the ordinary citizens in this state and those who are vulnerable.

When one attends functions where there is a large percentage of the ethnic community who love to gamble in a small way with lucky tickets and raffles it is now the case that the government is preying on that vulnerability. An article by Paul Robinson in Saturday’s Age reports on the savage cuts: 50 000 public servants have been retrenched, sacked or got rid of. The government has increased taxes to the highest level of any state in Australia. The article goes on to say that the Premier is still as popular as ever. We’ll see about that! I have a lot of faith in ordinary Victorians. The polls show some volatility. Rednecks may be attracted to the Premier’s love of aggression and the way he handles situations like the grand prix and the ambulance dispute, but instead of fixing the problems for the benefit of all Victorians the Premier talks about sacking ambulance drivers, contracting out, privatising and using any excuse to disband a service that has given a lot of support over the years. That is the sort of Premier we have.

It is very un-Victorian and un-Australian to respond like that to a difficult situation when ambulance drivers are attempting not only to improve their quality of life and working conditions but also to take on issues on behalf of the community they are dedicated to serving. It is unspeakable that the Premier should act in that way. He should use his good offices to remedy the problem rather than making threats. He has got away with it in the past but should not be allowed to get away with it in the future, because Victorian householders are paying $1500 a year more in gas, water and electricity charges and family taxes.

To hear government members support the Premier and heap praise on the government by naming people in their electorates in the face of what is going on in the community is a disgrace. People out there are hurting and it is about time the government understood the issues. People are being left on hospital trolleys. Even Liberal members in the south-eastern suburbs went to the hospitals and met with hospital staff. The hospitals are now getting a lot of bad publicity about waiting lists and people with serious injuries being left in casualty wards waiting to be treated. It is a serious situation when Liberal members of Parliament have to take action and get into their own Premier and Minister for Health to get them to remedy the situation.

The government should fix the hospital situation and do the right thing by the hospitals and the ambulance service, which has suffered cuts of some 200 workers since the government’s election. The government cannot continue to cut services drastically and then pretend that services will continue to be provided but on the basis of full cooperation with those working in the industry. It is a nonsense situation. The government will have to do a lot better than that.

The government certainly has too close a link with the business community. We know of the links with
the casino, Lloyd Williams and the like. That is beginning to damage the government’s image and gives the impression that the government is certainly looking after its mates. As has been said time and again, the government is more concerned about the number of people waiting at casino tables than it is about the waiting lists at hospitals or waiting times for ambulances.

The government has become arrogant and cronyism has become rampant. It will certainly see a reaction to that. It may not be evident in the polls, but it will certainly be evident in the election to come. Victorians have the good sense to give the government one jolt out of office and I am sure they will do it particularly well.

The government’s budget completely fails to address a number of key issues in both of my shadow portfolios — ethnic affairs and industry services. It is obvious from the most cursory examination of the state of ethnic affairs in Victoria that the Kennett government has failed and will continue to fail to deliver programs and services of any real or lasting benefit to ethnic communities. In the 18 months that I have been shadow Minister for Ethnic Affairs I have rarely seen the Premier at any ethnic community function. I will continue to harangue him about that. Again, at the 84th anniversary of the Republic of China the Premier sent along a backbencher to represent him, yet there were perhaps 1000 people from the Asian community at the grand ballroom of the Hyatt hotel. The Premier did not even have the courtesy to turn up or at least send a minister or his parliamentary secretary. That demonstrates his contempt for the ethnic communities in Victoria.

With its cutbacks, sell-offs and other drastic measures the government has sold out ethnic communities and completely failed to give adequate support to new arrivals. That is obvious. The Premier’s style in ethnic affairs is about gimmickry and political stunts; he has used his office for cheap political point scoring.

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr MICALLEF — I can certainly read it in this government. It has continually exploited and exacerbated divisions within and between ethnic communities for political advantage. That is an absolute misuse of the very important offices of the Premier of this state and Minister for Ethnic Affairs.

The Premier struts around the international stage playing at being the world statesman. We have just seen a demonstration of that while he was in Greece. He pretends he has some international status, which is an absolute nonsense because he is seen as a joke overseas. We might even have Premier Court going overseas soon doing deals on behalf of Australia! If this country is to be serious in international terms it should recognise that we have a federal government that is responsible for and elected to carry out that role. Yet here we have a joke walking around on the international scene and making suggestions to international organisations!

The Premier has very little understanding of the damage he is doing. His actions stem from purely political opportunism. He does not give long-term support to ethnic communities in this state or think about targeting their specific needs.

When the government came to power it set about actively dismantling the progressive policy initiatives in ethnic affairs that were instituted by the previous government. The most insidious measures were those dismantling the processes that were in place, resulting in the removal of the powers and resources of the Ethnic Affairs Commission. The commission is only a shadow of its former self and this government ought to be ashamed of what it has done.

At the same time there has been an erosion of translation, interpreting and general language services. That has had a direct impact on ethnic groups’ abilities to access government services. That is disgraceful.

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr MICALLEF — If you keep that up I will deal with you.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Dr Coghill) — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster is out of order. I ask him to remain silent.

Mr MICALLEF — Increases in taxes and charges have had a disproportionately adverse impact on ethnic groups. In many instances those groups are already struggling to make ends meet. Many families come to this country as refugees and it takes a long while to become established. When they come here they are hit with government taxes and charges and then discover that government services have been cut back.
The government's continued downgrading of ethnic affairs to being a low priority area has certainly affected the Overseas Qualifications Unit. I understand a recent review of the unit recommends its continuation. The government's actions have certainly knocked about the unit's effectiveness. It sacked and retrenched qualified and expert staff from the unit. It brought in people repatriated from other departments and directed them to go into areas where they did not have expertise. That had an impact on the effective working of the unit.

We all know that the qualifications of many professionals and tradespeople from ethnic backgrounds are being underutilised in this state. I am glad to note the government has picked up the fact that this is happening and agreed to resurrect and support the continuation of the Overseas Qualifications Unit. It is a pity that it has taken three years for the government to come to that decision.

The census shows that more than 700,000 people born in non-English-speaking countries currently reside in Victoria. This represents more than 16 per cent of the state's population, the highest percentage of any state or territory in Australia. Also, Victoria was recorded as having the highest proportion of people who speak a language other than English.

Victoria is a diverse cultural state. The federal Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs report on population flows says that 25 per cent of those arriving in Australia in 1992-93 settled in Victoria, and 27.5 per cent of Victorians were born overseas. We have an extremely high population of those born overseas. These multicultural figures should be cause for celebration!

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr MICALLEF — After listening to the inane comments of the honourable member for Doncaster one would be embarrassed to suggest that he may be part of those statistics. You are an embarrassment to your party. It is no wonder you have not got on. I totally concur with your Premier, who obviously treats you like a dill!

When almost 30 per cent of Victoria's population are from non-English-speaking backgrounds — that is almost one-third of the population — it is hard to understand why there is so little in the budget that acknowledges that fact. It has been well publicised that the government will spend $35 million on an advertising campaign that will be nothing more than political propaganda; yet not 1 per cent is being spent on new initiatives in ethnic affairs. In the first year of the Kennett government spending on ethnic affairs was zero. That shows what the government thinks about ethnic communities in this state.

Funding for ethnic affairs in the budget is only a miserable $234,000, and the overall figure in program outlays of $1.8 million is pitiful and reeks of tokenism. The ethnic communities will respond to that at the next election. The government will spend only $1.8 million for the whole of Victoria and yet the Premier can spend $33 million refurbishing his offices. It is an absolute disgrace.

Last week we were told that $1 million was lent from the Community Support Fund to the Grolloys for a project associated with the Rialto tower. The government ought to be ashamed of its action. That funding should have gone into support for ethnic communities, but instead it has been used to support the rich and powerful. That is what the government is all about!

Mr JENKINS (Ballarat West) — It is a pleasure to contribute to the Appropriation (1995-96 No. 1) Bill. Just three years ago on 3 October 1992 the great Kennett government was elected to run the state and get its wheels back on the rails. Investigations were held to see what had occurred during the previous decade — and what a mess and what debt were found! In the first months many stories were told in this chamber. One concerned the hundreds of tram conductors' uniforms that were made by Fletcher Jones and cost the earth. They were hanging waiting for the moths to eat them. We did not know how many cars were in the government car fleet. We were also told about $30,000 worth of toilet paper that that was the wrong size for the receptacles. The Labor government had no idea how to run the state. That has been well documented by many over the past three years. We were told about the mess and the huge debt created during that time.

Victoria's credit rating was downgraded, which was an embarrassment for Victoria. However, in the past three years the state has undergone a turnaround. The credit rating has been upgraded and I hope next year it will be upgraded even further. With this budget, for the first time in 30 years, the state is in the black and there is absolutely no reason why we should not continue that way. The turnaround has not been without pain, but confidence has returned to the state. Business is starting to invest in Victoria, something that had not occurred for many years. However, there is a long haul ahead to get Victoria back to where it should be. The people accept the
changes and the hard decisions that have been made by the Kennett government. The polls are showing that the people are responding, and industry is showing results. It is regaining confidence, investing and expanding. Victoria needs investment, especially in my area of Ballarat.

A headline in the Ballarat Courier of 6 February states, 'Big projects bringing $60 million to Ballarat'. Many projects in our area are benefiting our community by way of investment and employment. We are very proud of what is happening. Projects such as the Information Technology Centre at the University of Ballarat, costing $80 million, is almost at completion stage.

Mr Hamilton — Is that federal money?

Mr Jenkins — It is not federal money. It is $80 million of private investment. The technology centre has nothing to do with the federal government. It did not give us the funds for this project. The centre will be open in November and will employ 165 people. By 1999 it will employ up to 950 people.

Ms Marple — Tolls are going up!

Mr Jenkins — There are no tolls on Ballarat roads. Things are fine up our way. The honourable member for Altona should come up and try them out. Another project costing $11 million is being developed on the old Sunshine Biscuits factory site where biscuits, and later dog food, were once manufactured. The derelict building has been phased out after more than a century's operation and the site is being redeveloped. Last week the first new enterprise, Hungry Jacks, was opened on the site. We now have McDonalds, Hungry Jacks and KFC in Ballarat. It is a great investment in our city.

The School of Mines and Industries, with which the honourable member for Morwell will be familiar, has just announced a $6 million project on the old Ballarat Brewery site. Honourable members will be familiar with the brewery, which was phased out when Carlton and United bought the brewery. The historic School of Mines and Industries was a great mining institution in the early days and now is a great education centre.

Another interesting project is the $2.7 million Eureka Village hostel which has just been opened. That is another instance of private money being invested in Ballarat. In addition a 45-bed hospital will be built in the area for the Queen Elizabeth Centre. Another one to open next month is the Great Southern Woolshed project.

Mr Haermeyer — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, did the honourable member utter an unparliamentary term?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Cunningham) — Order! I thought he said 'woolshed'.

Mr Jenkins — The honourable member for Morwell would know what it is, but city members may not know that a woolshed is a place used for the shearing of sheep. A number of local business people got together to make this sheep and wool centre a great tourist attraction at Ballarat. The project will also provide significant employment in the Ballarat area. It will be located on the Western Highway and will be 140 metres long.

Containers Packaging has been another interesting story in our great city. It has established a $17 million factory where it is making millions of ring-pull tops for cans for Australia and South-East Asia. This great enterprise involves $17 million of high technology modern industry in Ballarat. Another $10 million will be spent on the Gardens residential housing estate.

Mr Steggall — Sounds like a good place to live!

Mr Jenkins — It is a great place to live. I have lived there all my life and will never stop talking about it. A $2 million restaurant will provide 106 jobs. There is no doubt about the Ballarat area. It is going great guns because of the initiatives of the Kennett government. The Minister for Planning has been a great help in cutting the red tape. Victoria was bogged down with red tape. The previous government thrived on red tape and made it difficult to get on with projects. We have a great planning minister.

Ms Marple — Anything goes?

Mr Jenkins — No, he does it with great skill and ability. We have plans, and we get projects operating and up and running as quickly as possible. A number of investors have said to me it is a pleasure to do business in Victoria but more so in Ballarat. The other day one said to me that he wanted to get a plan approved by the council. He took the plan into the council in the morning, and 6 hours later he was able to take out the approved plan. He poured concrete the next Monday. That is what it is all about. It is a matter of getting on with
the job and getting it done. It is typical of what the
government is doing and typical of what the local
people are responding to in that area and around the
rest of the state.

Mr Hamilton — Tell us about the Ballarat people.

Mr JENKINS — The Ballarat people are great
people. They are fine. You are one of them, so you
would know. The honourable member for Morwell
is a Ballarat man!

The high-fliers of the 1980s decided to build a
$60 million village in Ballarat. They started off, spent
a great deal of everybody else’s money, then went
broke and left this derelict half-built housing estate,
which sat there until the bankers sorted out who
would swallow the bitter pill. Finally, some local
businessman decided to revamp the whole project
and made a magnificent area for residential
purposes in the village. They will spend $60 million
there — another great thing for our city.

Even Telecom, now Telstra, decided to spend
$24 million in upgrading facilities in Ballarat. Only
last week we had the opening in Ballarat of the new
Telstra office which carries out a lot of the
administration for a greater part of country Victoria
and Tasmania. It was pleasing to attend that
opening. Telstra has seen how we can set up these
places in Victoria. It is not Tasmania, New South
Wales, Queensland or South Australia. It is Victoria
and Ballarat where they are setting up these projects.

This week the Laminex company, which makes
particle board, is celebrating 25 years in Ballarat. The
company is spending $12 million on new
timber-drying equipment because it has faith in
Victoria. It didn’t go to Queensland — it stayed in
Victoria and spent $12 million on new equipment in
Ballarat. We are very excited and pleased to support
the Laminex company which uses timber thinnings
from the Victorian forest to make this value-added
product for use throughout Australia and beyond.

Mr Hamilton — How many people do they
employ?

Mr JENKINS — Some 120 people, and it is a very
good industry. Bendix is another large employer in
Ballarat. It has been there for 40 years and is proud
to be part of Ballarat, too. The company has just
opened a $5 million rail and industrial brake
manufacturing plant at Ballarat. It is
high-technology manufacturing for the specialised
blocks which will replace the current cast iron blocks
used to put the brakes on trains. It is intended to
provide Australia and South-East Asia from that
plant. It is expected to employ 40 people in the
future. We have industry investing heavily in
Ballarat. I have only scratched the surface.

I shall turn to health and talk about our great base
hospital. The previous government added a new
building to the Ballarat Base Hospital which cost
about $40 million. It is a very nice and beautifully
designed building. It has a great atrium in the centre
and is reasonably functional, but in the attempt to
design how to look good they forgot to properly
design the wards for patients. They found that when
the orthopaedic surgeons want to examine a patient
all the ward equipment is in the way and has to be
wheeled out so the surgeons can move in their
equipment. It was a bit of a blunder! Knowing those
people in charge during the 1980s and the Labor
hierarchy at the time, you can expect those mistakes.

We also found that the hospital accumulated a
$10 million debt. This was very sad news and a big
jolt to Ballarat. However, despite the Cain-Kimber
years when these things happened we now have a
hospital management which is turning that situation
around and is reducing the debt. Soon we will be
able to smile again about the finances of the base
hospital. I congratulate those in the administration,
staff and medical fields for what they are doing and
on getting together to have that great hospital
survive and expand once again.

The Lakeside hospital has been closed down but
parts of it will be relocated onto new sites. We have
a very modern facility in Ballarat East which is
taking a number of Lakeside patients into modern
day living accommodation where they feel part of
the community and are not just isolated into wards
like they were in the old mental home. Those
facilities are going into the city and beyond and
former patients are being provided with general
living accommodation in Ballarat. Those patients
who have the ability to live in a town can do so
while being well supported by the CAT teams and
by the community services available.

During the past few weeks a $5 million
redevelopment for a new psychiatric centre at the
Ballarat Base Hospital has been announced. It will
provide for the more severely mentally handicapped
in modern premises associated with the hospital.
Although when speaking on the budget we tend to
mention large projects, it is also important to
mention small projects which are going on all
around the state and which provide many facilities
for communities. We must remember the little
details as well as the big ones.

I am proud of the way medical operations are being
handled in Ballarat nowadays. We have confidence
in what is going on not only in the state system but
also in the private health system. St John of God
Hospital in Ballarat is run by the Sisters of St John
and is one of their many hospitals in Australia. It has
spent millions of dollars upgrading its Ballarat
facility, which gives good service to the local
community and beyond. I congratulate the
administration, especially the sisters and staff, for
what they are doing. The reason they have spent all
that money is because they have confidence in
Victoria.

The government is also looking after our mentally ill
who are settled into the community. They have a
24-hour-a-day psychiatric help line, which is
working extremely well. There are 12 CAT teams in
the Ballarat and Grampians area and they respond
immediately to any concerns clients have. The
community has accepted the former patients of
Lakeside into their neighbourhoods. People have
come to me and said it is a pleasure to have them
living next door. They enjoy their fellowship as
neighbours and they are comfortable about the
service being provided by CAT teams and other
workers in that area. We congratulate the CAT
teams along with other staff of the Department of
Health and Community Services. Ballarat Base
Hospital has been given $42.5 million in case-mix
funding for the next 12 months. That will boost
funds and help reduce debt.

I turn now to transport. Ballarat has been a great
railway centre for more than a century. One of the
early train lines to Ballarat ran via Geelong. Later a
direct line was established from Melbourne through
to Ballarat and on to the Mallee, Wimmera and the
Western District.

Mr Hamilton — What about the standard-gauge
line?

Mr JENKINS — It did not go through Ballarat,
for a very good reason. The standard gauge went
down through the western plains. We have taken
that on the chin and said that we would do more
about it than let it run by. We now have an excellent
train service with our sprinter system. I travel on it
regularly and find it to be a good service — what is
more, the staff smile. We also have the conversion
of the national gauge line to the west. Mistakes are
often made, and one mistake was having different
rail gauges around the country. Standardisation
around Australia is one of the greatest achievements
of our country. It took a long time, but it was well
worth it.

The conversion to standard gauge lines goes up to
Yaapeet and Hopetoun and across to Avoca,
Maryborough and Dunolly, the great wheat storage
area. The engineers are currently transferring that
line. A lot of money has been spent on rail and, of
course, the upgrading has been a boost to our local
railway workshops.

For as long as I can remember living in Ballarat one
of the most political organisations in the city was the
Ballarat railway workshops. In earlier days it was a
bit of a luxury to work there because it was
considered to be an easy job. Nowadays the
workshops are efficient and have quality assurance,
something that is rather unique in railway
operations. I am proud that the Ballarat workshops
have that standard of quality control. The
workshops have been important in fulfilling a series
of contracts. At the moment they are spending time
fitting and upgrading many of the suburban trains
under a $49 million contract as well as sharing
another $39 million contract with the Bendigo
workshops. The workshop staff are pleased to be
part of this government endeavour; in fact, they
even like Liberal politicians now — that was
certainly not the case for many years. Perhaps Tom
Evans, a former member of Parliament, was a good
supporter of the workshops. I should say these days
they are not a bad mob of blokes.

As I said before, the most exciting scene in Ballarat is
information technology. According to the Premier,
Ballarat is poised to become a mini Silicone Valley,
and I certainly endorse his comments. Ballarat is
excited about bringing a lot of work in to expand the
information technology centre. I went to the Silicone
Valley in San Jose, California where I made some
contacts with people interested in investing in
Ballarat. Silicone Valley has 2500 companies ranging
in employment status from two or three people up
to 3000 or more. It is a fantastic enterprise. If we can
get 10 per cent of that it will do for Ballarat and
Victoria, because we will be at the leading edge of
information technology. This opportunity is boosted
by the fact that the Kennett government made the
former Ballarat College of Advanced Education a
university. The other advantage is that the
university has courses based on information
technology and is working closely with the
IBM-BHP consortium to have an interchange of
experience and training. That will grow as
information technology around the university expands. In fact a lot of contract work is going through South-East Asia, and that will increase in the future. We look forward to the Premier opening the new complex in November this year. It has been estimated that the information technology complex at the university will create 7000 extra jobs by the year 2010. I congratulate the Premier on his initiative in leading the charge to make Ballarat the centre for information technology. We are proud to be doing it and we will do it well with the support of the government.

My colleague the honourable member for Morwell was educated in Ballarat at a wonderful school and at an equally wonderful teachers college. He will be pleased to know that that is now part of the university. We have a great education structure in our region although when we came into government in 1992 the schools and facilities were in a sorry mess. The glass in the windows of the school I attended at primary level were falling out because the putty was gone and no maintenance had been done for many years. The timber was rotting and the building looked shabby. It was distressing.

However, the government has seen fit to spend money on that school and many others. The following schools are being refurbished: Redan Primary School, Caledonian Primary School, Black Hill Primary School, Grevillia Park Primary School, Ballarat Secondary College, Ballarat High School, Sebastopol Secondary College and the School of Mines. Those are some of the many schools being upgraded and rehabilitated in our area let alone the rest of the state. The staff, students and parents are appreciative of the efforts that have been made to get the schools up to the standard they should be, a standard worthy of our state.

There have been many exciting developments in the private and state sectors. I look forward to Ballarat continuing to be a great education centre in the state. It will certainly be supported by the Kennett government in the future.

I must mention the employment initiatives and job creation programs being pursued with great dedication in our area. With the support of the Kennett government and the commonwealth government through DEET programs, those developments have been a great success. The employment figures for Victoria show that Ballarat and its surrounding area are leading the charge in re-employment.

Prior to the government's coming to office Ballarat was in desperate straits. Youth unemployment was a disaster. However, the number of jobs has increased by 19.6 per cent. It is tremendous to know that, with that increase in our area, Ballarat is leading the state and other rural areas. I am proud that Ballarat has taken up the challenge through such programs, some of which are achieving an 86 per cent strike rate on the completion of programs.

I congratulate the Central Highlands Employment Service on its adult and further education program under Chris Carrol, which is helping create jobs. The Brotherhood of St Laurence is doing a great job, as is the 40-plus group, which is a group of people over 40 who are out of work. That organisation, which is based in the old council building at Sebastopol is really booming. It is good to see those people taking up initiatives that will get things up and running and get them back in employment.

In conclusion, I am proud to be part of the Kennett team. I look forward to being part of it for a long time ahead serving Ballarat, the greater Ballarat area and beyond and utilising my skills and abilities in ensuring regional investment and the progress of this great state in the future.
implemented, will bring about structures compatible with those in place in Victoria, and will provide a sound basis for a competitive market that will benefit all consumers in south-eastern Australia. The New South Wales government has announced a restructuring of the 25 distribution entities into 6 entities, compatible with the 5 entities in Victoria. The Hilmer committee also has recommended to the New South Wales government that Pacific Power be disaggregated into 3 entities.

The recent 1995 world competitiveness report shows that those countries with the greatest levels of internal competition are achieving the highest levels of external competitiveness. Thus, the benefits of the reforms will not only flow directly to Victorian consumers through the regulatory regime established in Victoria but also pave the way for Victoria to play a pivotal role in the South-East Asian region as a manufacturing centre. The increasing efficiency and competitiveness in the Victorian electricity industry is an important foundation stone in securing Victoria's international competitiveness.

This bill follows the Electricity Industry (Amendment) Act 1995, which was passed in the last session of Parliament. That act contained a range of significant amendments to the Electricity Industry Act 1993 to continue structural and regulatory reforms in the electricity supply industry and to facilitate the privatisation of the distribution and generation companies.

The government has since announced a very successful first step in this program, with the completion of the sale of United Energy Ltd. That sale resulted in a capital sum of some $1553 billion being paid to the government to be applied in large part to the reduction of state debt. Additionally, franchise fees totalling $382 million will be paid to the state during the period to 2000. The successful sale of United Energy represents a strong market endorsement of the government's carefully planned reform program for the electricity supply industry implemented over the past two years.

The main purpose of the bill is to make provision for the further rationalisation of land titles in the Latrobe Valley held by the generation companies under the Electricity Industry Act 1993. The bill also makes a number of miscellaneous and consequential amendments to the Electricity Industry Act 1993, the State Electricity Commission Act 1958, the Office of the Regulator-General Act 1994 and a number of other acts.

The Electricity Industry (Amendment) Act 1995, in addition to introducing further structural and regulatory reforms, including the detailed cross-ownership rules to apply between distribution and generation companies, contains detailed provisions concerning the surrender and regrant of land in the Latrobe Valley required for the efficient operation of the Yallourn W power station and associated open-cut mine. This bill deals in a similar manner with the Latrobe Valley land required for the operation of the Loy Yang A power station and the Hazelwood power station.

Other provisions included in the bill provide for the appointment of a Deputy Administrator of the State Electricity Commission to assist in the efficient administration of the residual assets and liabilities which remain with the SEC. Amendments are also made to the State Electricity Commission Act 1958 to confer powers on the Chief Electrical Inspector to assist in the administration and enforcement of the electrical safety provisions of that act and provisions which replace the Tree Clearance Consultative Committee with a new Powerline Clearance Consultative Committee, with representatives to be appointed by the minister representing those government departments and community groups with particular interest in matters concerning powerline clearance codes and procedures.

Part 1 of the bill states the purpose and commencement dates. Part 2 contains further miscellaneous and consequential amendments to the Electricity Industry Act 1993. These include provision for the appointment of a deputy administrator under the act to act during a vacancy in the office of the administrator, or if the administrator is absent or unable to perform the functions of the administrator, as well as to exercise powers specified in the instrument of appointment or delegated under section 52 of the act. Provision is also made in proposed new section 163AA to enable additional charges to be imposed on the holders of licences under the act by order of the Governor in Council. Such orders may only be made while the licensees remain in public ownership. Part 2 also amends the act to authorise the transfer of licences issued under the act, subject to the consent of the Office of the Regulator-General, after seeking public comment on the application for approval of the transfer.

The cross-ownership provisions contained in part 13 of the act are amended in technical respects to clarify their operation and to provide that relevant interests in shares may be disregarded in determining the
Part 3 of the bill provides for amendments to the Electricity Industry Act 1993 under which specified land in the Latrobe Valley is surrendered to the Crown and may be regranted in the form of new Crown grants to Loy Yang Power Ltd, SEC, Generation Victoria, Hazelwood Power Corporation Limited, Powerworks Pty Ltd and the Central Gippsland Region Water Authority. The provisions contained in part 3 also provide for the closure of specified road and river reserves and other reservations.

Part 4 of the bill contains amendments to the State Electricity Commission Act 1958. It inserts a new part VA in that act which confers powers on the Chief Electrical Inspector that support the administration and enforcement by the Chief Electrical Inspector of the electrical safety provision contained in the act.

Part 5 also amends part VI of the State Electricity Commission Act to provide for a Power Line Clearance Consultative Committee, for the constitution and functions of the committee and also to provide for the adoption of a Code of Practice for Power Line Clearance in place of the Code of Practice for Tree Clearance. Part 5 of the bill contains amendments which correct certain title references and other details which were included in the Electricity Industry (Amendment) Act 1995.

Part 6 of the bill amends the National Parks Act 1975, the Alpine Resorts Act 1983 and the Forests Act 1958 to authorise the granting of leases and licences in a national park, alpine resort or reserved forest where land is used for the purposes of generation of electricity for supply or sale. Part 6 also amends the Water Act 1989 to provide that Authorities under the act must not exercise specified functions and powers under the act in a manner inconsistent with declared bulk water entitlements. Part 7 contains miscellaneous and consequential amendments to other acts. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HAMILTON (Morwell) — I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

I suggest that the debate be adjourned for two weeks, as that is the custom. It is hoped the opposition will receive a briefing from the minister's office during this week otherwise it will be difficult to prepare to debate the bill in such a short time.

Mr COLEMAN (Minister for Natural Resources) — Obviously the request put by the honourable member for Morwell is one which can be accommodated. A briefing will be provided as soon as it can be arranged. I will ensure that arrangements will be made tomorrow morning to establish that process.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Debate adjourned until Tuesday, 24 October.

Remaining business postponed on motion of Mr MACLELLAN (Minister for Planning).

ADJOURNMENT

Mr MACLELLAN (Minister for Planning) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Buses: Brimbank

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — I ask the Minister for Natural Resources to direct to the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports in another place a matter concerning the City of Brimbank. The commissioners of Brimbank have lobbied for funding to build two roads within the city which will assist its development. The two roads are Kings Road and the Keilor-Melton Road.

I urge the minister to take serious note of the matter, given the federal and state government's petrol tax for roads around the state. I believe the minister has lobbied the federal government about the matter and has made the trip to Canberra for that purpose. I commend the commissioners for taking up the initiative and for pursuing the developmental process in the area, which is now part of the state seat of Keilor. It is a growth area that needs roads and infrastructure to be put in place to eliminate accidents and increasing traffic in suburban streets. People are used to travelling on major arterial roads, which the City of Brimbank does not have. It also does not have a road link nor a decent bus network that links the city together.

Being in its infancy the City of Brimbank requires some road work connection and public transport to make it feel as one unit. I urge the minister to listen
We are asking for a further $15 000 a year over the next three years to provide a full-time youth worker to work with the young people of Gladstone Park to ensure that the magnificent job that Laurie Clissold did over the years is continued to ensure that the young people of Gladstone Park are given the opportunity that they deserve and need.

I ask the minister give serious consideration to the request, because it is an important issue not only for the local area but also throughout the state with regard to the future of our young people. As members of this government have said so often, we must work for the young people.

Housing: Newtown

Mr LEIGHTON (Preston) — I raise with the Minister for Planning for the attention of the Minister for Housing in another place the matter of a public housing property at 9 Chester Street, Newtown in Geelong. Will the minister ensure that the Department of Planning and Development makes a decision urgently about the future of the four-bedroom house, which has been used for 10 years as emergency accommodation for many families in crisis? The house has now been vacant for some 12 months and as a result has been vandalised.

While it was successful during its 10 years, it was causing concern to a number of neighbours in the street because 14 out of the 28 public houses were burgled. The house has reached its use-by date and it may be appropriate to sell it and use the proceeds to purchase another house. It is certainly not appropriate to have the house sitting vacant at the same time as there is a housing crisis in Geelong.

I have inspected the burnt-out hovels in Geelong where homeless men and children sleep at night. The public housing list is increasing, the demand for priority housing is unacceptably high and the government cannot house families in crisis.

I believe the mismanagement by the department in allowing the house to remain vacant for 12 months is inappropriate. The house should not be left idle. It is time the minister intervened and forced his department to make a decision because it is not appropriate to have homeless families while public housing in Geelong is sitting vacant for 12 months.

We are asking for a further $15 000 a year over the next three years to provide a full-time youth worker to work with the young people of Gladstone Park to ensure that the magnificent job that Laurie Clissold did over the years is continued to ensure that the young people of Gladstone Park are given the opportunity that they deserve and need.

I ask the minister give serious consideration to the request, because it is an important issue not only for the local area but also throughout the state with regard to the future of our young people. As members of this government have said so often, we must work for the young people.

Gladstone Park Young Citizens Group

Mr FINN (Tullamarine) — In the absence of the Minister responsible for Youth Affairs I direct to the attention of the Minister for Natural Resources a matter the minister would be aware of because I have raised it in the house on two or three occasions. I refer to the great work the Gladstone Park Young Citizens Group has been doing in that part of the world for young people. I have particularly referred to the work of Mr Laurie Clissold, who over a period of years has achieved an enormous amount for the young people in the Gladstone Park area.

Unfortunately, and very sadly, a short time ago Mr Clissold passed away. As a result of that, we have seen the work that he has been doing come to almost a complete standstill.

It is my view, and also that of the Hume City Council as well as the youth officer, Mr Tony Ball, that it would be an enormous tragedy if we allowed the magnificent work of Mr Clissold achieved over such a long time to become unravelled as a result of his unfortunate passing.

I ask the minister to apply serious consideration towards our request for further funding to replace the work that Mr Clissold has done. He has prevented many of the major social problems among young people occurring in Gladstone Park, which we have seen occur in other parts of the north-west as well as throughout Melbourne and Australia.

I believe we could make no greater tribute to the memory of Laurie Clissold than to continue the work that he spent most of his life doing. The major part of his latter years was spent almost entirely on working for the young people of Gladstone Park.

We are asking for a further $15 000 a year over the next three years to provide a full-time youth worker to work with the young people of Gladstone Park to ensure that the magnificent job that Laurie Clissold did over the years is continued to ensure that the young people of Gladstone Park are given the opportunity that they deserve and need.
Mallacoota: lower lake

Mr TREASURE (Gippsland East) — I direct the attention of the Minister for Conservation and Environment to a situation in Mallacoota, in the extreme eastern end of my electorate. The bar at Mallacoota has been blocked with sand for at least two years and as a result the level of the lake has been rising steadily. Many problems have been caused by the rising water, including the condition of the water, because the lake cannot be constantly flushed with sea water. Recent fish kills have been blamed on a lack of oxygen in the water in the lower lake.

Because the lake level is estimated to be approximately 1 metre above its normal level it is inundating some of the lower jetties and making it difficult for local boat owners and tourists to use the jetties to go about their normal activities. The local abalone fishermen are unable to use the lake and its launching facilities and have to go elsewhere to launch their boats, which is difficult in certain weather conditions.

The farmers upstream on the Genoa and Wallagaraugh rivers are finding that the rising water levels are encroaching on farmland with the result that salinity is souring pastures and causing considerable problems. It is a major concern that local tourist operators are having their bookings for the coming holiday season cancelled because of the concern of holiday-makers who believe that the lake may not be in the best condition and they will not be able to access the open water of the sea from it.

Will the minister examine these matters and have his department report back to him? I have spoken with local departmental officers, consulted with the Port of Melbourne Authority in East Gippsland and the shire as well as local people. They are all of like mind, that it would be beneficial to have the lake open to the sea by shifting sand from the bar. Will the minister give serious consideration to the proposal?

Adult Migrant Education Service

Mr CARLI (Coburg) — The matter I raise for the attention of the Minister for Education, and in his absence the Minister for Conservation and Environment, concerns an industrial relations issue with the Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) in the Brunswick area. Currently teachers are employed by the service in two completely different ways. About half are employed as members of the teaching service under a federal award and the other half are employed as casual labour, although they have been working there for a number of years. The issue is one of parity and consistency of conditions for the same work. Half of them have worked there for years and are protected by federal awards but the other half are not. They can be sacked at the end of their contracts and re-employed soon after.

There is an inconsistency in their terms of employment and conditions. The Australian Education Union which covers AMES workers has prepared a draft federal award which it wants to serve and take to the tribunal. The problem is that the Victorian government and the Department of Education refuse to provide an appropriate person or group to begin negotiations with the union.

It is a question of the minister appointing the appropriate person to begin negotiations so the workers will have parity in their working conditions. Currently the casual staff are paid at a daily rate and have no sick leave, paid holidays or long service leave. Because the number of migrant arrivals in my electorate is constant, it is important that this service continue to be provided.

Will the minister examine the matter and nominate a person to begin negotiations on a federal award for the teaching staff of the Adult Migrant Education Service in the Brunswick office? No doubt the same conditions would apply to other officers who provide such services throughout Victoria. It is a matter that requires urgent attention.

Telecommunication towers: Mornington Peninsula

Mr COOPER (Mornington) — The matter I direct to the attention of the Minister for Planning concerns the Commonwealth Telecommunications Act, debate on which was guillotined in federal Parliament in 1991 by the Keating government. I refer to the enormous powers that act gives to the telecommunications carriers in Australia — that is, Telstra, Optus, and Vodafone — to enter, construct and maintain facilities on any land and to remove vegetation regardless of state or local government processes and laws. The facilities referred to include towers, powerlines and trenches for optical fibre.

The specific matter I direct to the minister’s attention is what I refer to as the deathbed conversion of the federal member for Dunkley, Mr Bob Chynoweth, who has suddenly commented in local newspapers
on the Mornington Peninsula that he is opposed to the construction of these mobile phone towers. That would come as a shock to people on the Mornington Peninsula, because the towers have sprouted like mushrooms over the past three or four years since the act was passed by the government of which Mr Chynoweth is a member.

Suddenly, on what appears to be the eve of a federal election, Mr Chynoweth has had a deathbed conversion and has started to tell people on the Mornington Peninsula that he is opposed to this degradation of the natural habitat and environment and has called for a moratorium on the construction of mobile telephone towers.

I am aware that the federal Liberal-National party coalition has a very firm policy on the way these towers should be constructed. I am also aware that the Victorian government has some views on the matter. I should like the minister to inform the house whether he is aware of Mr Chynoweth's late conversion to the cause and whether anything can be done to bring Mr Chynoweth into line with the policies of the federal opposition and the Victorian government, because this matter has certainly caused much concern not only on the Mornington Peninsula but throughout Victoria.

I am sure the minister has some interesting views on the matter and I ask him to inform the house of them.

City Link: financing

Mr BATCHELOR (Thomastown) — I ask the Treasurer in light of the imminent collapse of the City Link project how much Victorian taxpayers will have to pay Transurban if the government fails to convert into a contract the heads of agreement that have been entered into between the Melbourne City Link Authority and Transurban. Already the contractual negotiations have been dragging on for weeks longer than was previously scheduled and it is clear from tonight's announcement that the City Link project is on the brink of collapse. This really represents a monumental bungle by the Kennett government for which Victorian taxpayers will have to pay very dearly in the year ahead.

It is clear the project is about to fall over. It represents the banks, financial institutions and markets walking away from the Treasurer. They have said the Treasurer is a failure.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house cannot proceed with that level of interjection across the chamber. The honourable member for Thomastown, in silence.

Mr BATCHELOR — Thank you, Mr Speaker. I can understand why members of the government do not want to hear this information: they know the financial numbers for the City Link project do not add up. The figures cannot add up. The government ignored even the advice it received from Vicroads in the early stages when the project was first mooted. Vicroads said, 'Whatever you do, don’t use tolls’, but this government has persisted with the idea against that advice and the advice of the Auditor-General in New South Wales that road projects cannot be funded under BOOT.

The government's intransigence means that Victorian taxpayers will be placed at great financial risk. Not only that, it puts the lie to the image that the Treasurer has Victoria's finances in good solid hands because the financial markets and private investors are saying that this pet project of the Treasurer and the Premier is a failure. They do not want to have a thing to do with it and for those reasons have walked away from the project, as was announced by the government tonight. They know Victorians will not pay tolls. They know the project is a risk. They know the Treasurer has tried to enter into arrangements that would put at risk the road project and $2 billion of taxpayers' money, and now we will be made a laughing-stock.

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

Internet

Mr E. R. SMITH (Glen Waverley) — The matter I direct to the attention of the Attorney-General concerns the ability of young people to pick up material such as pornography and information on the manufacture of bombs from the Internet. In the past few months in the Glen Waverley area the senior sergeant in charge of the CIB, Senior Sergeant Barry White, has been conducting a campaign throughout the community to make schools, parents and the young people themselves aware of the incredible dangers of this ability to quickly access information on and make bombs with the simplest materials and ingredients.

Honourable members would be shocked if they knew how easy the bombs are to make. I am sure some members are aware and I do not intend
tonight to put into Hansard some of the materials that are required to make these sorts of bombs.

Only the week before last a young boy who had made a bomb from materials he had learned about from Internet blew off his hand. That story was in most of the metropolitan newspapers. He obtained the information, got the materials together and set up the device. He walked to one side and tried to detonate the bomb. It did not go off so he went back to see where he had gone wrong. Of course, he touched the proper device and off it went, blowing off his hand.

The dangers are widely prevalent at present. Senior Sergeant White is conducting this campaign, and I advise the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, the police and others to encourage other members of the force to conduct similar campaigns.

However, the root problem does not lie there. It lies with the Internet and the extraordinary inability of governments to control what actually goes onto it. The main message we want to send at this stage is that parents and teachers have the responsibility to ensure that such material coming through the Internet is blocked and that children realise the inherent dangers before them and how, unknowingly, they can put their lives at risk.

All honourable members have a responsibility to ensure that information on these devices is banned and, if that is not possible, the dangers are directed to the attention of young people.

**Windsor Secure Welfare Service**

Ms GARBUTT (Bundoora) — The matter I raise for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services through the Minister for Natural Resources at the table concerns the fire precautions at the Windsor Secure Welfare Service in Prahran, which houses a number of young women. It is part of the child welfare protection service. There have been a series of fires at the premises, the last of which was reported in the Age of 18 September, when the fire brigade was called in. Significant damage was done to the recreation room.

The issue I raise concerns the availability of fire precautions at the service. I believe the fire precautions are inadequate. In fact, the government has been negligent because it has not installed adequate fire precautions there.

At the time of the fire the unit had no fire extinguishers, no sprinkler system and no internal fire hydrant with which to fight fires.

At least three fires have occurred recently. Reports have been made about exit doors being barricaded so that they were not able to be used as fire escapes and of fire extinguishers being removed and placed in a central office rather than being available throughout the unit. No emergency exit plans were in place until last Friday when they were posted around the doors. This dreadful situation has placed young women's lives at risk and it needs to be rectified immediately.

The local fire brigade inspected the unit and ordered improvements. I understand that inspections were undertaken on two occasions but improvements have not been made. The government is putting these young women's lives in danger because the unit is locked and the young women cannot escape. Immediate action should be taken to put precautions in place. Indeed, they should have been in place long before the fires occurred.

I ask the minister to outline when he will take action to protect the people who live and work in the unit before there is a tragedy of enormous proportions.

**South Gippsland Water Authority: waste disposal**

Mr RYAN (Gippsland South) — I direct the attention of the Minister for Natural Resources to an important initiative on industrial waste disposal being undertaken by the South Gippsland Water Authority for which I seek his support. The authority embraces a number of authorities across the south coast of Victoria, stretching from Yarram in the east to Korumburra in the west, under the chairmanship of Mr Llew Vale, who is doing a tremendous job.

This area of coastline contains some of Victoria's most magnificent agricultural country. It also houses some of our great industries such as the Murray Goulburn factory at Leongatha, the Bonlac factory and a multitude of other industrial producers that do much to assist the welfare not only of the region but also of the state generally.

The issue concerns the waste disposal from those various industrious enterprises. Industry has developed to the extent where its capacity to develop further is reaching a worrisome stage. Recently the authority undertook a study to examine...
the prospect of establishing a world’s best practice waste disposal system for the area with new ideas and initiatives.

The area is unique to Victoria: it is a relatively narrow coastal strip with a high water table, a lot of industrial development and coastal discharge that in some instances runs into marine parks.

At a recent meeting I attended in Forster, the authority agreed to undertake this important study. It will, of necessity, involve consultation with members of the minister’s department and input of expertise from a variety of spheres to achieve the important outcomes the study seeks to provide. Will the minister assure the committee and the house that he will provide assistance, both personally and through his able departmental personnel.

Responses

Mr MACLELLAN (Minister for Planning) — The honourable member for Preston referred to a vacant Department of Planning and Development public house in the Newtown region of Geelong. It was his desire that the property either be disposed of or tenanted. I ask the honourable member to give me the address in Newtown as I was unable to get a note of what he said. I will be meeting with the secretary of the department and the Minister for Housing at 9.00 a.m. and I will ask that some action be taken to put the house in order, to make it secure and to determine its future use.

It is regrettable if it has been untenanted for the period, although I notice that the honourable member wants to take the popular view that the neighbours be massaged in the disposal of the house — in other words that it not be used for emergency housing again. I cannot guarantee that the honourable member will be successful in removing the emergency housing accommodation from that particular street or neighbourhood, but I will certainly take up the issue of its vacancy. I am curious about why an emergency house would remain vacant — and no doubt the honourable member is also — for that length of time. Perhaps it signifies some difficulty in identifying or placing people needing emergency accommodation. If the honourable member gives me the details I will take it up with the Minister for Housing tomorrow morning.

The honourable member for Mornington referred to the federal member for Dunkley, Mr Chynoweth, who in view of the impending federal election has had a death-bed conversion on the question of telecommunication towers. Mr Chynoweth is a loyal and supportive member of the federal Labor government. It was the federal Labor government that guillotined the legislation to which the honourable member referred — in other words, the federal government forced the legislation through under a guillotine system with inadequate consideration by federal Parliament. The legislation gives telecommunication carriers the right to erect towers and bunched cables, enter property and to totally ignore local government, state planning rules and, indeed, environmental rules as well.

We have found an increasing response from the community, which is rightfully outraged about the lack of consultation about attaching these facilities to buildings such as the Aireys Inlet lighthouse — that was negotiated under angry shots from the local community — rather than within the structure so that it did not detract from the historic nature of the lighthouse. Obviously, sensing the heat and anger of the people on the Mornington Peninsula and Frankston regarding this matter, Mr Chynoweth has now deserted his party on the issue and tried to palm himself off as having an independent view on the matter.

When legislation was before the federal Parliament he supported it. He was on the advisory committee to the federal minister that reported about it. He was the one who says federal power should overwhelm the states, the local municipalities and communities and that these towers should be able to be put up wherever the telecommunication carriers wish to do so. An interesting element for the opposition in this Parliament is that Mr Chynoweth believes it should be done under a competitive system whereby they do not even share towers — each carrier can erect its own particular method of carriage.

The information thoughtfully provided to me by the honourable member for Mornington shows that Mr Chynoweth is calling into question the technology and methods being undertaken by his government. The word ‘hypocrisy’ is an unparliamentary expression and it cannot be used here about a member of another Parliament! One hesitates to use the word ‘hypocritical’! All one can say, as the honourable member for Mornington said, is there has been a death-bed conversion, but death-bed conversions certainly do not guarantee paradise, but merely a shorter time at the halfway house!
I daresay that we can expect that the electors of Dunkley will be far too sensible, shrewd and understanding to fall for the line that Mr Chynoweth has a different view from the party he supports, from the government of which he is a member and of the parliamentary party he has been actively supporting for all his parliamentary career. Perhaps honourable members opposite might like to decide to desert too.

I have written to the Minister for Communication and the Arts, Mr Michael Lee, and asked him to consider proposals from this state by the Minister for Conservation and Environment, Mr Birrell, and me to try to bring a cooperative approach to this issue. It is urban blight at its worst. It is insensitive. I believe Mr Chynoweth has revealed the nature of the reaction to it that the weaker members of the Labor Party are now deserting the government and ratting as they get closer to the election. That should strengthen the resolve of local members that federal members are getting off the ship as the ship of state goes down.

Mr STOCKDALE (Treasurer) — The honourable member for Thomastown raised the matter of tonight's announcement about the City Link proposal. I will come back to his political schizophrenia, but let me just say that the government is acting in the best interests of the Victorian community. The government stands by the project and is concerned to proceed with it. It believes Transurban is also concerned to proceed with the project, but there are some important issues of risk allocation that are still to be resolved. The government has given notice to the other parties that it will allow 10 days for them to satisfy the government that agreement can be reached on all outstanding matters. At the end of that time the government will have to consider its options as to whether the project proceeds at all and, if so, the form or the business basis upon which it proceeds.

In seeking to get an appropriate risk allocation the government is simply acting in the interests of Victorian taxpayers, something completely foreign to the ALP when it was in government. The Labor Party likes to forget the fact that it actually commenced this project. The Honourable David White — although I must say that white is the colour of purity and perhaps we should call him David Yellow from now on — —

Mr Batchelor — You messed it up completely.

Mr STOCKDALE — David White was the leading proponent of the City Link project.

Mr Batchelor interjected.

Mr STOCKDALE — We will know where to come if we want some how-to-vote cards printed, won’t we?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! It is late in the day and I expect the house to be on its best behaviour for the adjournment debate.

Mr STOCKDALE — The real problem for the honourable member for Thomastown is that he will now have at least 10 days of acute schizophrenia: he won’t know whether he should be more gleeful if the project does go ahead or if it does not.

Mr Batchelor interjected.

Mr STOCKDALE — You are more than a little premature. It would be a great idea for you to restrain your impatience for another 10 days and see if the desire of all the parties to the agreement — —

Mr Batchelor — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the matter I raised with the Treasurer related to the costs of the project to Victorian taxpayers and the government if the government does not proceed with the City Link project. He should answer that question and not try to duck the issue.

The SPEAKER — Order! The rules pertaining to the answering of questions are not the same rules that apply during debate. It has been well held in this house that there is considerable freedom for ministers answering matters raised, not questions posed, with individual ministers. There is no point of order.

Mr STOCKDALE — One of the primary rules of debate in this house is that we shouldn’t waste the time of the house with hypothetical issues. The matter raised by the honourable member is an entirely hypothetical issue. The government remains committed to the project. We will be pursuing all of the options, but we will not sacrifice the interests of the Victorian people as the Labor Party consistently did when it was in government. We will act to protect the interests of the people of Victoria. We are seeking a proper risk allocation to protect the interests of the people of Victoria. They can have a
great deal more confidence in this government than they had in its predecessor.

Mr COLEMAN (Minister for Natural Resources) — The honourable member for Gippsland East referred to the blockage of the bar on the lower lake as it enters the sea at Mallacoota. The bar has been blocked for almost two years. There was an unsuccessful attempt some time ago to try to clear a passage, such as mentioned by the honourable member this evening. There was some exchange of water through that passage but it closed over soon after it was opened.

The closure of the bar and the deterioration of the water in the lower lake is having a significant impact on the tourism industry in Mallacoota, so much so that during the most recent school holidays it was necessary to put into place some temporary regulations to govern fishing in the lower lake and in the bottom of the Genoa River to ensure that some species were sustained. Bag limits were put in place to ensure that that occurred.

As the honourable member has indicated, there have been considerable discussions between the Department of Conversation and Natural Resources, the Port of Melbourne Authority and the Shire of East Gippsland. As I understand it, about $30,000 is required to open the bar again. It seems that the future of the Christmas holiday period, particularly accommodation, is an essential issue that needs to be addressed. On that basis there is general agreement that the bar should be opened and the water level dropped in a way that the surrounding vegetation, which is presently inundated, has sufficient time to draw off and does not pose a threat to life or create environmental problems to visitors to Mallacoota.

The honourable member was seeking some support from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, which it is willing to provide, providing the other parties are in agreement and there is a general understanding of where and when the bar should most appropriately open. That is the critical issue. There is little purpose in opening the bar if the tides have the effect of closing it as soon as it opened. I encourage the local member to keep pursuing the matter. I know he has taken a very active interest in the issue to date in an attempt to coordinate an action that will lead to a resolution of the problem. The department will participate in that process to the point where it can get the bar opened.

The honourable member for South Gippsland referred to discharges, especially in the areas under the administration of the South Gippsland Region Water Authority. That authority currently has five ocean outfalls which are discharging under EPA licence. I commend the authority for taking the initiative to get a study dealing with waste disposal issues under way. As the honourable member said, it principally involves dairy wastes, which are difficult to treat. It is in an area where there are reasonably high water tables and the issues of pondage and some sort of evaporative process are difficult to deal with given the climatic conditions. The Water Bureau and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources will make available the information they have and the personnel required to assist in the study to ensure the outcome is swift and addresses the issues.

The honourable members for Keilor, Tullamarine, Coburg, Bundoora and Mornington raised matters for the ministers for roads and ports, youth affairs, education, police and emergency services, and the Attorney-General respectively. I shall ensure that these matters are brought to their attention.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 10.31 p.m.