

The Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland Province) - Mr President, I am honoured to take my place in this Chamber today as the representative of the electors of Gippsland Province. I am indeed deeply grateful for this honour. I thank the electors of Gippsland Province for the trust they have shown in me and I pledge to work tirelessly on their behalf.

I congratulate you, Mr President, on your election to the high office of President of this House. You have a vast knowledge of and much experience in the operations of this House and I feel I can safely say you are held in high regard by all honourable members who have witnessed your tireless work for the people of Victoria over many years. I wish you every success in your new position.

I congratulate members of the Australian Labor Party for their party's success in the recent election and I look forward to working with them to ensure that the high quality of life that we seek for all Victorians is assured for the future. I congratulate His Excellency the Governor of Victoria on his opening of this 51st Parliament and, through him, express the loyalty of the electors of Gippsland Province to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

I also wish to have recorded my respect for the former member for Gippsland Province, the Honourable Barry Murphy. He diligently served the people of Victoria for six and a half years and, on their behalf, I extend gratitude. I look forward to extending the work done by Mr Murphy and also look forward to working with my Liberal colleague in this House, Mr Long, and fellow National Party members in the other place, the honourable member for Gippsland South and the honourable member for Gippsland East. We will work together to ensure that the future of Gippsland is given the priority it deserves.

Indeed Gippsland Province must be given high priority when decisions are made by Parliament. The development potential and range of opportunities which exist in Gippsland are unique in Australia and the wealth of the State is dependent on the successful management of the abundant natural resources found in the area.

Gippsland Province covers an area of more than 41000 square kilometres and has a population of 182,000. Its boundaries extend from Warragul in the west to Wilsons Promontory in the south; it sweeps through the highly productive Latrobe Valley region and extends as far as the New South Wales border in the east. The diversity of Gippsland Province is unequalled by any other area in Victoria. Tourism within the region has unlimited potential; the energy resources found in the Latrobe Valley and Bass Strait are the richest in Australia; the agriculture and timber industries are some of the most efficient and profitable in this country and, with regular rainfall and a temperate climate, Gippsland is indeed a happy home for my family and me along with the other 182 000 residents.

I shall expand on some of the areas I have mentioned. Gippsland boasts a magnificent array of choices for tourists with the Victorian snowfields in the north, some of this country's best national parks in East Gippsland and Wilsons Promontory and, of course, the ever popular coastal resorts which include the Gippsland Lakes and the Ninety Mile Beach. It offers a host of recreational pursuits that cater for the needs of even the most discerning of holiday makers.

The development of tourism within the region is largely untapped and, with improved communication links with the metropolitan area, will bring to this State the big overseas tourist dollars. To this end, the Very Fast Train project, which has a proposed route through the heart of this province, would be an enormous asset to both Gippsland and the State of Victoria. Local

government bodies throughout the region are right behind the project. It is for me during my term in office to fight for Gippslanders in order to obtain this service. Eventually it will bring not only Victorians and Australians but also many overseas visitors through this most scenic area of Victoria.

The energy resources within the province are indeed vast. The Latrobe Valley region is the energy heartland of Australia. Esso-BHP has developed and manages the sizeable offshore oil and gas fields of Bass Strait. The natural gas from these fields is piped throughout Victoria and the enormous quantities of crude oil from the area have helped Australia become largely self-sufficient in petroleum products. Secondary industry is dominated by some of Australia's largest public works projects centred around energy resource development and electricity production.

The brown coal fields of the Latrobe Valley enable the State Electricity Commission of Victoria to generate 85 per cent of the State's electricity requirements. In addition, massive investments into a brown coal liquefaction plant will safeguard this country against worldwide rising oil prices and diminishing crude oil reserves.

Australian Paper Manufacturers produces around 900 tonnes of paper a day at its Maryvale plant. That is almost 25 per cent of Australia's total paper production. It is interesting to note that this country produces only 70 per cent of its newsprint requirements. It costs \$300 million annually to import the remainder. With the possibility of a further pulp mill in East Gippsland, our reliance on the importation of paper products will be greatly reduced.

The timber industry is indeed the backbone of economic survival for many communities in Gippsland Province. In the Orbost shire alone, which makes up most of the East Gippsland area, almost half of the work force is employed in timber-related jobs. I have been delighted to visit the forests and sawmills in the region and to witness the great efficiency with which the industry is run. Timber is, importantly, a renewable resource, and I believe with conscientious reforestation and regeneration programs we can eliminate Australia's annual importation cost of \$1.6 billion for timber and timber-related products, which accounts for 15 per cent of Australia's current trade deficit. With the implementation of National Party policy in this area, Australia can become self-sufficient by the year 2000.

Agriculture provides far more than one-third of Australia's export earnings and Gippsland certainly plays its part. The dairy industry in the western area of Gippsland Province and in South Gippsland provides far in excess of 25 per cent of Victoria's dairy produce. The province has a flourishing primary growth in beef, lamb, fish, and vegetables.

Possibly the two biggest concerns shared by the people in the province I represent are those relating to two basic needs for us all: roads and water. The issue of road funding, particularly rural road funding, is paramount. For example, Omeo shire in Gippsland Province is totally dependent on road transport for its communication links with the remainder of the State. It has no rail system and no airports, yet in the past few years its road funding has been cut by 50 per cent in real terms. The shire covers a vast area, but it is sparsely populated and consists predominantly of national parks and forest areas. State grants provide for almost 70 per cent of local government funding in the shire, and it is an absolute crime to visit Omeo shire and see sitting idly in sheds road machinery that is not working because of lack of funding. Local government wants some certainty in road funding programs. Municipalities need five-year road programs to be approved by the government. It becomes our responsibility to ensure that funding for such programs is maintained in real terms over the life of the programs.

The water issue is also one of significant concern. The construction of the Thomson River dam was to ensure that the water needs of residents and irrigators in South and East Gippsland were assured and controlled in the years ahead. Instead, 175 000 megalitres of water is being diverted annually to the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. This has, and will continue to have, disastrous effects on dairy production in the Rosedale-Nambrook area, especially when the reduced flow in smaller rivers has contributed to the contamination of our once beautiful Gippsland Lakes. The algae problem experienced last summer has the potential to destroy permanently the ideal holiday location enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of Victorian tourists each year. Steps must be taken to correct this decision, and the water should be returned to the people of Gippsland to whom it was originally promised.

There is no disputing the fact that the future of Victoria rests with the youth of today, and their needs deserve special consideration. Indeed, concern for the welfare of young children and adolescents was a major factor that led to my taking up this position in the House. I, being what I consider to be a young person, believe I have a good understanding of the difficulties young people face in light of my recent personal experiences. I have been fortunate in having spent a significant proportion of my life working with young people. My former profession was that of a secondary school teacher, and I have spent fourteen years teaching in Victorian government schools. I have also spent a considerable deal of my personal time involved in coaching sports teams at both senior and junior levels, and I have worked with various youth organisations. These experiences have shown me how sensitive we need to be in providing effective education, employment, and social programs for our young people.

As one progresses through the age groups of 16 to 25 years, the personal decisions taken are the most critical in one's life. Leaving school, finding employment, perhaps getting married, looking to buy that first home or starting a small business, and perhaps starting a family, are some of the critical decisions taken by young adults. It is in these areas that government policies can vitally affect the future of young Victorians. More can and must be done to increase the range of employment opportunities, particularly in country areas where, despite claims being made about unemployment figures dropping, unemployment has increased significantly over the past six years. I hope many of the 520 000 new jobs to be created by this government, as outlined by His Excellency in his opening Speech, are directed towards country areas. More incentives must be given to enable young people to start their own small businesses, but higher priority needs to be given to bring home ownership within the reach of all Victorians.

Quality of, and access to, education for all young people is again an issue of major importance. Some significant advances have been made in the education field and many worthwhile programs have been implemented by the Labor government in recent years. I commend the former Minister for Education, the Honourable Caroline Hogg, for her work in that portfolio. However, there is much to be done. Country schools, in particular, still suffer from shortages in qualified staff and substandard physical work conditions. Access to higher education for country students is a real concern, with only 25 per cent of country students going on to post-secondary education compared with 75 per cent in the metropolitan area. As the National Party spokesman for post-secondary education, I shall be closely monitoring this situation and I hope the proposed mergers of country institutions, such as the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education in Gippsland Province, with metropolitan universities will lead to greater equality of educational access for all young Victorians.

Mr President, if throughout this speech I have sounded boastful of the province that I represent, I

do so unashamedly. With its diverse range of interests and issues and unlimited growth potential, it is an area of which I feel justifiably proud. It is my intention to work hard towards realising this potential and towards repaying the people of Gippsland for the trust they have bestowed upon me.