

Mrs BARKER (Bentleigh) - Mr Speaker, I firstly extend my congratulations to you, on your appointment as Speaker of this Parliament. As a new member, I look forward to working under your guidance, guidance which I am sure will be just and impartial. I thank His Excellency Dr Davis McCaughey for delivering the address which outlines the Cain government's programs and commitments for this term of Parliament.

The seat of Bentleigh was first won for the Labor Party in 1979 by Gordon Hockley, who, after nine and a half years of service to the people, has now retired. I wish Gordon and his wife, Joyce, a happy and healthy retirement. I congratulate Gordon for achieving what a lot of people thought would never be possible—that is, that the seat of Bentleigh would become a Labor seat. Equally, I know it was thought by the Liberal Party that, come this election, Bentleigh would be back in its hands. However, we had a surprise for them, and I thank the people of the Bentleigh electorate for not only electing me as their representative to State Parliament but also for increasing the margin from 0.1 per cent to 1.4 per cent.

I believe very strongly that the fundamental difference between myself and my opponent was my knowledge of the electorate and the knowledge that the people of Bentleigh had of the candidates and the issues. The people of Bentleigh knew that if elected, I would work to represent them to the best of my ability with vigour, enthusiasm, and honesty. I have now commenced that job.

I am very proud of the Bentleigh electorate and am pleased to say that, despite some sections of the press who purport to know what people are like down Bentleigh way, I have never found it boring. The electorate is diverse in its demography; and is an electorate which is supportive of itself and willing to work for those projects that contribute to the living standards of its community.

A fine example of this is the East Bentleigh Community Health Centre, which is, I feel, the best in the State. The building is innovative in design and was built by the Cain Labor government in 1986. The strength of the centre is in its efficient and caring administration, headed by June Calder, the board of management, chaired by Moira Dwyer, the auxiliary, and the volunteers, who number approximately 135. I pay tribute to them for their untiring efforts and the high standard of care they give to the community.

There has been a requirement for a hydrotherapy pool on the site of the community health centre. The centre did not sit back and ask for funding; it set about making the project a reality and its determination and commitment saw \$500 000 raised. Funding was then sought from the government so that the project could commence. I congratulate the Minister for Health on his decision to commit \$200 000 to the hydrotherapy pool. The highest accolade is awarded to the Hydrotherapy Fundraising Committee for its magnificent effort, and also to the community, business groups, service groups, and the Moorabbin City Council, which supported the committee.

A short distance from the community health centre is the Moorabbin Hospital, which is now the Community Medicine Division of the Monash Medical Centre. I have heard many derisive comments about the Monash Medical Centre, and that constantly astounds me. How can anyone question a government that clearly shows its commitment to health services for the people of Victoria by building and upgrading hospitals where people can have easy access to them? I have also heard on many occasions Moorabbin Hospital called the "poorer second cousin" of the Clayton campus. I strongly dispute that comment.

I look forward to seeing Moorabbin Hospital refurbished and upgraded to a 210-bed community hospital - a hospital that will be ideally suited to the site and the health needs of the people. I admit that when the announcement of the details of stage 2 were announced earlier this year, there was disappointment that the additional 100 beds were not included in the second stage. I welcomed the decision to spend \$23 million on the refurbishment and upgrading of facilities, and I welcomed the decision that the upgrading would be directed to creating the infrastructure for the future expansion of bed numbers.

However, the timetable for the provision of the additional beds was unclear and created some doubt in the community that the expansion would take place. I was pleased to play a part in providing 25 of those beds in the second stage, and I will be pushing strongly for the further expansion to occur as soon as possible. I point out, however, that I have no doubt that the Cain Labor government is committed to the expansion of the Moorabbin Hospital. Further proof of that commitment can be seen in the announcement by the Minister for Health to establish cancer services at that site.

I note with pleasure the further commitment to our older Victorians, as outlined in the Governor's Speech. I have a great deal of respect and admiration for our older citizens-those people who have enriched our lives by their lives. The expansion of the Home and Community Care program will enable more of our older citizens who wish to stay in their homes, but who require support and assistance, to receive that support.

Equally important is the commitment to expand nursing home beds and older persons units. The building of the eighteen-bed shared accommodation units in Centre Road, East Bentleigh will go a long way towards relieving some of the problems for those people in our community who have become slightly confused in their later years.

I also look forward to working with the Minister for Health to fulfil a dream which we have had for a number of years-that is, to build a nursing home. The commitment to build a 30-bed nursing home in Bentleigh with the provision of \$2.1 million in State capital funding and \$600 000 in recurrent Commonwealth subsidy funding is most welcome. Further negotiations will have to take place, and I have already asked the Minister for Health to ensure that the Moorabbin Community Extended Care Society plays a major role in the negotiations. The society has broad community representation and has already done a considerable amount of preparatory work. I am sure it will provide innovative and fresh ideas on the most appropriate manner in which we should look after those older people who require nursing home care.

Nursing homes, respite care, and supported accommodation are required for those older people who need it. During the election campaign, it was suggested by the media that the Bentleigh electorate contained an ageing population. I suppose that is technically correct as the electorate has a large population of older citizens. I tried to point out to the press, however, that a large section of our senior citizens are extremely active members of the community. The local senior citizens clubs, the Combined Pensioners Association of Victoria, and the Early Planners for Retirement are busy, stimulating groups that would, I feel, leave some of us feeling very tired if we participated in a day of their activities.

I also direct to the attention of honourable members a group in the Bentleigh electorate, which is the first of its kind in Australia, and one in which all honourable members should take an active interest. That group is Helpmates, and they are a group of intellectually disabled young adults who provide gardening services for 400 older people in the Moorabbin local government area.

The scheme provides these young adults with independence, work, social skills, and friendship, and they are a wonderful group. They, in turn, allow 400 of our older citizens to remain in their own homes because they do not have to worry about maintaining their gardens, which are often large and the maintenance of which is probably one of the reasons why they consider selling their homes. I am sure the parents of those young adults are also very pleased that their children, who have a disability, are able to gain work that gives them satisfaction and companionship.

Helpmates is coordinated by an equally wonderful group of people headed by Suzette Gallagher, who was this year awarded the honour of a medal of the Order of Australia for her work in this area, an award which was justly deserved. Having known Suzette for a number of years, I am sure she would be happy for me to take any interested honourable member along to Helpmates to learn about the scheme. I am sure they would leave the premises with such enthusiasm as to initiate similar schemes in their areas.

I listened with interest to the outline by His Excellency the Governor of the future commitment of the Cain Labor government to education. I am a firm believer in the government system, and I challenge anyone to find in the Bentleigh electorate a school, primary or post-primary, that does not have an excellent record in academic learning in a caring environment. Education is not without problems, but I consider this government to be one that has examined the system that existed previously and saw that it did not meet the demands and needs of today and the future. It is not always easy to make changes, but this government has initiated changes that will provide our children and young adults with skills for the future.

The children and young adults whom I have the pleasure of knowing both in my own home and in the community are inquisitive, intelligent, and demanding-and they should be demanding. We live in the electronic age, where, at a young age, television exposes them to the realities of life. The pace of life is faster and our youth need an education system that will not educate them only in literacy and numeracy but also stimulate their interest and equip them with life skills.

I was pleased that Victoria had a government that gave to school councils more responsibility for developing policy that was suited to their own neighbourhoods but which revolved around a central curriculum core. When you visit the schools in the Bentleigh electorate you find that they are individual in character. They reflect the needs of their neighbourhoods, and I welcome this..

I thank the teachers in the schools in the Bentleigh electorate for their commitment to our children and young adults, whom I have found they educate in a positive and caring manner. I equally pay tribute to the parents in the electorate who contribute their time and efforts on parents' clubs and school councils. As past-president of the Ormond Primary School school council, I found my time and efforts at my local school rewarding, interesting, and very fulfilling. I thank the Cain government for the opportunity it has given for parents to be involved in the decision making in their neighbourhood schools.

I also applaud the decision of the government to introduce the education allowance, which will do much to assist parents in what is usually an expensive time of the year, with items such as uniforms and books to purchase. Those families that receive a family allowance will next year receive \$100 for each child aged between four and sixteen years, so that they can begin the school year without incurring financial hardship for the family.

I am also fortunate to have in the Bentleigh electorate the Moorabbin TAFE College, which will shortly embark on a further stage of expansion. Brief notes on the college's ideas and

suggestions have been forwarded to me, and I look forward to working with the college to see the project completed.

Before I move away from the subject of education and the youth of Victoria, I place on record my congratulations to the Cain Labor government for initiating the Youth Guarantee Scheme, which is unique in Australia and which has done much to provide our young people with opportunities, counselling, guidance, and support so that they can find careers for themselves. The scheme is not only an investment in our economic future but also gives our young people who have, for whatever reasons, been unable to find employment, the status they deserve as part of our community.

Of course, the Bentleigh electorate is not without its problems. In the transport area, we have seen the completion of the third railway line, but this, in turn, has created some concern for the train travellers of the Bentleigh electorate. I know that it took the Cain Labor government to complete the third line, but I point out to the Minister for Transport that I will be seeking an investigation of the number of trains servicing the five stations within the electorate so as to ensure that my constituents have an efficient and reliable service. I am sure the Minister will offer me his cooperation.

Another area of concern that has been raised with me, and I am sure with all honourable members, is the issue of safety and security. I am disturbed by the perception in the community that nothing has been done in this important area. Recently I spoke at a Neighbourhood Watch meeting and I found it difficult, in the short time that was allotted to me, to outline the initiatives, the programs, and the work that has already been done and will continue in the future.

I refer to the increase in police numbers: there was an increase of 300 last year; 400 this year; and there will be 300 next year. As well, 500 civilians have been employed to do clerical and office work, which, in turn, has released police back to active duty. There have also been significant increases in police resources: 1 in 7 police stations has been rebuilt, 5 new complexes have been commenced, and further construction is planned. The number of police cars has been increased. The Victoria Police were the first in Australia to gain a 38-hour week, and they also have an early retirement scheme. The number of officers in the Drug Squad has also been increased.

Transit police were introduced for public transport, and this program will be expanded. Recommendations for sentences and penalties are to be implemented - such as abolishing automatic remissions and phasing out early release schemes. Air and water support has been expanded, and computers are being installed to streamline work. These are only some of the achievements and further commitments by the government.

The issue of police powers proved to be very interesting during the election campaign, and I was particularly pleased with the response from the people of Bentleigh on this issue. The Police Association of Victoria letterboxed the electorate, and it was heartening to hear from people' who questioned the granting of powers to the police that were not fully investigated and explained to the community before they were implemented. We must all be extremely careful and rational when we enter a debate on police powers. Not all persons suspected of a crime are guilty, and we live in a State where we, as citizens, have the right to be treated with respect and dignity. Police powers that are designed to help police clear up crime should also take into account the civil rights of innocent people.

The government has also examined closely the area of crime prevention, which to me is the more important issue. The Neighbourhood Watch scheme has not only made people aware of the need to make their homes secure but also it has taught all of us an important lesson: the need to care for one another. I believe our society had become fairly insular, but I now see neighbours who look out for one another and communicate with one another.

We need to educate our children to recognise and resist bad influences. In some of our schools police officers already talk to classes about good citizenship and the consequences of crime. Fifty additional police officers will be made available so that this positive and constructive work can be expanded. The Rage without Alcohol campaign has been very successful with our young adults and it is a program that I believe is extremely important. I am pleased to note that this work will be further developed.

I also congratulate the government on its introduction of the Good Neighbourhood program, which will emphasise activities for young people; it will provide, for those who need them, constructive programs in which to participate so that they will feel a sense of belonging in the community, which, in turn, will give them a reason for wanting to protect it.

I believe we need to look at the issue of law and order as a whole. We live in a modern age and need a modern Police Force which has the resources and power to carry out its job efficiently. We should also look around us and see what we can do for families and neighbours to create a safer environment. As citizens, we have a responsibility to the community in which we live, and the government has a responsibility to provide the resources and equipment to enjoy a safer environment. The Cain government has begun that process in a rational and sensible manner and will continue to do so.

I am pleased to note in the Governor's Speech the commitment of the government to women by providing them with greater opportunity through the choice and opportunity plan. The role of women in the home and the contribution they make to our community cannot be measured by any scale. The skills that are required to run a home and raise children are often not recognised by employers when women choose to return to the work force after a period of time at home. It is pleasing to me, as a woman who has been in that situation, to be part of a government that will provide women with the recognised training and education they need to return to the work force. I am also pleased that we will continue to support and expand the Neighbourhood House program which provides many women at home with support, interests, and the opportunity to learn new skills and make new friends.

I look forward to the introduction of a Bill to establish a reserve power on prices to underpin the prices peg program. A great deal of noise has been made by the Opposition about prices, taxes and charges, and the need to ease the financial burden on families. The success of the prices peg legislation in 1987 is well known. Therefore, I assume that the passage of the proposed legislation through both Houses will be speedy. Families will then once again pay reasonable prices for goods at supermarkets.

Before concluding my inaugural speech, I thank the many people who worked for me during the recent election campaign. I especially thank my campaign director, Andrew Hockley, who performed his duties in an efficient and imaginative manner. My special thanks go to John Halloran and Koula Alexiadis with whom I have worked for the past two and a half years and who worked very closely with me during the campaign. Their friendship, support, and assistance greatly assisted me.

I pay tribute to my former employer, the Honourable Joan Child, Speaker of the House of Representatives and the member for Henty. Joan is an astute and caring politician and is respected and admired by all who know her. Her advice, encouragement, and guidance is something which I value above all else, and I thank her for all she has done for me.

None of this would have been possible without the support of my family. To my extended family, I say, "Thank you". To my husband, Jim, and my children, Michael and Kirsty, I pay a very special tribute. They have always encouraged, supported, and assisted me in a loving and caring manner. Words could never really express my thanks to them.

Mr Speaker, I thank all honourable members for hearing me in silence this evening. I understand that it will be the first and last time. I look forward with much pleasure and enthusiasm to working with the Cain government in this historic third term of government.