

Mr McGRATH (Lowan) - It is with a great deal of pride and pleasure that I stand here this evening as the member for Lowan. I now join the team of the Federal member for Mallee, Mr Peter Fisher, and two members of the Legislative Council, the Honorable Bernie Dunn and the Honorable Ken Wright. We now make a full team to represent the north west of Victoria.

It was certainly a great event when the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Winneke, opened the 48th Parliament of Victoria. Victoria is particularly fortunate in having such a worthy representative of the Crown, one who upholds the dignity of his office and performs his duties with unselfish devotion. In September 1977 Sir Henry and Lady Winneke visited my home town of Minyip for the Dunmunkle shire centenary celebrations, and I can assure both Sir Henry and Lady Winneke that the people of the Lowan electorate would consider it an honour if they could find time to come back to the Lowan electorate.

Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on being elevated to your present position. I am sure you will carry this position with dignity and authority.

I congratulate the Premier on being returned to lead the Victorian Government for the next three years and I hope he and his Ministers will serve this State well for the welfare and well-being of all communities throughout Victoria.

To Mr Wilkes I also offer my congratulations on his being elected as Leader of the Labor Party. I am sure that the stronger representation of the Labor Party will augur well for a worth-while Parliament. It has often been said, with justification, that the stronger the Opposition the stronger the Government.

I look to my Leader, Mr Peter Ross-Edwards, with confidence, for guidance, and I am sure he will give it to me over the three years ahead.

I pay a tribute to the former member for Lowan, Mr Jim McCabe. To represent an electorate for some twelve years requires sacrifices in many areas of life. I may not have agreed with his policies and some of his opinions.. but I am sure he served the people he represented with honesty and integrity at all times.

I have been informed that Federal and State spending on welfare, health and education took some 14 per cent of everything that was earned in 1970-71 and 28 per cent of everything that was earned in 1978-79. Over the past 30 years there has been a revolution in material expectations. Encouraged by mass advertising, the general public assumed it to be a right to own motor cars, television sets, modern electrical appliances and to enjoy lengthy holidays. To keep up with all those payments, together with home payments or other commitments, the family soon needed two incomes and so the wife or mother entered the work force. The result of this has been neglected children and neglected sick and old people, followed by huge demands on creches, remedial teaching, hospitals, retirement homes and so forth.

If they are to be truly representative of people and people's needs, honorable members must re-establish the family unit to fulfil its basic purposes, that is the primary care of the young, the sick and the old. Any exchange for the family unit is, at the best, an expensive and ineffective substitute. We may need to provide incentives for some married women to leave the work force voluntarily. A realistic homemakers' allowance need not increase the cost of welfare, but would simply transfer social security to another area. The Government could explore the possibility of earlier voluntary retirement from the work force of mature-age people, with safeguards against

any undue loss of skill and experience that these people may provide. The Government should also promote a greater exploitation of the natural potential of the land by creating new forestry schemes and promoting fisheries and animal husbandry.

People should question why status is given to academic qualifications rather than to technical and personal skills. I point out that the Federal Government is spending annually \$8000 on each tertiary student compared with \$800 on each apprentice. I ask the question: Can we afford this expenditure? Enrolment figures that I have gathered in my own electorate show that the intake of pupils in non-Government schools has increased at the expense of Government schools.

During the week-end I checked the intake of students at four Government schools and four non-Government schools. I was amazed to find that the total Government school enrolments had dropped from 1390 last year to 1342 this year. For the same period the enrolments at non-Government schools had increased from 519 to 579. The Government schools I checked were Horsham North, Horsham Central, Dimboola and Nhill. The non-Government schools were St. Brigids and St. Marys Catholic schools in Horsham and Warracknabeal and the Lutheran schools in Horsham and Nhill. I add that next Sunday the Federal Minister for Education is opening a further Lutheran school in Horsham.

I wonder whether the increased enrolments in non-Government schools are to enable children to gain an introduction to the basic Christian principles that seem to be falling apart in our society, or whether it is partly due to the fact that many people are becoming weary of the continued strike action taken by some, even a minority, of teachers in the State system. Many of these teachers appear to have no dedication to their jobs or concern for our children. Some offer a poor example to follow.

Regardless of all the expensive audiovisual aids, teaching machines and similar equipment, in which some people have put their belief, it transpires that the most important aspect of all in a child's academic achievement is the attitude that his parents take. That returns us again to the all-important family unit.

I should like to refer now to the Lowan electorate. It has a vast area of dual purpose country that extends from Harrow to Edenhope in the south. The area produces some of the finest wool in Australia. I often wonder whether Colonel Macarthur, who introduced the first four merino sheep into Australia in 1805, ever envisaged how great the sheep and wool industry would become in Australia. Further north, through the Horsham, Warracknabeal, Dimboola and Nhill districts, some of the best quality and highest yielding grain crops in Australia are produced.

With the assistance of the Department of Agriculture there has been an expansion and development in the oil seed production in this region. We depend on various secondary industries and Government departments to provide job opportunities for people who are not associated with the farming sector. As unemployment is the biggest worry at the present time, the Government must make every effort to provide job opportunities for a balanced State development. These opportunities must be provided in country areas.

I am concerned that all country shires and municipalities, with the exception of Horsham city, have suffered a fall in population. Horsham city has had some growth. One may be excused for thinking it strange that Horsham, a city of some 12 000 people, is still seeking an adequate water supply. Although that city is close to the Grampian watershed, it is at times a struggle to provide an adequate water supply for its residents.

I now refer to tourism development potential in the Lowan electorate. The electorate has national parks in the Little Desert and the Grampians in the south. From time to time its many lakes and rivers bring tourists to the area. Other interesting places for tourists to visit are the Wheat Research Institute, the Longerenong Agricultural College and the Warracknabeal and Jeparit farm museums. This country area has decentralized industry; the only thing needed is people. I suggest that many people who embark upon overseas jaunts could well enjoy a good holiday in country Victoria.

I was pleased to learn from the Speech of His Excellency the Governor that a young farmer establishment scheme will be set up by the Government. The loss of many of our young farmers from primary industries has probably been the biggest disaster in the past decade. The country needs at this moment a confident and expanding primary industry. As Victoria has limited mineral resources, agriculture has a tremendous part to play in the State's economic well-being.

I should like the Government to give preference to low-interest loans for the children of farmers, farm employees and share-farmers who display an ability to work hard, save and use their experience. In this area the Government could also consider removing stamp duty for first home buyers and first farm buyers. For a \$30000 home \$600 in stamp duty is payable and, on a \$40 000 home \$800. On a \$100,000 farm, the stamp duty payable is \$2250. I am sure that the loss of this revenue would not break the Government, but it could well provide the incentive and encouragement needed for young farmers and home buyers to purchase their first homes or farms, which in other circumstances they might hesitate to do. The removal of this stamp duty would demonstrate that the Government is showing an interest in these people. This is one way in which the Government could well help our young people.

Country areas depend on small businesses to provide services. The owners of small businesses in the country have not only the usual problems of pay-roll tax, workers compensation, loan guarantees, freight and telephone charges, but also problems relating to remoteness, decreasing population and their basic reliance on a rural clientele whose income is seriously affected by seasonal conditions. A simple answer to the over-all problem is not easy to find, or to express in a few words other than to say that if more emphasis or consideration were given to the issues of freight, telephone charges and remoteness, the problems would not be so great. If we want Victoria to grow as a State, it is inevitable that the plight of the small business in rural Victoria must be given greater recognition than it is today. Those businesses must be helped.

Probably, the main reason that the Lowan electorate changed from Liberal representation to National Party representation was the Hamer Government's decision to close the Balmoral railway line. As a representative of the National Party, I appeal to the Premier and his new Government to reconsider the decision to close that line. The rail link between Noradjuha and Hamilton could become one of the most significant rail links in Victoria. The increased use of weedicides and pesticides is leading to greater crop yields in the Mallee and the Wimmera. There has been increased use of fertilizers and improved grain varieties have been developed by the Department of Agriculture. With the advent of lupins and other legume crops, the fertility of the soil is brought back even more quickly than in the past.

It is necessary to rebuild this line. With the availability and cost of petroleum fuel causing grave concern, the shortest possible route should always be taken. With new grain storages proposed for such sidings as Kanagulk, Toolondo and Carplac, and with further storages to be built at Portland, this line must be rebuilt. If the Government can afford underground rail loops, city

freeways, a world trade centre, the Victorian Arts Centre, all in the city, it can afford this rail link.

Not only should the Government be looking at this link, it should be looking at a north-south link between Mildura and Portland as a means of expanding State development. It is also interesting to note that the Labor Party, in its election policy, supported the retention and rebuilding of the Balmoral line. Again, I appeal to the Premier to reconsider the decision to close this line.

Finally, I support the honorable member for Ballarat South, who said that she found the image of politicians at this time was not good. I, too, have found this as I have travelled in my electorate—not concerning my predecessor but in respect of the image of all politicians generally. It is up to every member of the Victorian Parliament to serve honestly and with integrity. We will then command the respect of all the people whom we represent throughout Victoria.