

Mr. RAFFERTY (Caulfield). - It is my privilege and pleasure to address the House to-night, as the twenty-fifth speaker in the Supply debate. I have noted that the Leader of the Opposition has assumed a gracious attitude and now wears a more youthful smile than he did earlier in the day, when he expressed concern at the Government's action in seeking Supply for a period of three months. Apparently, at that stage, the honorable member was worried because he thought the House would not be afforded an opportunity to debate the matter fully. Surely, however, a sufficient opportunity has been afforded members to state their views when 25 speeches have been made on Supply. In my view, that number of speeches should be sufficient to warrant the granting of Supply for a period of six months-but we are asking for Supply for only three months.

I remind the honorable member for Brunswick East, who has just resumed his seat, that the Government is extremely interested in any method of housing, whether it be co-operative housing or otherwise, and it is doing everything possible to assist in overcoming the housing shortage in Victoria. The Leader of the Opposition referred somewhat plaintively to the fact that the Chief Secretary had been running around calling meetings on matters that seemed to me to be of considerable interest to the community. Two of those meetings were for the purpose of discussing the terrific problem that is associated with the toll of the road. It may well be that some figures which I propose to cite will illustrate the seriousness of the position.

In 1954, no fewer than 2,042 people were killed on Australian roads. That figure represented an increase over the previous year. In Victoria alone there were 587 deaths in 1954, as compared with 584 deaths in 1952.

From statistics I have been able to see, I estimate that, during this year, road deaths may well reach the 600 mark and I am certain that members of this House were dismayed to read, in the newspapers of 22nd August of this year, a heading, "Black week on the roads; toll of eighteen sets a record." In the light of the further fact that approximately 42,000 persons throughout Australia are injured annually through road accidents, it must be appreciated that something will have to be done to overcome the road-toll problem. I stress that of the persons who were killed last year, 414 were in the 21 to 30 age group. Members will appreciate, therefore, that a large number of useful productive citizens were lost to the community. It is also interesting to note that among the children between one year and seven years of age involved in road accidents, no fewer than 136 were killed last year. That number, roughly speaking, is equivalent to two children for each member of this House.

Another factor is that road accidents are costing the Australian community about £25,000,000 annually. That sum of money would be sufficient to afford employment for more than 40,000 people on the basic wage. The figures I have cited are sufficiently illuminating to indicate the seriousness of the problem confronting the Government, and it should be assisted by all parties. Unless worth-while action is taken to arrest the road toll, it may well be that, before 1956, some unfortunate Australian will become the millionth road casualty since Federation. Moreover, at the present rate of road accidents, the 50,000 mark will be reached before 1959. That number is greater than the number of electors represented by some members in the Ministerial corner, and, incidentally, it is probably greater than the total population of the City of Geelong.

Figures such as those that I have cited are of sufficient magnitude to cause members to ponder over the question: What is the cause of this tragic state of affairs? Statistics reveal that one of the principal causes of road accidents is inattentive driving, and that another major cause is excessive speed. It is interesting to note that nine out of every ten fatal accidents in Australia are

attributable to human failure as distinct from mechanical failure. A remedy for the situation must therefore be found.

Over the years, much active work has been done by Governments and other interested bodies in an effort to solve the problem, but to-day a curious state of affairs obtains in regard to certain aspects governing road traffic. In some communities local government authorities have established road crossings and erected road signs, but some road signs, unfortunately, are as far as 50 yards away from the road crossings to which they are related. Road crossing signs differ in size, shape, and style as between municipalities. In a community in which motor traffic is increasing rapidly a standard type of road crossing sign is essential. If possible the uniformity of signs should be extended not only throughout the State, but throughout Australia. Another important method of reducing the number of road fatalities is traffic education of both children and adults.. At present such education is being provided at schools, and I commend to honorable members and the