

The Hon. R. M. HALLAM (Western Province) - It is a very proud moment for me to take my place in this Chamber as the representative of the electors of Western Province, and I am pleased that, as the first act in that capacity, I am able to support the motion for the adoption of the Address-in-Reply to the Governor's Speech made earlier today and to express the loyalty of the electors of the Western Province to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. I congratulate His Excellency the Governor and Lady Murray for their grace and dignity in representing the Crown in Victoria.

Although I acknowledge the responsibility that goes with my election to this place, particularly as Western Province covers almost one-quarter of the entire State of Victoria, I am not daunted by the task which confronts me in protecting and advancing the interests of western Victorians. I pledge my full co-operation to my colleague, Mr Chamberlain, who shares that responsibility with me. I should like to place on record a tribute to my predecessor, Mr Crozier, who served the electorate with great distinction.

Western Province covers the entire south-western corner of the State, extending from Lake Hindmarsh in the north, to the township of Nelson on the South Australian border in the south-west, and along the southern coast to include the town of Lorne. The province encompasses the major centres of Horsham, Hamilton, Portland, Warrnambool and Colac.

The wealth and stability of the province is very much dependent upon primary production, including as it does the Wimmera grain belt, the famous grazing lands of the Western District, which is most noted for the production of super-fine merino wool, as well as the Heytesbury dairying district. Beef and fat lamb production is also important, as are the industries of forestry and fishing. In addition, the province boasts more than 300 kilometres of the most magnificent coastline and is blessed by the location of both the Grampians and Otway Ranges, which are extremely important in terms of tourism.

If any single feature of the electorate could be described as its crowning glory, it would have to be the port of Portland, which is generally acknowledged as the best natural deepsea port in the State, if not the nation.

Although the potential of the port has never been questioned, its development over the years has been chequered and has been fraught with charges of parochial interference. However, in recent years, throughput has grown steadily, and, with the port authority recently announcing a record year, I believe Victorians are now seeing activities which at least approach the potential of which I spoke. With the trend being towards larger and larger cargo vessels and with the natural advantages the port has to offer, it is almost inevitable that there will be greater throughput in grains, livestock and woodchips, particularly in the coming years. We look forward to the impact that the completion of the Alcoa of Australia Ltd aluminium smelter will have upon the port.

The advent of the Alcoa project means much more than simply an increased tonnage through the port; obviously, a development of such magnitude will have dramatic and far-reaching economic and social implications for the entire Western District, some bitter and some sweet. The assimilation of a work force expected to reach some 1600 persons being directly involved in that project when the smelter becomes fully operational will place enormous strain upon the local community. This will require the ultimate in co-operation between all tiers of government and the Portland Consultative Committee, which is responsible for minimizing social disruption associated with that development. For example, it is estimated that there will be a demand for the construction of some 300 homes a year during each of the next three years in the private sector alone. If one compares that figure with the capacity of the building industry in Portland as it

stands today, which is some 30 homes a year, one notes that it indicates the dimension of the problem being faced in that area.

This estimated shortfall in housing construction is indicative of the sorts of pressures emerging upon the local infrastructure. I expect many matters will come forward relating to the Alcoa development in the life of this Parliament.

While the Alcoa development has been a welcome shot in the arm for regional Victoria, I am concerned at the impact of the Government's general policy review on decentralized industry. The phasing out of decentralization incentives has placed even more pressure on many firms that are struggling to survive the costs associated with a remote location. Perhaps even worse, this policy review has effectively emptied the locker of those country centres that are seeking to encourage city-based operators to relocate to their areas.

I have always had a close interest in politics. However, if any single issue prompted my involvement at this level, it was the then Government's decision to close the Balmoral rail line, which represented a direct link between the port of Portland and the Wimmera grain belt. Although some years have passed since that decision was effected, the question of that line and, indeed, of several others that face the same fate remains one of high contention in the electorate I represent. I remain convinced that an efficient transport network is absolutely vital to Victoria's future prosperity and development. I point out that our forefathers, with the equipment and technology they had at their disposal, were able to construct these lines, yet with the enormously advanced equipment and technology that is available today we are unable to justify even their maintenance. I serve notice that this matter will be dealt with in this House at the earliest opportunity, especially in relation to the dramatic shortfall in funding related to road maintenance, which has been highlighted by the transfer of bulk grain cartage to a country road system that was neither designed nor constructed to carry the heavy loads that are carried today.

Having spent several years conducting a business in Hamilton, I understand the problems confronting the small businessman today and the compounding factors he faces if that business is located in a country environment. I instance the love-hate relationship that every country businessman has with his office telephone. The array of Government charges and returns that the businessman faces each month is alarming, and I am genuinely concerned at the extent to which this factor alone is stifling incentive and endeavour in the private sector.

Heading the list of much needed reforms must surely be the question of pay-roll tax. At a time when the community needs every single job opportunity that is available, it is impossible to justify a taxation mechanism that deliberately and directly penalizes employment. Any reduction of this penalty must have an immediate impact on the level of employment. It is to our eternal shame that our society has allowed young people to be priced out of the labour market, as evidenced by a youth unemployment rate approaching 25 per cent. The social costs of that situation are horrific, and every avenue must be explored to redress that situation. I agree that we must treat with dignity and compassion those who unfortunately find themselves in the ranks of the unemployed, but the only real solution is long-term employment. In the private sector it is mainly the small businessman who has both the desire and the capacity to take up that slack, and his attitudes and opinions must be canvassed much more carefully than has occurred in the past.

I am sure the costs associated with employment, as distinct from the raw wage costs, represent a significant factor, and I look forward later in this sessional period to contributing to the debate on one such cost, namely, workers compensation.

I mentioned earlier that the Western Province is largely dependent on primary production. The savage cost spiral faced by all primary producers, together with the highly protected international market in which they must compete, has enormous ramifications for farmers and for the country communities that rely so heavily on the farmer. One has only to consider the trend of fuel prices during the past few years to understand the effect on farm incomes. Although the farm industry remains highly efficient, commodity prices have not kept pace with increased costs, and nowhere is this more evident than in the troubled dairying industry. All of this indicates that the resolution of the problems besetting the industry at present demands our most urgent attention.

I should like to broach one specific question in relation to country education, and that is the recruitment of teachers for country high schools. Without canvassing the reasons for the breakdown in our system, the facts are that, at the start of the current school year, an alarming level of staff vacancies existed in high schools in the Western Province as well as in other areas. I am assured that this situation has now been largely alleviated-in particular, by a scheme to appoint primary school teachers who qualify under a retraining program. However, this does not compensate the schools, the staff concerned or, worse still, the students who have suffered disruption in the interim. I had advocated that a range of incentives be offered to teachers who were prepared to accept country appointments - perhaps accelerated promotion or study leave entitlements - -but, frankly, the situation now calls for mandatory measures if a recurrence of the position that applied at the start of the current school year is to be avoided.

There is good reason to argue for short-term studentships to be offered to teachers who are prepared to train in critical subject areas, in return for acceptance of a posting to a specific country location. Those postings need not be long-term postings, because, in many instances, teachers who take up country appointments quickly settle into the country lifestyle and stay on of their own volition.

I conclude on a subject from which I believe honourable members can draw encouragement, and I speak of the Green Triangle, a refreshing initiative in terms of regional development. As the name implies, the Green Triangle represents a region which takes in the south-west of Victoria and the south-east of South Australia; it includes the Victorian centres of Warrnambool, Portland and Hamilton and the equivalent centres of Millicent, Narracoorte and Mount Gambier in South Australia. Accordingly, the Green Triangle has come to represent a bold new promotional plan for economic development of a homogenous area which happens to cross State boundaries. The effectiveness of the Green Triangle will be monitored Australia-wide, constituting, as it does, new ground in terms of regional development. It was founded as a local initiative, but has won both support and funding from all tiers of government-from the Federal Government; perhaps more significantly from both the South Australian and Victorian Governments; from 25 of the 26 municipalities which it embraces; and from the business community within the area. It is administered by a seventeen-member board of directors, the composition of which mirrors the broad scope of community and government involvement which the concept has attracted. The board has established and staffed an office in Mount Gambier to support the executive officer whose appointment will, I understand, be announced tomorrow morning. I congratulate all those who have been involved in this unique organization, and especially its inaugural chairman, Mr Philip Shanahan. I pledge my personal support to the triangle in its quest for regional development, and particularly for job opportunities in the south-west. I wish it the success that would see it adopted as the blueprint for regional development throughout Australia.

I thank the Chamber for the courtesy extended to me on this occasion.

