

The Hon. M. T. TEHAN (Central Highlands Province) - I thank you, Mr President, for the opportunity of making my maiden speech during debate on the motion for the adoption of an Address-in-Reply to His Excellency the Governor's Speech at the opening of the second session of the 50th Parliament. His Excellency Dr Davis McCaughey and Mrs McCaughey are highly respected throughout Victoria and esteemed as people of firm Christian principles who have brought Christian values to the high office of the Governor of Victoria.

The President of the Legislative Council is esteemed in this House for his fair-mindedness, even-handedness and impartiality and I look forward to working in this House under his guidance. I had the pleasure of an informal meeting with him the week before last when he extended his hospitality to me as a member-elect. I thank him for his cooperation in arranging these proceedings this afternoon.

I am delighted to have this opportunity of addressing my fellow members in the House. Over the past two weeks honourable members have been welcoming and warm towards me and I look forward to working with them as my colleagues on both sides of the House.

The by-election for the Central Highlands Province, which has brought me to this House, was brought about by the ill health and early retirement of the Honourable Fred Grimwade. Many members of this House have paid formal tribute to the work that Fred Grimwade carried out in this Parliament. I am pleased to endorse the contributions made to the Parliament of Victoria and the Central Highlands Province by the Honourable Fred Grimwade. I do so from the perspective of a constituent of the province of which he was the representative for twenty years.

Fred Grimwade was always available to his constituents. He was always willing to listen and to help. He was esteemed for his integrity and willingness to pursue matters on behalf of his constituents and for the concern that he held for those people. He was approachable, friendly and able. I hope to continue my personal association with Fred and to learn from him and from the experience he acquired over twenty years so that I, too, can service the constituents of Central Highlands Province in the excellent way that we were served by Fred Grimwade.

During the five weeks of my election campaign in the Central Highlands Province I was out every day meeting hundreds of people. I have spoken with them, listened to them and learned from them. I have brought to this House very definite ideas of what the people of the central highlands indicated to me they wanted of their Parliamentary representative at this time.

While that experience is still new and while the clarity of the needs and requirements of the people are fresh in my mind, I want to place on record some of the hopes, aspirations and concerns of the people who make up the Central Highlands Province.

Firstly, people are concerned and worried at the present economic situation prevalent throughout Australia and particularly Victoria. They know and understand the serious indebtedness at both Federal and State levels in this country with borrowings far in excess of acceptable indebtedness, with massive interest payments to service that indebtedness. They understand that our State contribution to the Australian-wide economic plight is heavy and that Victoria is indebted to an amount just short of \$20 billion. They appreciate that this amount totals more than \$4000 for every Victorian man, woman and child.

The people of Victoria know that these figures of indebtedness have escalated dramatically over recent years and that there is little likelihood of reversing the trend. They know the reality of living

with household debts and personal debts, and they understand too well that the consequences of indebtedness are equally devastating at State and Federal levels as at household levels.

They are telling their representatives that enough is enough; that there are limits that cannot be overstepped; that the trend must be reversed; that we must get our house in order; that we must stop borrowing, stop spending and reduce the deficit. They are asking for a responsible Budget. They know that restrictions and limitations will be needed to lift us out of our economic plight, and they are prepared to accept those restraints.

This concern was not a hip-pocket concern. It Was a genuine worry and interest in the long-term outlook for this State, for the future of Victoria and of Australia. It was expressed throughout the length and breadth of the Central Highlands Province and through people of every sort of economic involvement.

However, there was a hip-pocket reaction in the second of the concerns that I found affecting the community throughout the province. There was a constant complaint about ever-increasing taxes and charges, high interest rates for borrowing, high interest rates for housing loans, municipal rates, Board of Works rates, taxes and charges, water rates, licence fees, motor registration fees, third-party insurance premiums, WorkCare costs, Telecom and. State Electricity Commission charges. These are the essential, compulsory and ever-escalating increases that people cannot control, avoid or reduce. They cannot budget to reduce their rates, the third-party insurance on their cars or their State Electricity Commission and Board of Works charges. Charges are imposed by government, be it Federal, State or local. There is no bargaining, no contracting out, no avoidance and no input or control on the part of the payer.

The charges concerned are in addition to income tax. They are a burden and a constant irritation, and must be recognised as such by Governments. They cannot continue to increase. These high and escalating taxes and charges are the one single factor more than any other that will change Governments.

To illustrate the position, I point out that between December 1981 and December 1986 the consumer price index rose by 61.5 per cent. Of this, average food prices rose by 56 per cent; local government rates and charges by 78 per cent; and electricity and gas charges by 80 per cent. These figures are from an article in the Age of 26 March 1987. The article concluded:

The Australian Consumer Association will watch and see what happens with the new Price Watch Schemes. The A.C.A. says, that if a few months after the politicians have gained all the mileage they can out of the price watch campaign, it will be interesting to see whether pressure mounts on Governments to tackle the price of goods and services including Government services, that are hurting consumers much more than food costs.

Coupled with this is the legislative and regulatory burden that people are carrying. The community is overgoverned: our bureaucracies are too big; we are taking on ourselves that which should be left to the people. We are imposing too often and intruding too deeply into people's lives, and we are costing the people too much in doing it. Big is not beautiful: it is cumbersome, ineffective, impersonal and expensive.

We are over-legislated and over-regulated. The people are saying: "Leave us alone. Get off our backs. Let us make our own decisions. Do not lead our lives for us. Do not cripple us with new laws and new regulations. You do not repeal the old and substitute an additional law. You just

keep adding and adding to the legislative burden we are already carrying, and that is a light one when compared with the regulatory burden." They are telling us to stop and to let them do it their way for a while.

Private enterprise must take back those functions that are not uniquely those of government. Government can no longer be all things to all people. It must provide the basic services required for the well-being of the State; but any growth, any new function and any new legislation should be submitted to critical consideration of its need, its effectiveness and its cost.

We in this Parliament must recognise these widespread concerns in the electorate. As representatives of the people, we need to listen to our constituents and take upon ourselves their concerns. These are real concerns, and we cannot ignore them. They are complex issues, but the fact that they are difficult does not mean that they can be disregarded. A solution must be found and a start must be made to cut the spiral of escalating costs and the legislative and regulatory intrusion into people's lives.

It is interesting that it has taken a serious economic downturn to effectively and practically direct attention to a reconsideration and questioning of the accepted theory of expansionism - of big government, of big business, of big cities; but there are social implications that similarly need to question that role of expansionism that has been prevalent over the past decade.

The Central Highlands Province consists of a multiplicity of diverse geographical and social areas - from sweeping plains and mountain country in the north to the outer suburban developments in the south. Thus it really is a microcosm of Victoria. Its one unifying factor is that it is made up of many small communities - small towns and small cities. It is a conglomerate of towns and cities, some larger than others - Lilydale, Craigieburn, Seymour, Benalla - but all small enough to be communities, as opposed to our large capital and regional cities. Their value lies in those words, "small" and "community". They still give their residents a sense of identity, a sense of belonging and a sense of community.

In an interview during his recent visit to Australia, Dr J. K. Galbraith spoke of the social and economic problems of large cities caused by the breakdown of small towns and communities with the drift to the cities, and the consequent loss of identity and support heretofore supplied in small communities.

These small communities have been neglected in recent years, as have small businesses, which are the backbone of small communities and the families that make up those communities. They have been neglected at the expense of big cities and big government, and the time has come to reverse the trend.

Small towns should be encouraged and supported so that they become self-supporting entities, managing better, in fact, for lack of Government intervention. Small communities should be independent and socially and economically viable in their own right. They need to have the support of schools, health facilities, law and order enforcement that is suitable to their needs, and encouragement to create their own industries for employment for their own breadwinners, especially for their young, and encouragement to take pride in their efforts for themselves and their communities.

That sense of pride and achievement in self, in work well done and in community effort is being eroded throughout this country and must be reinstated as a fundamental value in personal and

civic life if we are again to stand tall as a State and a country. The best place to start to instil and activate this sense of pride is in the security of an accepting environment-the home, the small business, the small town or rural community. It encompasses a spirit of giving, not taking; of independence, not dependence; of self--reliance, not expectation. This change in values and attitudes, this sense of pride, will help to turn this country around economically and socially.

Finally, I found in the electorate and the hundreds of people I met and spoke with a crying need for leadership, for leaders to show and exemplify that sense of pride and achievement of which I have spoken; for someone or some group who will make the right decisions for the overall good of the State, even if those decisions are hard or unpopular. It seems to me that we, the elected representatives of the people, should be those leaders. We should be encouraging the values of independence, integrity and self-reliance. We should be making the hard decisions for the overall good of the State and the country.

We should be looking critically at legislation and regulation, and testing it on the grounds of overall value and cost effectiveness. We should be pruning the State housekeeping budget and budgeting to live within our means. We should be leading by example, by giving more than we take, by doing rather than saying' by being prepared to establish the decisions in the interests of the people and to apply them without fear of criticism and without the politician's plight of compromise.

I am certain that this is the leadership the people want; this is what they should be able to expect from their Parliamentary representatives. If we continue not to live up to their expectations we can only continue to feel the contempt and the cynicism that people have for members of Parliament that is festering and invading our community.

Victoria and Australia have so much to be thankful for and so much to give. We are a country of remarkable freedom, freedoms of every sort, and the envy of most other countries of the world. These freedoms must be acknowledged and exercised responsibly. We are a country of great opportunity-we always have been and we still are. Our successful migrant absorption is an illustration of this and there are many success stories of those who take the opportunities that this country offers.

But, again, those opportunities must be recognised and utilised and people must be encouraged to seek them and take risks if necessary. Encouragement should be given not only to our new settlers, but also to our young people to seek these opportunities-be they in business, in buying land, in investing, in studying and in seeking success.

Finally, we are a country of great people, an homogeneous national people with great spirit and great potential from a diversity of backgrounds, offering a diversity of cultural traditions and skills and holding the future of this country and this State in our hands.

Our people are our greatest resource and we should listen to what they are saying, share their concerns and give them the right direction and the future leadership they want. We, together, then can make this State a place where we can enjoy our freedoms, respond to our opportunities and live our lives free of excessive Government intervention without the spectre of economic disaster hanging over our heads and with a sense of pride in ourselves, our communities, our State and our nation.

I propose to work for those ideals as an individual, as a member of the Liberal Party and as part

of this Parliament. Mr President, I look forward to my time spent here as a member of the Opposition and as part of the Parliamentary process in this State.

I thank the members of my family, especially my husband and my children, without whose support I could not and would not be here today. I thank the rank and file members of the Liberal Party who, through their democratic preselection process, chose me as their party candidate.

I thank the people of the Central Highlands Province for the trust they have placed in me to represent them in the Upper House of this Parliament. I thank you, Mr President, and my Parliamentary colleagues, especially those on this side of the House who have been so welcoming and who are prepared to teach me and work with me as I come to terms with my new role as a member of the Legislative Council. I look forward to making a positive and worthwhile contribution to the Parliamentary process of this State.