

The Hon. G. B. ASHMAN (Boronia Province) - Mr President, I congratulate you on being elected to your present high office in this Chamber. I thank the House for allowing me to speak and to raise a number of matters that are important to the constituents of Boronia Province.

Before doing so, I take the opportunity of thanking my party supporters and Parliamentary colleagues; also, my family and friends for their assistance throughout the recent campaign. I also make special mention of Rob Llewellyn and Bruce Bingham who were candidates for Wantirna and Knox and who, although unsuccessful, made a major contribution towards my success. I also note the support I have received from the honourable members for Glen Waverley and Forest Hill in the other place, both of whom have been re-elected.

Boronia Province, in the eastern suburbs, covers approximately 120 square kilometres and includes Knox, Wantirna, Glen Waverley and Forest Hill. While preparing for this speech I reflected on my knowledge of the area. I recall approximately 30 to 35 years ago travelling, as a boy, through the area looking at orchards and horticulture. I reflected on the development that has taken place since then. When I went to school, I rode a bike along dirt tracks; today many of those tracks have almost freeway status in Victoria's road network.

The Boronia district was named in the mid-1930s by the late Sir Gilbert Chandler, who had a long history in this Chamber. It was called Boronia because of the widespread growing of that flower in the area. The Chandler family introduced boronia to that district and later became major daffodil growers there. It is a privilege to follow a person of such calibre, and one who had such a history in the area.

Today the province is a young area, with over 85 per cent of residents being under the age of 50 and a staggering 37 per cent under the age of twenty years. It is obvious from those figures that the dominant group within the province comprises young families and people establishing family life. The high proportion in those age groupings leads to concerns that obviously reflect the family, quality of life, the establishment of a home, maintenance of the mortgage payment, the education of children and the provision of health services.

It is interesting that Boronia Province has one of the highest, if not the highest, home ownership or home purchase rates in Victoria. Approximately 87 per cent of families in Boronia Province are either purchasing or own their own homes. That statistic demonstrates why mortgage rates have such an enormous impact in the electorate, as does government policy on service charges, including property charges, power and energy and water rates.

Stamp duty is now becoming a major concern to new home buyers. The average property that changes hands is in excess of \$120 000. Stamp duty is an additional burden on new home owners; it is a charge at a time of great expenditure that many can ill afford. The young families of Boronia Province have never hurt more. Their mortgage payments are higher than they have ever been in the past. They have never paid higher local government rates or more for government services and facilities. In some areas, State taxes and charges have been held to consumer price index increases. The average take-home pay over the past five years has increased by 40 per cent while the CPI has increased 50 per cent, which is about the rate of wage increase over that same period. Families are worse off today than they were five years ago.

Health care is a continuing problem. There are more than 1200 people in the area on waiting lists for urgent medical care, and 50 per cent have been on the waiting lists for more than six months.

We are all concerned about the security and welfare of our families and our homes. Law and order is an issue. There is an uneasiness in our community and many feel insecure when they are out after dark. The local police are facing a lack of manpower and a shortage of vehicles. The Ferntree Gully police district has 95 officers to cover a 320 square kilometre area with a population of 110 00.

During the recent election campaign the government promised to develop a police complex at Knoxfield. The development and manning of that complex will improve the police presence in the area. The development of the new Country Fire Authority headquarters at Knoxfield, in conjunction with the police complex, will create a presence in the area and provide a facility to the community for fire prevention and law enforcement.

Boronia Province is served by public transport in the east on a fixed rail, the Belgrave railway line, and in the south-west by the Glen Waverley railway line. Those lines cut through the eastern and south-western corners of the province. The remainder of the province is serviced by the private bus operators, albeit with the limitations placed on the routes that they are able to operate. There is scope for expansion of the private bus network within the province to act as feeder services to the rail system.

The rail network during peak hour is operating at 100 per cent capacity. Substantial improvements have taken place to the rail network but the network cannot transport any more people during the peak period. The vast majority of the journeys to and from work by people in the province are by private motor vehicles. More than 90 per cent of all work-related journeys occur in private motor vehicles. Private journeys - those not work-related - are in excess of 98 per cent. From those statistics, it is easy to see why an efficient arterial and feeder road system is essential to the area.

The major roads in the area are in urgent need of upgrading. Many of the arterial roads during peak hours are congested and the feeder roads in many cases are saturated during the peak period. The bottlenecks are similar to most that one experiences in the inner suburbs. It is important in the coming years that additional north, south, east and west road systems be constructed.

Over recent years there has been a bias against the private motorist in favour of public transport. It is obvious in my area from the high use of private transport that it is the preferred mode of transport for most people. In many cases it is impractical to suggest that public transport can service the requirements of the local community. The road network is an essential communication link for all our goods and services, and the inefficiency of that road network is adding to our costs.

Despite the fact that more than 95 per cent of the work journeys take place in private vehicles and a high proportion of other journeys take place in private vehicles, public transport still consumes two-thirds of the transport budget. Less than one-third of the transport budget is allocated to road expenditure. That is an inequitable distribution in view of the choice of the community for their mode of travel.

Over recent years I have had more than a passing interest in small business and, as Executive Director of the Small Business Association of Victoria, and Assistant Director of the State Chamber of Commerce, I have come to understand the problems, aspirations and frustrations of the small business entrepreneur. Small business is an integral part of our economy. It is indeed an essential part of our society. There are approximately 150 000 small businesses in Victoria

that provide a substantial proportion of our private sector employment. About 98 per cent of small businesses employ fewer than 50 people. The viability of small business is essential to the economy of Victoria.

The business community of this State is increasingly subject to regulation and government imposition. Much of this regulation is to control the small minority in the community who seek to go beyond the bounds of reason. In controlling the minority we are frequently tying the hands of those who want to get on with the business of running their businesses, creating job opportunities and prosperity for the State.

On many occasions small business falls prey to pressure and coercion from outside groups. The Dollar Sweets company was one such company. This company is well known to most people. It entered into a common-law action against the Federated Confectioners Association of Australia. The history of that dispute is interesting. The dispute commenced in July 1985. It came about because the Federated Confectioners Association of Australia, which is now the Confection Workers Union of Australia, sought to vary the working hours of its members. It sought to vary those working hours outside the prices and incomes accord that was in place at the time. In seeking to, alter the working hours, the employees sought to reduce their working week from 38 hours to 36 hours. The award at the time was a 40-hour week award.

In support of their claims, the employees, at the insistence of the union, conducted a number of stop-work meetings and strikes at the plant. Those strikes occurred between July and October 1985. The matter went before the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. It went before the commission on no fewer than ten occasions, culminating in October with the recommendation from Commissioner Bain that the employees resume work and drop their claims.

The union continued to picket that company. At that stage the first common-law action of its type against a union was implemented in this State. The action sought to restrain the picketers and to recover damages. It was heard in the Victorian Supreme Court in November and culminated in December 1985 with Mr Justice Peter Murphy handing down a decision granting an injunction restraining the union picket line.

In the hearing of the action, a number of matters were put before the court. Evidence was submitted of the harassment of the owners of the company, the super gluing of the locks of the building owned by the company, and the cutting of telephone and telex wires. Bomb threats were made. The proprietors and employees working at the time were spat upon and abused as they entered and left work. Delivery drivers were prevented from picking up and delivering their goods.

Mr Justice Murphy granted the injunction restraining the nine defendants and the union officials from intimidating, coercing, and besetting those at the plant. In recent months, the union approached the company and settled out of court the damages part of the action.

The point I am making about the Dollar Sweets dispute is that one of the major concerns of those in small business is not what occurs within their own plants but the outside influences. According to many small business owners, one of the reasons why they will not expand their businesses is that when a business is expanded beyond five or ten employees the unions start to show an interest and the owner-operator starts to lose control of the business and day-to-day management decisions.

I do not suggest that the Supreme Court should be the first port of call in an industrial dispute. Clearly the tribunals that exist-the Industrial Relations Commission of Victoria and the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission-should be the first ports of call. Negotiation should take place. Every effort should be made to resolve a dispute before litigation of the type that is brought before the Supreme Court occurs. However, if all else fails, business owners should have the right to go to common law and seek to recover damages from those who have sought to damage their businesses. All people in the community should be equal before the law; there should not be a privileged group in the community.

The Dollar Sweets action has been concluded. May I now conclude by thanking you, Mr President, and the members of this Chamber for the opportunity of addressing the Chamber.